

The Status of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People at UNL  
*An annual report created by the Committee for GLBT Concerns and submitted  
to Chancellor Harvey Perlman in July, 2006.*

Dear Chancellor Perlman,

The Committee for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns has created this report as a foundation for our annual meeting with you. We have reviewed the goals and objectives we set for ourselves and for the campus in April 2004, and have seen progress in some important areas. We have also identified issues that continue to create an unhealthy climate for GLBT people at UNL.

**Progress:**

In the positive column, the approval of the **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Sexuality Studies minor** within the College of Arts and Sciences has affirmed the academic value of the study of LGBTQ people, accomplishments and issues. It also allows LGBTQ students to find themselves and their lives reflected in the classroom more strongly than ever before at UNL. The number of faculty adding LGBTQ components to existing coursework and the new courses developed for the minor grows each semester.

An important academic milestone occurred in March 2006, when the topic for the **Nebraska Symposium on Motivation** was “Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identities”. Through the leadership of Dr. Debra Hope the most recent research and central theories about LGB identity were presented at this nationally respected academic symposium. From the Committee’s perspective, it is especially noteworthy that no protests were made to the Chancellor’s office or to the Symposium organizers about the selection of this topic. Your readiness to champion the scholarly value of this event and the academic rights of the faculty involved are appreciated, even though no opportunity arose to respond to protests.

The reception and ceremony this spring for the **Chancellor’s Awards for Outstanding contributions to the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community** had higher attendance, especially by students, than in several years. The Committee believes that your public recognition of the work done by the recipients of these awards contributes immeasurably to the improving campus climate for GLBT people.

As several key **administrative positions** have opened up, we have been pleased to be invited to participate in those searches, either as search committee members or as invited guests for presentations and discussions with the candidates. We are pleased that you and other members of the administration understand the impact that these positions have on the status of GLBT people at UNL, and that **our voices are welcomed, heard and valued during the search process**. Our relationship with Dr. Griesen grew into one of respect and support over the years, and he has openly discussed his development as an ally for GLBT people. His honesty about that development provided an important role model for many students, faculty and staff. We hope to establish an equally positive relationship with Dr. Franco, and request your assistance in creating an opportunity to meet with him as soon as possible to begin that connection.

When the Committee began 15 years ago our Speakers Symposium was the key source of GLBT programming on campus. We are happy to report that **GLBT programs and events** are being presented in increasing numbers by departments and organizations outside of the active Committee members. In addition, since the decision three years ago to expand “National Coming Out Week” to the celebration of October as “UNL GLBT History Month”, the number of events and the number of collaborators in those programs has increased significantly. Our partners in these events no longer include “just the usual suspects”, but have included new allies every year.

We must also emphasize the value of having a **Student Involvement Assistant Director for GLBTA Programs and Services** on our campus. D. Moritz’s **Safe Space training sessions** with the Residence Life staff, with campus administrators and other key groups has expanded the circle of people on campus who understand and support the rights of GLBT students to be safe, respected and treated with dignity at UNL. A powerful example of true institutional change that has occurred because of D. Moritz’s leadership is the table at the 2005 Omaha Pride Celebration that was co-sponsored by Admissions and the Student Involvement GLBTA Programs and Services office. This June UNL will be represented at both the Omaha and Lincoln Pride celebrations, and the Queer Student Alliance will be an additional co-sponsor. The presence of these students at the table will provide clear evidence to potential students that UNL welcomes GLBT people.

One of the most positive things happening in the past year has been the work of the **Queer Student Alliance**. The restructuring of the governance model as the group changed from Spectrum to QSA has had a major impact on membership recruitment and retention for this student organization. In recent years the number of people attending meetings averaged 6, and this year has risen to an average of 20 with an active Blackboard membership of 52 people. The support they feel from the administration, staff and faculty members has encouraged them to set and reach high goals for themselves, such as creating and hosting the Nebraska GLBTA Student Conference. This half day program has created connections with other Nebraska schools, and given our students valuable experience and confidence in their leadership and outreach skills. They hope to connect with Admissions and other departments to enhance this event as it continues to grow.

The Committee members are proud of these accomplishments and pleased with the climate changes they reflect. As we look forward to the next year and beyond, the following items are the challenges we think are most critical in making UNL a place where GLBT people can survive and thrive.

**Challenges:**

The lack of **domestic partner benefits** continues to be a serious problem for the current GLBT faculty and staff and for the recruitment of outstanding GLBT and Ally faculty and staff now and in the future. The Committee recognizes that the political climate in Nebraska makes change difficult, but in light of the leadership changes in Varner Hall since our last meeting we would like to hear your views on the most effective strategy to pursue.

In the past 5 years the Committee members have seen an increase in the visibility of **transgender students, faculty and staff** at the University. This has brought into sharper focus the need for more inclusive language on the forms we use for admissions, housing and across the institution. There are also privacy and safety issues that transgender students living in University Housing have voiced for which there is no consistent written policy. The absence of “Gender Identity and Gender Expression” within the University’s non-discrimination policy contributes to the invisibility of this population within our institutional planning and policy making. We believe it is time to bring together a task force that includes key department representatives and transgender students, staff and faculty to identify short term actions and long term goals to make UNL safer and more inclusive for transgender people.

One of the goals we have set for ourselves as a Committee is to assist with the **continuing development of the GLBTQ/Sexuality Studies minor**. We will be working with the faculty of the Women’s and Gender Studies program to publicize the availability of the minor, and to create programs and events that will present the faculty and topics of the GLBTQ/SS minor to the larger UNL community.

As UNL faculty and staff begin our next round of the Gallup survey, the Committee is very interested in receiving a report from the last survey that focuses on the responses of people who identified themselves as GLBT. We are also aware of the interviews that were done and would like to see a report on that qualitative data. Will the interviews be done again with this year’s survey? **We need to know how GLBT faculty and staff perceive the climate at UNL.**

We also need current information about the **campus climate for GLBT students**. Given the changes that have taken place on campus since Dr. Robert Brown and his students completed the "Campus Climate and Needs Assessment Study for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln: Moving Beyond Tolerance Toward Empowerment" in 2002, we believe the climate study needs to be updated. Dr. Brown, a nationally known expert on campus climates and college student life, received modest funding from the Committee and from the Emeriti Association to cover expenses for copying, printing, and data analysis. He and the graduate students who assisted him volunteered their time. Most, if not all, such campus climate studies at other universities have been conducted and funded out of their respective campus offices. We believe that UNL should use its resources and take on the responsibility for conducting a follow-up campus climate study at UNL.

For the past two years students from Spectrum/QSA were actively involved in the work to gain student support for a new Culture Center, and are generally pleased that the Union Expansion question passed in the ASUN election with such strong support. During that experience they built some important alliances with students from other marginalized populations. They became more aware of the double marginalization of students of color and from ethnic minority groups who are also GLBT. That awareness has been reflected in their work this spring and in their plans for next year.

However, the experience of working with the Jones Scholars, MASA, APU and other American racial minority student groups educated the **GLBT students** about **resources and support** to which members of those student organizations have access that the GLBT students do not. We realize that many of those resources are federally mandated and funded, but we would like to explore with you what kinds of support could be developed and provided for our students. Some of the most heart breaking work we do involves students who have come out to their parents and then lost the financial support which has allowed them to attend college. It would be very helpful if the Office for Financial Aid gathered and maintained current information about emergency scholarships or loans available to GLBT students, and made this information easily available on the Financial Aid website. Establishing a policy of a 60 day grace period for late tuition or housing payments that result from these situations would also help us retain these students. These are some examples of the student needs on an individual level that we would like to have addressed.

On an organizational level, in the past, American racial minority student organizations have received some financial support at UNL for their work that QSA has not. As one of the most visible points of contact for GLBT students on campus, are there **additional sources of financial support QSA could receive?**

### **Recommendations**

When the “Campus Climate and Needs Assessment...” was released in 2002, it served as a catalyst for some important changes. For a while it was clear that many offices and departments were seeking ways to make UNL a welcoming, inclusive and supportive place for GLBT students. In 2006 we need your support to reactivate and expand those discussions, with some special emphases:

- 1) Identify and address the barriers experienced by transgender students, faculty and staff.
- 2) Explore emergency resources for GLBT students.
- 3) Identify institutional sources of support for QSA as an organization representing a marginalized population.
- 4) Conduct a follow-up campus climate study of GLBT students at UNL.
- 5) From the information gathered in the Gallup survey and in the follow up interviews, determine the GLBT staff and faculty perceptions of the UNL climate.
- 6) Identify new strategies to establish domestic partner benefits.

It was gratifying to review our goals from spring 2004 and see how much progress we have made. These accomplishments would not have occurred without the work of many people both on and off of the Committee for GLBT Concerns. The support from you and your administration has been essential, because the seeds we've been planting cannot flourish in an environment that is not receptive to them. We look forward to discussing this report with you and to our continued partnership in creating a UNL that welcomes all people regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.