

## Transgender Awareness Week: a time to understand

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During the week of Nov. 17, The Bayard Rustin Center for LGBTQA Activism, Education and Reconciliation hosted a weeklong event at Guilford College to provide community members a deeper understanding of what it means to be transgender. The events included performances and panels revolving around trans education.

The week culminated with a Trans 101 training, an informative session differentiating between people who identify as cisgender or transgender. The training overall covered the idea that gender and sexuality is not so black and white.

"Although I wasn't in attendance this year, I have been through the training, and I found it to be enjoyable and accessible," said senior Chelsea Yarborough, a women's, gender and sexuality major. "It's a good way for everyone to come together and learn about something we've been taught to think of as rigid in a much different way."

The events continued on, including a Q&A Tuesday afternoon with Tona Brown, the first openly transgender African-American musician to perform in Carnegie Hall. Following her Q&A was a musical performance by Brown and an accompanying pianist, Myron D. Brown, later in the night.

The purpose of this week was to bring awareness to the transgender experience through events that shed light and clarity on a subject many are unfamiliar with, building a bridge connecting trans, cis, non-binary and gender nonconforming students at Guilford College. Tona Brown's event was very successful in strengthening the bond between all members of the community.

"It's very important to have figures like Tona Brown come out," said sophomore Taylor Brown, public relations manager for Guilford PRIDE, who identifies as trans masculine gender fluid. "In society it is thought that trans people do not live a normal life, but we do. We just go through maybe little more difficult changes than others."

Brown found that a week of awareness surrounding Nov. 20, Transgender Day of

Remembrance, would be an opportune time to educate current students and prospective students visiting campus on the identities of community members.

"Last year, I was going through many changes and discovering who I was," said Brown. "I found that there weren't many resources on campus, so this week would be something for other students going through what I was going through."

"I really wanted this week to happen so people can get the idea that there aren't just gay men, lesbian women and bisexuals. Gender and sexuality falls on a very wide spectrum."

Guilford's efforts in accommodating students that identify as transgender have begun, starting with the implementation of gender-neutral housing in the basement of Shore Hall. But, what trans students would really like to see are some gender-neutral bathrooms.

"First-year dorms are the most difficult place to live for gender non-binary," said transgender first-year Alex Conkright, treasurer for PRIDE. "The bathrooms are strictly male and female, and you're automatically assigned a roommate that is of your birth gender, or essentially, your genitalia."

Although there are options, the options are limited. Together, as a campus, we need to work harder to be more than just half meeting the needs of transgender. Right now, there is not equality, and that is an issue we need to work on.

"Guilford is relatively accommodating,"



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said Colin Nollet, president of Guilford PRIDE. "We are still working on the availability of gender-neutral bathrooms and the availability of gender neutral housing that isn't hidden in a basement."

"Part of it is they are tied up in housing policies put forth by North Carolina laws, but I know specifically that tour guides are asked not to mention the gender-neutral

housing option in Shore."

The Greensboro community has many transgender individuals. However, according to Brown, Guilford is the only college in the city with gender-neutral housing. It would be realistic to advertise that option.

"It's also due to the fact that students come here with their parents, so it's sort of a parents ideals issue, but I find it counterproductive," said Nollet. "If we want to actually be a school that is inclusive, we need to advertise our inclusivity rather than hide it."

When prospective students come to Guilford they should be aware of our community dynamic, a dynamic that is accepting, supportive and progressive.

"Having the incoming first-year know that people who don't identify as male or female exist is important," said Brown. "When coming to college, it's very different, and many people have never been exposed to the idea of being transgender before this time."

At the student panel on Wednesday afternoon, Taylor Brown and Alex Conkright spoke on their experience starting from high school and moving to college.

Raising community awareness of other sexualities and genders is important. Societal norms are shifting, and each day we are becoming closer to the acceptance of alternative ways of loving and living.

"If you're a girl and you think you are a guy, then you can be a guy," said Conkright. "If you are a guy and you think you are a girl, then you are a girl. Genitals don't define your gender."

## Amina Wadud exemplifies Islamic feminism, makes significant strides in research

BY TAYLOR HALLETT  
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For more information, check out this video:

Interview with Amina Wadud



Watch this collaborative video for more of this prominent scholar's insight and opinions on women in the Qur'an.

BY TAYLOR HALLETT  
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[Youtube.com/user/TheGuilfordian](https://www.youtube.com/user/TheGuilfordian)

On Tuesday, Oct. 28, Dr. Amina Wadud, Islamic feminist and scholar, gave a fascinating lecture in the Carnegie Room in Hege Library on the current debates and struggles in Islamic feminist discourse.

The work Wadud is undertaking as a scholar is unique given her specific focus on a woman's perspective of the Qur'an. She is not, however, the only individual involved in the burgeoning Islamic feminist movement.

"I prefer to speak in terms of women's activism and engagement, as opposed to 'Islamic Feminism,'" said Visiting Assistant Professor of Religious Studies Betsy Mesard in an email interview. "Many Muslim women who are doing work to transform women's roles and rights don't like this term."

Mesard is currently teaching a course offered in the religious studies department entitled "Islam and Modernization."

One student in the class, junior Katie Fullerton, decided to do an in-depth research project on the body of work that Amina Wadud has contributed as a scholar in Islamic studies.

"Researching Amina's work has given me a glimpse into the complexities of Islamic feminism," said Fullerton in an email interview. "Her initial rejection and then her gradual acceptance of the label 'feminist' gave me some insight into the negative impression the

term has in some Muslim circles." Fullerton described her experience in Mesard's class in positive terms.

"We are discussing various Muslim responses to 'modernity,' primarily defined as the influences of European and Western domination," said Fullerton.

During her lecture in October, Wadud made clear to the audience the significance of the current women's movement in relation to the history of Islam.

"There have been more radical considerations of the possibilities of how to live as Muslim women in our time rather than at any other time," said Wadud during her lecture.

So, what is it that makes Wadud's work especially important at this point in time?

"She, along with many other Islamic feminists, makes a distinction between feminism inspired by Islamic ideals versus feminism inspired by Western and modern ideals," said Fullerton.

Associate Professor of English Diya Abdo, who attended Wadud's lecture in October, shared similar thoughts on the importance of Wadud's work.

"Wadud's work is significant because it brings a much-needed perspective to religious exegesis," said Abdo. "Her methodology's clear emphasis on justice shows us how we can live and be better as human beings."

Mesard found importance in Wadud's work for its thought-provoking aspects.

"Amina Wadud's work is significant in part simply because it has provoked debate," said Mesard. "Whenever people are forced to think carefully about, clarify and defend their commitments, there is a potential for change — even if it is not immediate change along the lines that she calls for."

Wadud's work is also significant for its emphasis on "tafsir," meaning interpretation in Arabic. In a video interview with The Guilfordian, Wadud elaborated on the strategies she employs in her methodology of applying "tafsir" to the Qur'an.

"If you have a 14,000 year history of engaging with the text, but you don't have a record of women's responses to that text until this last century, then maybe we are missing something from the story of how the text is understood," said Wadud.

Other prominent scholars in the Islamic women's movement include journalist Mona Eltahawy, Harvard professor Leila Ahmed and Egyptian writer Nawal el-Saadawy.

"Many of the things that she said during her visit have stuck with me, and most of what has stuck with me are life lessons rather than comments specific to Amina's experience," said Fullerton. "Above everything that I admire about Amina though, I most appreciate her ability to claim power for herself in a situation, while also empowering those around her."