



The Mills Gay Agenda

BY ALICE HEWITT ON OCTOBER 23, 2021

Mills College is gay, and that is its greatest strength — not a problem to be solved, as a recent letter by members of the classes of 1970 and ‘71 suggests. It is time for queer students to be celebrated and valued, and it is time for our leadership and community to stand against this instance of hate.

When I was choosing a college in 2011, peers asked if choosing to go to a women’s college meant that I was gay. I wasn’t out to myself then and I bristled at that suggestion. I grew up surrounded by a very loving and supportive queer community, but Mills was where I was able to feel safe enough to come out to myself. Mills showed me many different ways to be a woman or not be a woman. Mills was the first place where I knowingly interacted with trans folks, and learned that there are people who, like me, don’t understand or fit into the gender binary.

Nearly 60% of Mills students are queer, according to a 2020 student survey. There aren’t many other schools with those numbers, and one would think that Mills would celebrate such a statistic in its marketing and recruitment. Instead, Mills has too often hidden this percentage. It is hard not to imagine that the idea that Mills is just “too gay” — the fear held by the signatories of the letter — is a fear held by our leaders themselves, and one that motivated them to merge with a school that will bring down these numbers.

Queer students deserve places where they are the norm, not the minority. Mills is that place. But for far too many of my trans and nonbinary siblings, Mills was not a welcoming place, and many

could not continue there. By undervaluing and hiding its queer population rather than celebrating it, Mills missed a great opportunity to name itself a school centering this population. Internalized homophobia and transphobia kill — and might have killed Mills.

The letter states, “If there had been [a] large enough pool of academically talented LGBTQ applicants who wished to attend a college where they formed the majority, however, Mills would not be in the current position of lowered selectivity and academic standards.” I thought I had heard all the stereotypes about the LGBTQ community, but “queer folks are dumb” was new! Mills grads are highly successful, intelligent, kind, empathetic and strong. There are so many ways to measure intelligence beyond the standard “academic talent” referenced here. Empathy, self understanding and awareness of others’ lived experiences can never be taught — but they are skills cultivated and honed at Mills.

A common refrain among Mills alumnae is “Mills isn’t what it used to be.” We need to stop saying this immediately. Yes, Mills is less white and less straight than it was before, and I am not sorry that Mills has changed in that way. We’ve improved, and there is still more improvement needed. To those wary of the change: either get excited about it, or take your bigoted views somewhere else.

Mills students deserve leaders who will stand up for them. To President Hillman: I call on you to release your response to the letter from the classes of ‘70 and ‘71. I also call on you to ensure diluting the gay population of Mills was never seen as a positive attribute of the acquisition. I call on you to release your plan to protect and support the queer population here during the imminent culture shift.

And to the alumnae of the classes of ‘70 and ‘71: to borrow an old slogan, WE’RE HERE, WE’RE QUEER, GET USED TO IT! I hope that you continue to fight homophobia when you see it around you, and I might suggest you look inward for your next target.