

## Welcome Remarks for Teach-in on Homophobia, Bullying and Suicide

By President Lee Higdon

October 13, 2010

I am pleased to welcome you all here to add to this important conversation.

In my first year at Connecticut College, we opened the LGBTQ Resource Center. This was both a reactive and a proactive administrative decision. Reactive because we had understood how tough it was then for LGBTQ students on campus. Opening the center was a response to that environment, an opportunity to help make this campus more welcoming and supportive.

Proactive because we knew the College would really benefit from having this kind of space. And not just the physical space, but a true center for learning, creating community, for helping to improve the campus culture. And I'd like to think the Center *has* helped improve the environment on our campus. With Professor Manion's leadership, the support by allies throughout the faculty, staff and student body, and the administration's full support, Connecticut College has become a more welcoming place for LGBTQ students. In the last few years:

- We've incorporated more awareness and sensitivity training into our orientation programs.
- We've re-shaped the protocols for handling bias incidents.
- When appropriate, and for special projects, we have sought to augment the Center's budget.
- And, most recently, we introduced a gender neutral housing policy into our residential options.

I believe this is a good start for us, but there is no doubt we have work ahead of us – and that is why we are here this afternoon. The fact that we can have this kind of critical conversation – with so much meaningful input from people all across campus – is very encouraging to me. I hope it is to you as well.

A very recent CNN poll found that 37 percent of American teens say they have been ridiculed, humiliated, or verbally or physically threatened by another child, either in person or online. For LGBTQ teens, this number is much higher and of greater consequence – as we have been learning from the recent suicides. It is a national problem – not the kind of thing any of us can ignore. We need to discuss why this is the case.

A college campus is a natural setting for this kind of meaningful discussion. I hope that everyone here learns something this evening – and that you will share these lessons with your friends who couldn't be here. Every person should be able to live in an environment free from harassment, bullying, stalking or other forms of targeting. Thank you for helping to make Connecticut College such a place.