

# Learn, Discuss, Act

## A Student's Hope for More Civic Engagement

Danielle Diamond

Learn, discuss act, this is the motto for LGVI. I am currently the president of the Luxembourg Gender Voice Initiative (LGVI) a.s.b.l. LGVI was set up to target students, primarily university students, to get more involved on and off campus. The organization's mission is to "make gender issues more visible, and particularly support students becoming leading voices on gender equality and meet with a purpose to embrace diversity and open discussion. LGVI is an open and independent organization that promotes equal treatment for all by combating anti-gender and anti-sex discrimination." In order to do this, LGVI uses a theoretically based research strategy to meet different goals: inform the general public about various gender and sex issues, offer trainings and conferences on how to combat such realities and develop relationships and connect networks with similar interests locally, nationally and internationally. In my opinion, the University of Luxembourg has been a great supporter of this cause and has helped LGVI achieve much of its success. The University of Luxembourg has great potential to help other students lead civic organizations impact society and the story of LGVI evidences this.

In September 2011, I began my masters at the University of Luxembourg and tried to find student organizations focusing on gender issues and community involvement. Much to my dismay, there were few to none. That was when I had the idea to create my own. I thought, "Hey, why not?" To be honest the entire process wasn't that difficult. I simply called professors who gave seminars on gender issues, asked students what to do and eventually LGVI was created with no resistance from the university.

From this experience, I found that Uni.lu is very open to hearing demands from students and willing to take action, if given a reason. The founders and I created a business plan and asked to have meetings with the administration. Shortly after, we started to partner with the University for almost all of our events, and together we were able to do great things.

June 2012, LGVI organized Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, a beneficiary production for Femmes en détresse and V-Day International. The aim of LGVI's event was to get both students and the general Luxembourgish community more aware of a very serious issue – i. e. domestic violence. This debut showing had over 100 people in attendance and a large percent of them being students. In November 2012, the University permitted LGVI to hold its general assembly and host a viewing of documentaries on the topics of human trafficking, domestic abuse and forced prostitution. In February 2013, LGVI with the support of the University of Luxembourg organized One Billion Rising Luxembourg, which had nearly 200 people attend with press coverage following on RTL television and summaries of the event in the *Luxemburger Wort* and *L'Essentiel*. We participated in International Women's Day last March with members holding flags and leading the march. I was one of two members in LGVI privileged enough to be asked to give a speech. Both the vice president, Catia Gonçalves and I spoke representing LGVI in

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Danielle Diamond is a 25 year old American teaching business English at Berlitz. She is finishing her masters at the University of Luxembourg and aspires to begin a consulting or marketing career in Europe.

front of more than 250 community members and over a dozen gender focused sister associations. Also, two encore showings of *The Vagina Monologues* were held with over 250 in attendance in March 2013. Mayor Xavier Bettel was a special guest panelist before the final show. At the round table, prostitution in Luxembourg became the subject for discussion. Again a student population was in attendance to support LGVI and the causes. Also, preceding the showings, LGVI got over 70 students at the University of Luxembourg vow not to harm another person. The participants were asked to put their hands in paint and write their names or initials under it to symbolize their vows.

This brief history of LGVI shows how much potential the University of Luxembourg has in giving students the freedom, financial support and material means to positively impact society. In the past 2 years, LGVI has outreached to nearly 1 000 community members on important societal themes and raised nearly 1 500 euros for both local and international organizations. I am not a fortuneteller, but I am a believer that if something happens once it can happen again; I believe that there will be many more successful student organizations helping civil society.

LGVI is an example of how the University of Luxembourg creates the opportunity for talented students with a passion to pursue that passion. Last semester the Office of Student Life was created at the University and in that office sits the Presidents' Association. LGVI is one of more than a dozen university-recognized organizations. Themes and missions of my fellow President Association members includes: green and sustainability initiatives in OIKOS, leadership in AIESEC, law in ELSA, international relations in IRC, and intercultural dialogue in CIEL with many other positively impacting associations.

I hope and believe that the University of Luxembourg will have a bright future cultivating talent and giving support to those who ask for it. In my opinion, it is not the university's job to push their civic agenda on students, but instead for the student's to push theirs on the university. I hope that students realize the opportunity they have living in Luxembourg. I hope students see that they have a means to fulfill their missions. I hope that students will begin to learn, discuss and take action at the University of Luxembourg. ♦

Photos of *The Vagina Monologues* and *One Billion Rising* by Irma Hadzalic.

