

Memorandum

To: Board of Trustees Diversity Committee
CC: Rebecca Flewelling, Special Advisor to the Provost
From: Dorothea V. Brauer, LGBT Services Coordinator
Date: 10/10/2008
Re: Presentation on Issues Affecting LGBT Students on Campus

On behalf of the LGBT community at UVM I want to thank your Committee for taking the time to hear the concerns of a few of the LGBT students at UVM. In order to provide you with some background for the statements you will hear from students in today's meeting, I have selected a few paragraphs from a recent publication edited by Dr. Ronni Sanlo, a respected higher education professional entitled "Working With Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender College Students." The paragraphs I have selected both describe the issues facing LGBT college students and recommend institutional and programmatic responses to these issues.

From the chapter on "The Residence Hall," I have excerpted a brief section on national statistics on the prevalence of harassment and other bias incidents. I included a rationale for establishing a procedure to document details of bias incidents and for actively pursuing investigation and intervention.

In the mid '90's, our Director of Residential Life, Annie Stevens, initiated a procedure for recording and reporting bias incidents in the residence halls at UVM. One of the recommendations that came out of the OCR partnership review was to formalize and expand this process to address bias throughout the campus. In the fall of 1999 the President assigned this project to Wanda Heading-Grant, Executive Director of Affirmative Action. Heading-Grant gathered representatives of related groups and offices on campus including the Executive Officer of Cultural Pluralism and Racial Equality, the Director of Residential Life, the Chief of Police, and representatives of the two President's Commissions for initial input and ongoing review. By January of 2000 Heading-Grant published the existing bias protocol. Our Police Services and Judicial Affairs work in close coordination with Affirmative Action on responding to reports of bias incidents.

It is important to note that in this respect UVM's Administration is following what is considered best practices. As the author of this chapter points out however, while our actions send a message that UVM takes bias seriously and is supportive of LGBT students, cultural change happens slowly. On this and most campuses it is still true that the vast majority of bias incidents that occur go unreported and that our LGBT students are

subjected to harassment on a regular basis. In my attachments you will also find a table summarizing the bias incidents that have been reported since January of 2001. Complete information about each incident is published on the Affirmative Action web page at <http://www.uvm.edu/~aeo> under the link "What We Do." The incidents targeting the LGBT community that have been recorded since the policy was instituted range from a student being called a "fag" or a "dyke" by passersby to having notes that say things like "fags must die," on paper stuffed into their backpacks, slipped under their doors or scrawled on their message boards.

A bias protocol is a reaction to unwanted negative behavior. Sanlo's book points out that there are many proactive things an institution can do to improve the climate for LGBT students, faculty and staff. The second excerpt I provided is from the chapter on "LGBT Students in the College Classroom." In the excerpt I have provided, you will see a discussion of classroom climate and the impact on LGBT students of the extent to which LGBT issues are addressed in the curriculum. These issues and those raised in the excerpt on "Role Models" concern areas where there is need for growth and improvement.

These authors point out the importance of non-discrimination policies and active administrative response to anti-gay harassment of staff and faculty. UVM has a long-standing policy against harassment on the basis of sexual orientation and Vermont is one of eleven States that have included sexual orientation in our civil rights legislation. Once again, however culture changes slowly. In spite of support expressed by many of our Administrators, instances of anti-gay speech are still commonplace in some quarters and some LGBT faculty or staff hesitate to become involved in providing support to LGBT students because they fear a loss of status or esteem by colleagues.

In the coming year my office will focus on assisting and encouraging faculty across the colleges to consider developing courses in the area of LGBT Studies. My office will continue to provide training and education to staff and faculty on issues pertaining to LGBT students, staff and faculty. I will also be working to develop leadership and mentoring skills among LGBT staff and faculty.

I want to thank you again for your time and consideration of these important matters. The students you will hear from represent students who have waited many years for their concerns to be considered at this level. I hope it is clear to you, as it is to LGBT students, that these issues will warrant continued attention in the coming months.

Summary Statistics of Bias Incidents For 2001 from UVM AAEO web page		
Month	Number of Incidents	Number Targeting Gays
January	2	2
February	1	1
March	0	0
April	2	0
May	2	1
June	0	0
July	0	0
August	1	1
September	4	2
October	0	0
November	3	2
December	1	1

- In 2001, there were 16 bias related incidences reported on campus; 10 of those targeted gays.
- Nearly two-thirds (2/3 or 62.5%) of the bias related incidences that were reported on campus targeted gays.

Excerpts From: Working With Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students: A Handbook For Faculty and Administrators, edited by Ronni L. Sanlo, 1998

From chapter entitled: "The Residence Hall: A Home Away From Home," Matthew W. Robinson. pp. 55 and 64.

As colleges and universities are microcosms of society, they reflect the biases and prejudices of the broader social context. Indeed, college students bring to the residence halls the social scripts they have learned about LGBT people. Unfortunately, most first-year students have negative attitudes toward LGBT students (Herek, 1989). Studies indicate that 51 percent of first-year college students think lesbian and gay men should try to be heterosexual and 54 percent described themselves as "disapproving" or "very disapproving" of homosexuality (Comstock, 1991). In a 1988 survey of males ages 15 to 19, 89 percent said they found the idea of sex between two men "disgusting." Only 12 percent were confident they could befriend a gay person (Marsiglio, 1993).

College students, particularly first-year students, openly share their revulsion, disgust, and hatred for sexual minorities (Thorson, et al., 1991). Comstock (1991) found that 22 percent of first-year students had verbally harassed gay men. Despite such widespread victimization, LGBT students rarely report harassment or other hate crimes, because these students feel the incidents would not be taken seriously, the administration is not concerned with their welfare, and

nothing would be done (Norris, 1992; Sherrill & Hardesty, 1994). Moreover, reporting victimization on the basis of sexual orientation raises coming out issues, deterring questioning and closeted LGBT students from reporting hate crimes (The Study Committee on the Status of Lesbians and Gay Men, 1991). This “victimization goes on within their dorms and workplaces” (Norris, 1992, 82).

Harassment

An important procedure to establish in residence halls is documentation of homophobia and heterosexism. Most victimization goes unreported, so the needs of LGBT students are never recognized nor addressed. Thus, a step in preventing harassment is to make it an issue. Educational campaigns could include flyers, bulletin boards, speakers, posters, notes in mailboxes—any way to get the word out that harassment of any kind, whether on the basis of race, gender, or sexual orientation, is not acceptable and should be reported. Such a concerted effort will work to overcome student perception of institutional apathy and disinterest. In creating a harassment documentation project it is important to have uniform standards of reporting, one center of information and clear lines of communication so reports are not lost. Moreover, protocols should be developed to determine appropriate responses to specific types of harassment.

The most common type of verbal harassment is the generalized derogatory comment about LGBT people. Such comments are ubiquitous. In a survey at Oberlin College, a small liberal arts college known for its supportive atmosphere for LGBT people, 87 percent of the campus had overheard negative comments about LGBT people (Norris, 1992). Only 25 percent of those who opposed such comments actually verbalized their objections. Whether or not there is a direct target of the offensive comment, it is imperative to confront such comments. Otherwise, the resident staff member implicitly approves of the comment, subverting the norms of an inclusive community. Others—both heterosexual allies and LGBT people in the closet—may oppose the comment but not feel comfortable confronting the individual (Norris, 1992).

From chapter entitled: “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students in the College Classroom,” Kristen A. Renn. pp. 231 - 233.

The Classroom Climate

We know that LGBT students experience significant negative consequences when they are exposed to violence and harassment on campus (Comstock, 1991); D’Augelli, 1989a; Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1993; Kurdek, 1988; Myers, 1993; Norris, 1992). The classroom—the place on campus reserved for the free and respectful exchange of ideas—should provide an oasis from this seemingly constant barrage of anti-LGBT harassment, violence, and invalidation. Unfortunately, this is not the case. In 1993 the Select Committee on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns at the University of Minnesota reported testimony from undergraduate and graduate students who described the “humiliating and

demeaning environment" (15) they experiences both in the classroom and in pursuit of their academic program of study. Students told of occasions when faculty made derogatory jokes, minimized or denied the contribution of LGBT people, and denied, made light of, or dismissed as irrelevant the sexual orientation of artists, scientists, or historical figures. Students also reported incidents of professors making overtly hostile or demeaning comments, including some implying that violence against LGBT people is justified and deserved.

At Brown University in 1989, the Faculty Committee on the Status of Sexual Minorities reported that 66 percent of LGBT students feared harassment or discrimination by classmates, 40 percent feared harassment or discrimination by professors, 60 percent did not feel safe being open about their sexual orientation in class, and 53 percent censored their academic speech, writing, or actions in order to avoid anti-gay harassment or discrimination. Of all students, gay or straight, in the Brown survey, 10.5 percent reported occasionally hearing faculty make negative remarks or jokes that denigrate LGBT people.

While overt victimization of LGBT students is clearly a problem on campuses in classrooms, students encounter other negative experiences resulting not from conscious acts of aggression but rather from a passive stance on the part of faculty. LGBT students' needs are unknown, unmet, or ignored by well-meaning but uninformed individuals. Paradoxically, in a study at Oberlin College, Norris (1992) found that students, faculty, and staff of all sexualities expressed strong positive attitudes toward their LGBT peers and colleagues, but these same LGBT people were subject to widespread harassment and violence. In explanation, Norris presents evidence that while these supportive students and employees are not the same people who are engaging in specific anti-gay actions, they are not actively preventing or discouraging these actions. By not acting to interrupt the pattern of LGBT victimization these students and employees are contributing to it.

Even if faculty wish to become more informed about LGBT issues, many institutions do not provide them opportunities to do so. In the Oberlin study 55 percent of heterosexual faculty and staff expressed interest in learning more about LGBT concerns, history, and culture (Norris, 1992). A graduate student told the University of Minnesota Select Committee (1993): "As a teacher, I have received no support or training for dealing with homophobia in the classroom. I have been discouraged from discussing my concerns about this, again through the discomfort and ignorance of my colleagues and faculty. Homophobia should be a issue in training all TAs (teaching assistants)" (20). Another student said, "It would also be a good idea to sensitize faculty in all disciplines to the fact that many of their students are not heterosexual. In examples they give in class, or in their assumption about their students, they should be aware of this" (23).

Increasingly, LGBT students are benefiting from support and encouragement from faculty. Academic programs, individual courses, or projects within existing courses and curricula are having a significant impact both on LGBT students and on the attitudes of their non-LGBT peers (Chesler & Zuniga, 1991; D'Augelli, 1992a; McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993; Mohr, 1989; Stevenson, 1988). Campuses that support

openly LGBT faculty and staff create an environment of acceptance where faculty can serve as role models for all students (Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1993).

From chapter entitled: "Making Meaning: Providing Tools for an Integrated Identity," Laura C. Engelken. p. 28.

Role Models

Faculty and administrators must provide and serve as role models for all students. Just as it is important for women and students of color to see themselves represented in faculty, staff, and administrative positions, so too is it important for LGBT students to see themselves reflected in campus life. These role models testify to the possibility of the positive integration of sexuality with the rest of one's life. For LGBT students struggling to make sense of self in a hostile environment, these examples are crucial.

Consequently, closeted professionals must "rethink their silence and invisibility." Research shows that when a heterosexual learns a family member, friend, or colleague is lesbian or gay, homophobia often decreases (Tierney, 1992, 46). Yet the same hostile environment existing for the student also exists for LGBT professionals. Without federal, state, or local protection, LGBT professionals can be fired for their orientation without any grounds for recourse (D'Augelli, 1989b). Administrative divisions and academic departments must actively encourage and support the professional in coming out and ensure his or her ability to do so.

Harassment and other hate crimes directed at staff members, as well as students, must be immediately and intentionally addressed. Administrative response to anti-gay harassment directed at LGBT live-in, residential life professionals must be clear and decisive, communication that such behavior is not tolerated in either the residential or the greater campus community. Support for faculty members conducting research in LGBT-related topical areas is also important—honoring academic freedom and financial recognition—for special appointments and tenure decisions. Individuals are most efficient and effective when able to study and work in an organization where they feel appreciated and affirmed. If this support is absent, LGBT professionals will remain in the closet or go elsewhere, and wisely so.