W

ome in the students who choose to enroll in the University of Oregon (UO) and its social environment is critical to their overall development and success.

According to a 2017 study by the Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, students in this underrepresented group experience higher levels of stress, depression, and suicidal thoughts than their cisgender peers. Additionally, The Youth Suicide Prevention Program reports that more than 50 percent of identified transgender students from more than 73 college campuses reported greater exposure to trauma and higher rates of suicidal experiences, as well as different causes of stressful periods, than their cisgender peers.

For students in this underrepresented group, finding an institution offering a safe and respectful environment matters the most. People who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer or non-conforming have historically been targets of physical, mental and verbal abuse in academic and social environments. This has led to high levels of anxiety, depression and suicide among these students.

For Sorrel Rosin, an openly transgender freshman at the University of Oregon, the decision to leave for college 2,000 miles away from home was tough. "When I was looking at colleges, I didn't think there was going to be a comfortable place for me to live, and it was really concerning," Rosin said. "I was one of the first transgender kids to come out at my high school, and people didn't like me very much, so there was a lot of self-doubt about whether I could succeed at college or not."

Rosin's roommate, Kinsley Ballas, a junior who may not totally understand your gender identity or agree with it," she said. "In this community, you don't have to worry about being sexually attracted to others. It can be really nerve racking, especially in high school, if you're talking to someone else who may not identify as straight, and you're trying to figure out what you're doing."

"I thought I was going to be suicidal by the time I was 20, and gay youths are more than four times as likely to be suicidal than their peers. The added stress of coming out to your family, friends and community who are pursuing higher education, finding support as they discover their gender identity and accept their identity is essential. This is especially true for students who are living in environments where they don't feel safe or supported," Rosin said.

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I really love being in the ARC,” Ballas said. Her experience with the ARC in her first year created the best environment for her. She encourages other students to take similar classes because it can be very rewarding, but some may have a harder time understanding the material. "I think I would have benefited from having more support and greater budget. Additionally, the ARC requires more faculty involvement," Ballas said. Raiskin said that ideally we would have more staff members to coordinate with the students about events and social activities. He added that the ARC is the direct result of feedback from faculty, students and administrators. The ARC is known as the culmination of the academic portion and the Department of Residence Life — the ARC is a part of the Division of Undergraduate Studies.

"So, the ARC kind of developed from that.” Julie and I thought: wouldn’t it be great if we had this kind of program aiming to help incoming freshman and so it has been really nice getting to explore and experience different identities and so it has been really nice getting to learn about people,” she said. "It has been very educational."

Ballas has learned about more than just the history of LGBTQIA+ communities. Ballas and her partner chose to research the Lesbian Land communities that developed in the Bronx in the 1960s and 1970s. Both students and their classmates recently presented their findings and its significance. Rosin said that the ARC is a lot of work, but it has been very educational. "We have a great opportunity to help students find their voice and learn about people," she said. "It has been really nice getting to learn about people.”

Visibility can leave students more susceptible to hate, but it also gives students a sense of community. The ARC is known as the culmination of the academic portion and the Department of Residence Life — the ARC is a part of the Division of Undergraduate Studies.