Dear APA Diversity and Inclusiveness Grants Committee,

I am writing to provide a progress report on the grant-funded project titled "The Lavender Library: Institutionalizing Access to Queer Theory, Courses, and Speakers at a Regional Comprehensive University in the South." This project was awarded the APA Diversity and Inclusiveness Grant, and I am pleased to share our achievements and updates to date.

Project Overview

The Lavender Library project aims to promote diversity and inclusiveness by enhancing access to queer theory, courses, and speakers at the University of Central Arkansas, a regional comprehensive university located in the South. Our objectives include the following activities:

1. Collection Development: The establishment of a comprehensive Lavender Library collection featuring a wide range of queer theory books and multimedia resources. We have also expanded to host a repository of student thesis and creative projects.

2. Curriculum Enhancement: The development and implementation of new and expanded courses focusing on queer theory and LGBTQ+ studies within various academic departments.

3. Speaker Series: Organizing a speaker series featuring prominent LGBTQ+ scholars, activists, and artists to engage and educate our university community. This was the most important aspect of this year’s development of the Lavender Library.

Progress and Achievements

1. Collection Development: We have made meaningful progress in building the Lavender Library collection. To date, we have acquired over 150 books and multimedia resources. These materials are now available to students, faculty, and staff through a process of lending/taking mirroring a Little Free Library. Each book/resource is stamped with the Lavender Library logo.
and documented by a student worker in our office of Learning Communities. The stamp informs patrons of the space that they may borrow, keep, or gift any resource they find valuable in the Lavender Library. We do not keep records of individuals visiting the site, and so are offered more latitude than our official university library for collecting usable workbooks, soliciting student input about desired resources, and in gifting materials as needed for individuals. We began collecting by donation, and have now created an Amazon Wishlist to which students, faculty, and staff make recommendations: https://www.amazon.com/registries/gl/guest-view/G8LZ1ANOKWVV

We have also begun working with students to invite presentations of their research, and to collect undergraduate theses, creative works, and student research projects in the space. An upcoming example is a presentation by the president of our PRISM student organization, Saylor Travis. Graduating senior Saylor will be presenting “PRISM at Crystal Bridges: An Inquiry of Culture and Social Bonds,” on October 4, 2023 in the Lavender Library space. Their talk is a reflection of their site visit to the American Art Museum, Crystal Bridges in Northwest Arkansas with other LGBTQ+ students from campus on September 23, 2023. This visit was sponsored in part by the APA Diversity and Inclusiveness Grant, and now we are adding their presentation to the collection.

2. Curriculum Enhancement: We have successfully developed a reading group on Educated by Tara Westover, expanded the service and COIL projects of a special section of PHIL 2360 Gender, Race, and Class: Philosophical issues in a classroom neighboring the library, and will be hosting a roundtable discussion with faculty from across the University of Central Arkansas College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences who use queer pedagogy and content in their classes to discuss these efforts on October 13, 2023 in the Lavender Library.

One highlight has included an ongoing partnership (this semester marks the third semester in a row) between my own PHIL 2360 course, and a section of Classical Literature with Prof Maria Di Muro from Andrés Bello University in Caracas, Venezuela. The students between our two courses created brochures in Spring 2023 on topics such as issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion between the two countries; this semester, we will be working again on a COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning), and plan to create a video series based on student projects comparing gender, sex, and sexuality topics across cultures. Funding from the APA grant has made possible printing and storing copies of brochures in the Lavender Library.

3. Speaker Series: Despite challenges posed by an extraordinarily heterosexist and anti-higher ed Arkansas Legislative Session in Spring 2023 (see my APA blog on the topic here: https://blog.apaonline.org/2023/03/13/looking-back-and-acting-out/), we have hosted several student thesis defenses, a presentation on creating resumes from humanities-based experiential learning from Geoff Pfeifer, philosopher at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (https://www.wpi.edu/people/faculty/gpfeifer), and we have six upcoming presentations taking place this Fall. Three highlights of these upcoming speakers include scholars with explicit ties to rural southern communities, and each of these events will be funded wholly by the APA Diversity and Inclusiveness grant funds:
October 25, 6:30-8 PM, Thomas J. West III, PhD (https://tjwest3.medium.com/), "'He may be a queer, but he's our queer': Conditional Queer Acceptance in Appalachia," and October 26, x period, IDI LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff Check-In with featured speaker Thomas J. West III, "Queer Self Advocacy and the Power of the Public Humanities," McCalister Mirror Room. From the presenter:

“There's no question that it's a tough time to be both a humanities scholar and a queer person. While universities across the country gut humanities departments (and sometimes abolish them altogether), state legislatures pass anti-queer and anti-trans legislation. It's thus all the more important that writers and other public intellectuals use the power of the pen to push back on these relentless attacks. Those with humanities training in argumentation are uniquely primed to make use of both established and independent media--newsletters, blogs, and so forth--to advocate for themselves and others. As my own career as a writer has shown, this be
tremendously rewarding, and it might even make a difference to someone reading such work."


December 6, 6:30-8:30 PM, Matt Lovett, PhD (https://www.gsws.pitt.edu/people/ant-8), “Sex and Truth, or: Psychoanalysis Has Always Been Queer."

Challenges and Next Steps

While we have achieved significant milestones, we also encountered some challenges, including budget limitations (we did not receive the grant funds from the APA until after the end of last academic year on May 17, 2023) and the need for ongoing outreach to ensure full participation in our programs. More acutely, we have also had to face issues of governmental oversight into LGBTQ+ inclusive programming and curricula, safety concerns which led to the space having limited access, and a lack of other resources for student organizations to meet and build community—leading to pressures on the Lavender Library to provide student affairs, as well as academic resources. To address these challenges, we are actively seeking additional funding opportunities to expand our collection and enhance the sustainability of our courses and speaker series. We have also applied for an NEH Media Grant to develop a podcast series to ensure greater visibility, support for faculty research travel, and to expand on our accessibility online and in the greater region.

In the coming months, we will:
1. Launch a marketing and awareness campaign to increase the visibility of our courses and speaker series. Each of the promotional materials for our upcoming public speakers’ series will also be forwarded to grants@apaonline.org.

2. Continue to seek external funding sources to support the long-term sustainability of the Lavender Library. We have already successfully received support from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and we are soliciting funding for an endowed scholarship to support students studying topics related to the Lavender Library.

3. Navigate an unexpected spatial transition. The residential college Lavender Library is currently housed in will be moving to a different housing complex on campus. Though this poses some challenges for us—and means we will need to invest in some renovating—it may also make possible greater accessibility. Our current space has not yet been afforded the opportunity to be open to students without staffing letting them into the building, and it is housed on the second floor. The space we are requesting in the new building is accessible during operational hours without staffing and is navigable by a ramp on the first floor. This space will also have additional room for more media and an expanded collection, so we plan to use any remaining grant funds in December for purchasing additional books.

**Conclusion**

We are extraordinarily grateful for the support of the APA Diversity and Inclusiveness Grant, which has allowed us to make substantial progress toward institutionalizing access to queer theory, courses, and speakers at the University of Central Arkansas. Our commitment to diversity and inclusivity remains steadfast, and we are excited to continue advancing our project's goals in the coming months.

Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to sharing more updates in the future. If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at tduncan@uca.edu.

Sincerely,

Taine Duncan, PhD
Project Leader, The Lavender Library Project
University of Central Arkansas