

UTAH FAITH

# Group lights BYU's 'Y' on mountain with rainbow-colored lights

'This wasn't a protest. It was mostly just to say we're here, we belong,' said Provo's Joshua Warden

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A group hiked Y Mountain in Provo, Utah, with handheld LED lamps to light it in rainbow colors for one hour in support of LGBTQ students on Thursday, March 4, 2021. | Emily Colton

**By Tad Walch**

Tad Walch covers religion with a focus on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

For one hour Thursday night, rainbow colors lit up the 380-foot Y on the mountain that towers above Provo, Utah.

A group supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer BYU students used LED lights to light the Y without school authorization from 8 to 9 p.m. Lighting the Y in what appeared to be red, orange, green and blue capped the fourth, self-styled Rainbow Day for BYU declared by Color the Campus, an LGBTQ student support group.

“BYU did not authorize the lighting of the Y,” university spokeswoman Carri Jenkins said Thursday night. “It appears it was lit by individuals on the Y with colored lights. The Y is BYU property, and any form of public expression on university property requires prior approval. We intend to make certain that members of our campus community understand this.”

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Students lingered at the Y Mountain Trailhead after hiking down from the Y that sits about 4,000 feet above the campus.

“This wasn’t a protest. It was mostly just to say we’re here, we belong,” said Provo’s Joshua Warden, who said he is bisexual. “We’re part of this community, this school, this church. We are here. We belong. We wanted to shine a light on that. It’s not just black and white, there is a whole spectrum of colors that we belong to. The Lord made the rainbow, and we’re part of that.”

Aw [pic.twitter.com/72rZRX8LcS](https://pic.twitter.com/72rZRX8LcS)

— Natalie King (@mindemulsions) [March 5, 2021](#)

BYU purchased the 81 acres on Y Mountain that include the Y from the U.S. Forest Service for \$180,000 in 2016 and installed permanent LED lighting around the rim of the letter, which has been on the mountain since 1905. The school lights the Y for special occasions like homecoming and graduation.

Color the Campus is the brainchild of Bradley Talbot, a 23-year-old BYU psychology major from Pleasant Grove, Utah. Rainbow Day and Thursday's rainbow lighting of the Y were Talbot's idea. Color the Campus is not an official BYU club or organization.

"At Color the Campus, our mission is to support, protect, befriend and love members of the LGBTQ+ community at all CES schools, cultivating an environment that is both faith-inspiring and queer-affirming," Talbot wrote on Instagram, where he posted a photo of the lit Y. "But then it dawned on me. My dream of painting campus Rainbow isn't limited to the physical grounds of BYU."

Talbot did not join the hikers. Instead, he coordinated social media from elsewhere.

Brennan Rosenlof of Provo joined the group that he estimated totaled about 40 people. They hiked to the Y carrying portable working lamps with COB LED lights. Rosenlof said he is a bisexual who volunteers at [Encircle House](#), which provides LGBTQ support.



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"I think representation like this is super important," Rosenlof said. "I can guarantee there's at least one kid out there that looked up tonight and said, 'Oh, cool. There are tons of people like me, and it's nice.'"

BYU tweeted a response at 8:22 p.m., stating that the rainbow lighting was not authorized.



Warden and Rosenlof said they hadn't seen any university officials, but a BYU police vehicle was parked at the trailhead at about 9:40 p.m., when about two dozen people were still milling about near the trailhead or in the parking lot.

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