

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 on September 10, 2007.*

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 at our meeting with you and Dr. Franco last July, and have seen progress in some important areas. We have also identified opportunities for continued growth in the development of a healthy climate for GLBT people at UNL.

Progress:

One of the most important events for the GLBT community at UNL this year was receiving funds from the Bastian Foundation that allowed us to lay the groundwork for the **LGBTQ Resource Center**. Dr. Franco's leadership in identifying the grant source and support during the grant writing process was essential to the success of this project. Charlie Francis, the Nebraska Unions director, was very helpful in working with the Union Board to fulfill our request for a space on the third floor of the Nebraska Union, next door to the Women's Center. As of August 1 we begin moving into the new space, and the newly established LGBTQ Resource Center Advisory Committee is discussing policies, marketing plans and resource development plans. An Open House is planned in conjunction with the Women's Center fall Open House for Thursday, September 6, from 3 to 5 pm.

The **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Sexuality Studies minor** within the College of Arts and Sciences continues to affirm the academic value of the study of LGBTQ people, accomplishments and issues. The new course developed for the minor, WMNS 201 Intro to GLBT Studies, as well as several of the core courses for the minor, has been oversubscribed every semester. Students in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, the College of Education and Human Sciences, as well as the College of Fine and Performing Arts, have had a strong presence in the courses, even though the minor is based in Arts & Sciences and can only be officially declared by students in that college. The fall of 2006 was the first semester that students could declare the minor, but we have already graduated several students in the December 2006 and May 2007 graduations. Currently we have at least a dozen minors, although the number is surely larger. Nearly all of our students have at least double majors and more than one minor, and Advising does not always track multiple minors until graduation. We expect the program to grow as it becomes more well-known. In addition, the number of faculty adding LGBTQ components to existing courses as well as developing new courses for the minor continues to grow.

The Committee sponsored and co-sponsored several successful **GLBT programs and events** during this academic year. In October Dr. Sue Rankin gave a presentation about her latest research which focuses on transgender people, and met with the Athletic Department Academic Support staff to discuss how to improve the environment for

GLBT student athletes. The fourth annual GLBT History month dinner at the end of October showed an increase in attendance and featured Reverend Don Hanway, author of “A Theology of Gay and Lesbian Inclusion: Love Letters to the Church”, as keynote speaker. In March, Women’s History Month events included Dr. Meredith Bacon’s presentation about her experiences transitioning from male to female as a faculty member at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, performances by poet Elana Dykewomon and national slam poetry champion Buddy Wakefield, and a lunchtime discussion with authors Dr. Hilda Raz and her son Aaron Raz Link.

The Committee organized a small group of transgender people and allies to meet with Dr. Franco and the Council of Student Affairs Directors in October and identified some key concerns that affect their safety and well-being as students, staff and faculty at UNL. One essential need identified was **gender neutral bathrooms**. With the support of Charlie Francis, Director of the Nebraska Unions, the Nebraska Union Board voted to make a first floor bathroom in the City Campus Union gender neutral and to change the signage to make clear it was a safe resource for transgender people. In addition, Debbie Krahmer, the faculty co-chair of the Committee, and Pat Tetreault, the Student Involvement Assistant Director for GLBTA Programs and Services, initiated a series of campus tours to evaluate the accessibility of bathrooms identified by UNL Facilities Management as gender neutral or uni-sex. The resulting **list of gender neutral bathrooms has been posted** on the LGBTQA programs and services webpage on the Student Involvement website, and a map has been created that can be distributed via the web and through campus resources such as the LGBTQ Resource Center, the Women’s Center and Student Involvement.

The position of **Student Involvement Assistant Director for GLBTA Programs and Services** is an important asset on our campus. The work done by the Director of Student Involvement, Linda Major, to **expand the position to full time as of July 1** sends a clear message to GLBT students that their personal and academic development is important to UNL. Dr. Pat Tetreault served as the interim assistant director this year and very effectively coordinated the use of the \$5000 Bastian Foundation funds UNL received to lay the groundwork for the LGBTQ Resource Center. We are pleased that she has accepted the permanent position and will be able to continue the work she has already initiated.

The reception and ceremony this spring for the **Chancellor’s Awards for Outstanding contributions to the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community** was well attended. 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.

This summer **UNL Admissions, LGBTQA Programs & Services, and the Queer Student Alliance have co-hosted a booth at the Omaha and Lincoln Pride celebrations**. The presence of UNL admissions and these students at these events continues to provide clear evidence to potential students that UNL welcomes GLBT people.

Queer Student Alliance continues to thrive, planning and implementing successful events like the Drag Ball, Day of Silence and Transgender Day of Remembrance. With financial support from the Bastian grant, CSAD funds and other resources, a group of 20 students represented UNL at the Midwest Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Ally College Conference in Minneapolis in February, 2007. A QSA graduate student and CGLBTC student member, Ignatius Nip, and two ASUN representatives/CGLBTC student members Greg Gifford and Allen Ratliff attended the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force “Creating Change” conference in October, 2006, with support from the same sources.

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 University discriminates against employees who are in same-sex committed relationships, and that is a violation of our non-discrimination policy. A statement in the advancement section of the final report of the 2006 site visit to UNL by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools underscores the role of domestic partner benefits in reaching UNL’s diversity goals. “The ability of UNL to recruit and retain minority faculty members can be expanded by greater attention to building more supportive environments and communities. These efforts can assist in recruiting and retaining more diverse student populations.” The Committee knows that Nebraska’s political climate is the major obstacle to change on this policy, but we need you to continue to advocate for us with the Regents and other policy makers.

One of the best outcomes of our meeting with the Council of Student Affairs Directors was the quick response to the issue of gender neutral bathrooms. The directors’ support of the work by the Committee to catalog the available bathrooms, and Charlie Francis’s willingness to collaborate with students to create change in the Union was a powerful message to the transgender people and allies involved. However, the other concerns expressed at this meeting have not been addressed. The Committee wants to revisit the **need for more inclusive language** on the forms we use for admissions, housing and across the institution. We want to review the **privacy and safety issues that transgender students living in University Housing** have voiced for which there is no consistent written policy. University housing is so overcrowded that this fall resident assistants in almost every hall will have a roommate. This will hinder the opportunity for students with special needs like GLBT students to speak with their RA. Additionally, the established roommate selection process places GLBT students into sometimes difficult and potentially dangerous situations. We are eager to work with the Housing administrators and staff to focus on the **special circumstances and needs of GLBT**

students living in the residence halls. We also reaffirm our conviction that **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.

As was noted in the minutes from our meeting last summer with you and Dr. Franco, it was agreed that an **assessment of student needs** would be useful so that we can determine progress at UNL since the 2002 study and identify specific actions that will enhance the safety of GLBT students on campus and improve their learning and development in the future. After reviewing the assessment methods used by other institutions we believe that the most effective process is to hire an external consultant who has an outstanding reputation for developing assessments that are credible and provide useful information for administrative planning. The person we feel is most qualified to help UNL with this process is Dr. Sue Rankin. We would like to share more information about why and about the process she uses when we meet with you to discuss this report.

We continue to be concerned that we do not have a **similar measure of the needs of GLBTQ faculty and staff.** The rich detail in the 2002 "Campus Climate and Needs Assessment Study for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln: Moving Beyond Tolerance Toward Empowerment" helped Student Affairs staff to identify and implement important changes in staff training, policies and procedures. GLBT students have repeatedly and movingly told us that because the study, conducted by Dr. Brown, focused on their experiences, concerns, and needs, it validated their worth as it demonstrated the institution's concern for their academic and personal welfare. The study informed each student that he or she was not alone, as their personal concerns were mirrored in the responses of other GLBT students. This same outcome could be expected from a study of GLBT faculty and staff concerns and could be expected to boost their morale, as well as have an impact on recruitment of GLBT faculty and staff. We learned from our research about assessments of student needs that Dr. Rankin’s process can include staff and faculty needs at the institution’s request. We want to discuss that option with you at our meeting.

We continue to seek **assistance for the GLBTQ students who have lost their parents’ financial support because of their sexual orientation.** As we requested last year, could the Office for Financial Aid gather and maintain current information about emergency scholarships or loans available to GLBT students, and make this information easily available on the Financial Aid website?

Recommendations

Of the recommendations listed below that were made in July, 2006, significant progress has been made in two areas. Finding a grant to develop an LGBTQ Resource Center has taken some of the financial burden and institutional responsibility off of the shoulders of the Queer Student Alliance (item #3), and the development and publicizing of gender neutral bathrooms has been a first step in recognizing the needs of transgender students, staff and faculty (item #1).

2006 Recommendations

- 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.

With that in mind, here is our **updated list of recommendations for 2007**.

- 1) Based on the barriers identified at last year's meeting with CSAD, invite members of the transgender subcommittee to meet with individual directors and Dr. Franco to recommend action plans for their departments.
- 2) Ask the director of Financial Aid to gather and maintain current information about emergency scholarships or loans available to GLBT students, and to make this information easily available on the Financial Aid website.
- 3) Provide administrative support to the LGBTQ Resource Center Advisory Committee as they identify needs and seek additional funding sources.
- 4) In collaboration with the CGLBTC, conduct a follow-up needs assessment of GLBT students at UNL.
- 5) Identify and implement an effective needs assessment for GLBT faculty and staff.
- 6) Continue to insist on the equal treatment of GLBT faculty and staff through the establishment of domestic partner benefits.

It is encouraging to review last year's accomplishments and to reflect on the progress being made towards our shared goals. We look forward to discussing this report with you and to our continued partnership in creating a UNL that welcomes people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.

Submitted on behalf of the Committee for GLBT Concerns by Staff Co-Chair Jan Deeds, Faculty Co-Chair Debbie Krahmer, and Student Co-Chair Allen Ratliff.