

## Report on Speak Out 4 of 25 August 2015

### Speak Out Seminar: "Homosexuality in Academia"

The Edu-HRight Research Unit hosted a Speak Out seminar entitled "Homosexuality in Academia" on Tuesday 25 August. The event was attended by about 100 members of student and staff. Two papers were delivered during the evening. The first, by Dr Jacques Rothmann, a Senior Lecturer in Sociology on the Potchefstroom Campus, was entitled "The (De)professionalisation of the gay male academic identity: Locking the closet door in South African tertiary education". This provided a theoretical and empirical overview of his qualitative PhD study undertaken in 2012 on the reasons why gay male academics decide to disclose or foreclose their homosexuality in the academic context, or as he termed it, the *professionalisation* (foreclosing gay identity) or *deprofessionalisation* (disclosing gay identity) of the gay male academic identity. These reasons for disclosing their identities centred on the importance of interrogating the underlying heterosexism which may inform their respective subjects' content, the need to serve as role model for sexual minority students and to even identify their own internalised homophobia. Reasons to foreclose their sexual identities ranged from a fear to lose their jobs or not be promoted, to concerns of exclusion and isolation from both their heterosexual colleagues and students.

The second presenter, Ms Tshanduko Tshilongo, a Master's student in Sociology, also on the Potchefstroom Campus, focused on the experiences of sexual minority students on university campuses in her paper entitled "Exploring the need and feasibility of Safe Zones for lesbian and gay students on the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus". She provided the attendees with references to previous studies on the potential obstacles these students face in their day-to-day lives on campus, including verbal and physical assault, a decline in their psychological wellbeing as well as their academic studies. She concluded her presentation with contemplation on the need for 'safe spaces' for these students, in order to redress potential homophobia. To conclude the evening, representatives from the newly established Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) student organisation on the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus, *Campus Pride*, introduced attendees to their organisation's vision, mission and objectives. These included, amongst others, the importance of providing a safe space for all students (regardless of their sexual orientation), characterised by inclusivity, support and critical academic debate.