

Lavender Graduation Testimonial by Tatiana Young

1. Why did you decide to participate in Lavender Graduation?

I decided to participate in Lavender Graduation because I felt compelled to share the celebration of graduation with my queer community members. As a self-identified transgender queer woman of color and activist with over ten years experience working for queer liberation, I know firsthand the struggles we currently face and have faced. Over the years, I have had the disprivilege of mourning the deaths of countless queer brothers and sisters due to constructed forces of prejudice and hate while struggling to keep my own head above water. My queer communities particularly my queer communities of color are routinely neglected and isolated from many of the rights and privileges non-queer community members take for granted, leaving many of us to the streets, to a life away from academia and scholarship, often a life not indicative of our true potential.

I am no stranger to such a life. As a former transsexual sex worker and homeless neighbor, I am familiar with the political and social forces that work to exclude queer identified community members from equality and Lavender Graduation is a powerful way to reject such forces and to claim for ourselves as queer and ally community members our true potential to succeed in education and beyond.

2. Were you positively impacted by the ceremony? If so, what was the most impactful experience?

The Lavender Graduation ceremony was a very moving experience for me and I am forever grateful to all those who made it possible. Tony Keffler and the Lav Grad Committee, ya'll really did an amazing job. This was my first Lav. Grad ceremony and I thought everything was well put together. It is really difficult for me to single out a particular experience that was "most impactful" because for me the entire Lav Grad process was most impactful especially when compared to all the usual graduation ceremonies. For me, the Lav Grad ceremony was in all honesty, the single most important graduation ceremony for me not only because I was invited to speak but also because it

took place shortly after California decided to uphold Prop 8 taking marriage rights away from same sex couples. For me, Lav Grad in its entirety positively impacted me. At Lavender, we were celebrating queer and allyness and graduation all in one. It is hard for me to imagine a better reason to celebrate.

3. Would you recommend that other GLBTQ students participate in future ceremonies? If so, why?

I highly recommend and encourage all queer and ally students to participate in Lavender because when you participate you are not only sending a message to our fellow peers at UT but you are challenging the forces that seek to hold us down simply for being queer, forces that say we aren't worthy of education, family and employment. It is important that we give collective voice to our struggle by participating in a celebration of queerness allyness and academic success. Participating in Lavender has forever changed the way I look at not only graduation but how I view queer pride. We can at once be hot in the club and in the library.

4. And how about ally students? How did their participation/support make you feel?

I got mad love for the allies. Allies are extremely important in the struggle for queer liberation and it was very refreshing to see their shining faces at Lavender. Allies help me to feel safe and valued wherever I go and more I would not be here today without their loving support.

5. Are you proud to have graduated from a university with a Lav Grad ceremony?

Yes, I am very proud to have graduated from a university with a Lav Grad Ceremony.