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Simon's Rock Awarded Freedom to Read Grant for Library and Bard Queer Leadership Project

GREAT BARRINGTON, MA— Bard College at Simon's Rock was awarded a Freedom to Read Grant by the Newburger Schwartz Family Foundation. The grant was awarded to support the Alumni Library and Bard Queer Leadership Project in building a more robust collection of queer scholarship, starting a Queer Book Club, and hosting Drag Story Time events in partnership with Drag Story Hour of the Berkshires.

In response to current educational threats with book bans affecting schools and libraries across the country and further proposed legislation against LGBTQ+ people's access to basic rights and education, Simon's Rock is actively seeking to create inclusive and equitable spaces for queer individuals.

The Bard Queer Leadership Project and Alumni Library will utilize the grant funding to expand the library's current collection of queer books in order to fully enable the longevity of the Queer Book Club and the Bard Queer Leadership Project. The Queer Book Club will be an intergenerational space, open to local middle school students through rainbow seniors and will partner with local community organizations, to discuss queer books and learn about LGBTQ+ issues and experiences. Bard Queer Leadership Project students will eventually help lead this initiative as part of their leadership project training.

The Queer Book Club will host their first meeting on April 6 at 3:00 p.m. at the Alumni Library, with following meetings on April 27 and May 11. This semester, the selected books are *Obie is Man Enough* and *He/She/They*, both by Schuyler Bailar, inspirational speaker and first openly transgender NCAA Division swimmer, who was a guest speaker in the inaugural Queer Leaders Vision Forum in fall 2023 at Simon's Rock. Schuyler Bailar will return to campus for a book signing and pool party at the Kilpatrick Athletic Center on April 19 at 7:00 p.m. Participants in the Queer Book Club will receive a free copy of either book of their choice.

The first Drag Story Time will be on Saturday, March 30 at 2:00 p.m. at the Simon's Rock Alumni Library and is open to all LGBTQ+ affirming individuals. The event is in partnership with Drag Story Hour of the Berkshires with local drag queens JV and Poppy DaBubbly. The second Drag Story Time will be Saturday, April 27 with drag queen Poppy DaBubbly and drag king Sativo Green.

"What 'Freedom to Read' means to me goes beyond JUST having a choice in what you decide to read, it is also equally about having access to books in the first place. For how is a person supposed to choose when the full list, much like a full spectrum of color, is not allowed to exist? It is both the freedom to read and the freedom to have access to a variety of books," shared a student in the first cohort of the Bard Queer Leadership Project.

"The idea really came about last spring as a response to the increase in book bans across the country, with many states and school boards aggressively doubling down on their policing of LGBTQ+ material and black authors and history. Discussion and community connection are vital if we are to push back against the ideology that leads to book banning; and if we can provide a discussion space for our little corner of the Berkshires, the impact of that could be huge. LGBTQ+ people need spaces where they can be themselves and our potential allies need spaces where they can ask questions and see queer folk as people, not a political talking point. I hope the book club and drag story time events can do that for us," shared Victoria Bokaer, Collections Librarian at the Simon's Rock Alumni Library.

About Simon's Rock

[Bard College at Simon's Rock](#) is the only college in the country specifically designed for highly motivated students ready to enter college after the 10th or 11th grade. Simon's Rock offers a challenging program in the liberal arts and sciences, taught exclusively in small seminars by supportive, highly trained faculty, who are leading scholars in their fields. The College grants degrees in more than 35 majors. The Princeton Review's *Best 380 Colleges* rates academics at Simon's Rock higher than Harvard and Princeton.

[Bard Academy at Simon's Rock](#) is the nation's first two-year boarding and day program designed to prepare 9th and 10th graders to start college early. A student entering Bard Academy as a high school freshman will earn an Associate of Arts degree from Bard College at Simon's Rock after only four years and a Bachelor of Arts degree after six years. The Academy curriculum is designed and taught by students' future college professors who are leading scholars in their fields.

[The Bard Queer Leadership Project](#) (BQLP) is a revolutionary new Bachelor of Arts degree program designed for, and by, LGBTQIA+ college students to elevate LGBTQIA+ students and college graduates into leadership roles in school and across the workforce while serving as a space for actualizing educational practices designed for students to thrive. The centerpiece of BQLP is a four-year dual major B.A. degree combining Queer Leadership with a second academic field.

For more information, visit simons-rock.edu and bardacademy.simons-rock.edu

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