

In Memoriam

Charles William Gossett

Charles W. (Charlie) Gossett, 72, who died on May 10, 2024, was a longtime advocate and scholar of LGBT rights.

A scholar and practitioner of human resource management, Charlie worked on personnel issues for the US Office of Personnel Management and the District of Columbia government in the 1980s while completing his dissertation on the civil service in Botswana. As special assistant to Mayor Marion Barry and as chief of the benefits administration division, he was deeply involved in policy decisions about domestic partners benefits, a new policy innovation providing health insurance and other fringe benefits to the unmarried partners of city employees.

One of the first public administration researchers to publish on LGBT issues, Charlie then addressed those policy issues from a scholarly perspective. At a time when little data on LGBT people was available, he focused on the impacts of state and local government policies. In 1994, he described provision of domestic partner benefits in 23 cities. In 1996, he examined how local anti-discrimination laws affected the experience of lesbian and gay male employees. In 1999, he studied how Dillon's Rule impeded local government efforts to protect the rights of lesbians and gay men. He continued to examine the status of LGBT public employees for the remainder of his career.

His public opinion research focused on how support for same-sex marriage changed in California. As support had risen more in that state than in the rest of the country, he was among the first to look at the relative importance of cohort replacement and individual mind-changing in explaining that rise. He also showed that hopes that Californians would reject Proposition 8, which overturned the state supreme court's decision establishing a right to same-sex marriage, were unrealistic; long-run trends in popular support for same-sex marriage were positive but too slow to make a vote in favor of it at all likely. He also examined how American government textbooks covered LGBT people and same-sex marriage and compiled a first-of-its-kind data base of gay and lesbian elected officials.

Charlie's interests in the political world more broadly and in culturally sensitive teaching and learning took him back to Africa twice after his initial dissertation research and teaching stint in Botswana. He served as a Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Swaziland and later, while on sabbatical as a Fulbright Scholar, he aided in establishing the Centre for the Study

of HIV and AIDS at the University of Botswana. From its campus in Gaborone, he built a network of university researchers, developed outreach to community organizations, co-authored grant proposals, and created a web presence for the Centre.

Indeed, Charlie also had a career as an academic leader. He became acting department chair at Georgia Southern University in 2001, then moved to California State Polytechnic University in 2002 to become chair of the department of political science for seven years. In 2009, Charlie was named Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies at California State University, Sacramento. He served in that role for three years until being named Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs of the campus. Following his Provost role, he opted to return to teaching and writing, spending the final years of his career in the Political Science and Public Administration and Policy Departments. Charlie transferred to emeritus status in 2019 and moved to Palm Springs, CA.

The ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the University of Southern California maintains an archive of Charlie's research on domestic partnership benefits, LGBT employment discrimination, and other LGBT-related topics, as well as administrative records from his time on the Commission on Domestic Partnership Benefits for the District of Columbia, the Georgia Equality Project, and APSA's Committee on the Status of Lesbians and Gays in the Profession.

In the APSA, besides serving on the LGBT Status Committee, Charlie served on the Trust and Development Committee, the Leonard White Dissertation Award Committee, as chair of the Public Administration Section as well as its program chair, and was an early member of the LGBTQ+ Caucus for Political Science and the Sexuality and Politics Section. Charlie will be remembered as one of political science's pioneers, teaching and otherwise institutionalizing LGBTQ+ scholarship and professional concerns within the discipline, and through his civic engagement, beyond it.

As Charlie supported many LGBTQ+ initiatives, please consider memorializing his life and work through a donation to: [ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries](#); to its community partner [ONE Institute](#); and to the [Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law and Public Policy at the UCLA School of Law](#).

— Mark Blasius, *City University of New York Graduate Center*,
and Greg Lewis, *Georgia State University*

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