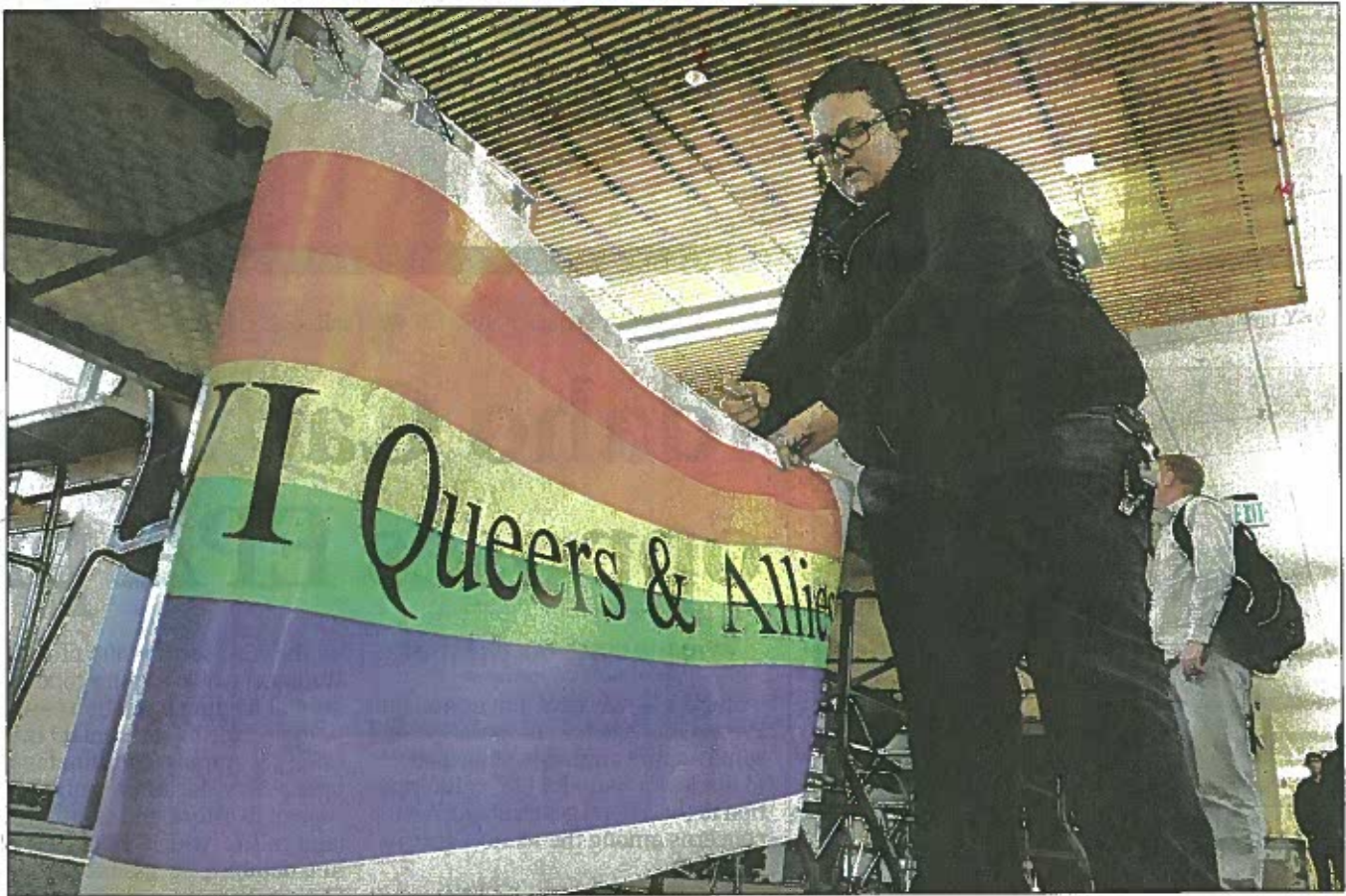




CWI 'queers, allies' club promotes understanding



Charlie Litchfield/APT

Nicole Myers, a freshman at the College of Western Idaho and member of the group Queers and Allies, a gay-straight alliance on campus, takes down the group's banner in a common area at CWI Tuesday afternoon in Nampa.

Organization formed by Boise student last year

By **MIKE BUTTS**
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NAMPA — College of Western Idaho has joined other schools in the Treasure Valley with clubs to promote understanding between people of different sexual orientations.

The CWI Queers & Allies organization formed last fall and has about 50 members, about 20 of whom are active. The College of Idaho has a Gay-Straight Campus Alliance and Boise High School and Borah High School both have gay-straight alliances.

"It's really good to educate people and say, 'Hey, we're here and we're your friends and we're your peers,'" CWI Queers & Allies president Victoria Justin said.

Justin, 24, a criminal justice and sociology major from Boise, enrolled at CWI in 2010 and wanted to belong to a group similar to Boise State University's

"LGBT youth face staggering amounts of anti-gay violence and harassment, and a disproportionate number of them commit suicide each year."

— **Krista Perry**
Co-chair of the Idaho Safe Schools Coalition

BGLAD (Bisexuals, Gays, Lesbians and Allies for Diversity). She formed the club and it meets weekly. It is in the process of getting formal approval as a CWI student organization.

"It's a fantastic group that's really do-

ing good things," CWI history professor and Queers & Allies adviser Reggie Jayne said.

The group's stated purpose is to:

■ Provide an atmosphere of love, acceptance and support for all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

■ Educate ourselves and others about issues surrounding sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

■ Maintain a positive image of the queer community within the college and city.

Justin said the group's name is meant to include people of various sexual orientations and expression.

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CWI

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"A lot of people in the community identify with a lot of different labels and it runs into kind of an alphabet soup," Justin said. "It (queer) is a really general and all-encompassing term ... It's just really simple and it catches on."

Krista Perry is co-chair of the Idaho Safe Schools Coalition, which advocates for student gay-straight alliances (GSAs).

"LGBT youth face staggering amounts of anti-gay violence and harassment, and a disproportionate number of them commit suicide each year," Perry told

Seattle Lesbian last year. "GSAs are one important counterweight. Students in schools with GSAs are less likely to report feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation, are less likely to hear homophobic remarks and more likely to report that school personnel intervened when hearing such remarks."

More information about the CWI group is on the group's Facebook page "CWI Queers & Allies."

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