

THE NORM ROBERTSON STUDENT PRIZE – FAQs

WHAT IS THE NORM ROBERTSON STUDENT PRIZE?

This cash prize of \$250 is intended to recognize and spotlight students who have completed outstanding projects of either scholarly research or artistic production/performance that advance communal awareness of issues related to the history, experience, or accomplishments of U.S. and non-U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender (LGBT) persons.

WHAT IF MY PROJECT IS NON-TEXTUAL?

Videotapes, audiotapes, slides and/or visual work can be submitted as well as written work. If you have questions about the form of your submission, contact one of the Robertson Prize committee members listed below.

WHO SPONSORS THE PRIZE?

The Robertson prize is co-sponsored by Oberlin Lambda Alumni (OLA) and the General Faculty Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Concerns Committee (LGBTCC). A subcommittee of the LGBTCC oversees the awarding of the prize.

WHO WAS NORM ROBERTSON?

The Prize is named after Norm Robertson '81, one of the original co-founders of the LGBT alumni group (now OLA). Norman Campbell Robertson enrolled at Oberlin College in the fall of 1975 with the intent of following a pre-med course of study. He realized that he didn't want to become a doctor and when he graduated in the spring of 1981, he did so as a Religion major who had spent all of his extra time in the Conservatory. Although he had studied the violin seriously in high school and had never intended to become a professional violinist, at Oberlin he came in contact for the first time with Early Music. He was a member of the Collegium Musicum and studied baroque violin and viola. When he moved to Chicago, he was one of the first members of City Musick, a short-lived but distinguished baroque orchestra. His partner was also a well known keyboard instrumentalist and soloist.

Oberlin professors who knew Norm remember him as a talented student and a gentle, generous person. One remembers how trusting Norm was and how he inspired trust in others. While at college, Norm had worked hard to reconcile his sexuality with his deeply felt convictions as a Catholic. After graduation, he put his convictions into practice and worked for several years in a parish in Baton Rouge, LA, as director of Christian education. Norm died of AIDS in 1992. The Robertson prize and the work for which the prize is awarded stands as a testimony to Norm, to his place in the Oberlin community, and to the place of all queer students at Oberlin.

WHY SPONSOR A PRIZE IN LGBT STUDIES?

The prize is intended to encourage and celebrate students who undertake projects that deal with issues related to LGBT people. Until OLA and LGBTCC created the Queer Studies Student Research Grant (the Cemelli Grant) in 1995, students often carried out this work with little hope of positive recognition or support. Such work often requires unusual creativity, because Queer Studies is still a new, albeit rapidly growing, cluster of fields. Working in these subject areas may require unusual effort to find materials or develop methods. It also requires courage to

negotiate the risks that may arise from having one's name linked with subjects that may be viewed in some quarters as faddish, immoral, or a threat to social order.

Such work, however, has been and continues to be vital in creating a positive context for curricular and social change on our campus. Every student who chooses to research an LGBT-related topic increases campus awareness of sexuality issues, and adds to the growing recognition of the importance of the role that LGBT persons play in our society, past and present.

PRESENTATION REQUIREMENT

The Robertson Prize recipient will be honored at Lavender Celebration during Commencement/Reunion Weekend, sponsored by OLA, which provides the recipient with an opportunity to describe her or his work for the community and thus add to communal knowledge of these issues. OLA members are very interested in hearing about student work on LGBT issues; the prize winner may wish to have copies of an abstract or project summary on hand for those alumni/ae who may have follow-up questions (be sure to include your contact info on your handout, as this is an excellent net-working opportunity).

WHAT CRITERIA WILL BE USED FOR JUDGING THE PRIZE APPLICATIONS?

The projects will be evaluated based on (a) the significance of the topic, both within its specific field and to the understanding of sexuality in general; (b) the quality of the work; and (c) the significance of the project to the Oberlin community.

WHERE CAN I GET ADVICE ON MY IDEAS FOR ACADEMIC OR ARTISTIC PROJECTS RELATED TO LGBT ISSUES?

Start by talking to any of the members of the LGBTTC committee (who are listed at <http://www.oberlin.edu/secretary/faculty/genfaccom.html>) and/or with any of the faculty members who teach in the Comparative American Studies program (<http://www.oberlin.edu/CAS/faculty.html>). You can also research faculty bios on the relevant department web pages to find someone whose research interests relate to your project idea. For more ideas, feel free to contact the Robertson Prize sub-committee members:

Beth Blissman (beth.blissman@oberlin.edu)
Christa Champion (christa.champion@oberlin.edu)

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HOW DO I APPLY?

Pick up an application form at the MRC, the BCSL, or the ELC. Applications, including a copy of the project, should be submitted to Beth Blissman at the BCSL. *All graduating applicants should be prepared to attend the Lavender Celebration if their project is chosen as the prize winner. Good luck!*