

At Middlebury, I was part of a central group of people pushing for the institutionalization of a permanent gender council, a radical advisory board of “experts” on gender theory, transphobia, sexism, male/masculine supremacy, and how to ground that analysis in intersectional anti-oppression politics. Our main purpose was to push the administration to adopt radically gender-affirming/anti-racist policies, push the faculty to incorporate more anti-oppression analysis in the curricula, push for cultural change among the student body, and push for more staff training around gender. Karin Hanta, Sujata Moorti, and Laurie Essig were also involved, so they can tell you more about the kinds of stuff we were pushing for! Chellis house, and the queer studies house next door, were completely indispensable to our activist efforts in terms of providing both a physical meeting space, as well as a way for us to further our own political education and the education of others.

The gender council had a lot of opposition in the administration – which came in the form of administrators either not wanting a gender council at all, or wanting it to look vastly less “threatening” than the one we were proposing – and so we students really had to meet frequently and be at the top of our game. But as a fledgling organization, we couldn’t really have a formal meeting space, as the college requires that you be a registered organization to reserve classrooms and other spaces. So we met most often in the queer studies house and chellis house. If we didn’t have chellis, we probably would not have had a stable headquarters.

Part of our activism was also to bring radical speakers and workshops to campus, to educate students, staff, and faculty, and expose them to an ‘outside expert’ who could nudge them in the direction of our politics. We brought people to speak about the inherent racism of the prison system, critical trans politics, radical queer people of color organizing around anti-gentrification, and more. We also organized our own workshops and skillshares, with the students providing the education. Chellis house provided both a budget to bring these speakers to campus, a space to host them, and of course the wonderful and magical Karin Hanta to put it all together and make it a welcoming experience for everyone.

Chellis was also more than just a physical space to us. We found refuge there from an overtly and publicly racist, transphobic, sexist, ableist, and classist campus, and it was important that we find ways to take care of ourselves and shield ourselves from that hatred. Chellis House provided an affirming and nurturing space and staff that reminded us that we were not alone in opposing those forces, and that the activism we were pursuing was appreciated and needed.

On a personal note, I also worked for Karin at Chellis House in my last year of school, during a time when I really needed to earn some money, and I would have otherwise been unemployed. So chellis really helped me get by in a very basic way as well. I can’t express enough how important Karin was to my own well-being and the survival of my friends! I will forever appreciate her for this.

So, that’s sort of the gist of my interactions with Chellis!

**-Lark**

