

Campus Climate and Needs Assessment Study for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln:

Moving Beyond Tolerance Toward Empowerment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

&

RECOMMENDATIONS

November 2002

Dr. Robert D. Brown, Project Director

Carl A. Happold, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Brandy Clarke, Graduate Student, Educational Psychology, UNL

Valerie Gortmaker, Graduate Student, Educational Psychology, UNL

Rachael Robinson-Keilig, Graduate Student, Educational Psychology, UNL

This comprehensive study of the UNL campus climate for GLBT students is an organic document. It should stimulate a constructive dialogue about how to best improve the campus climate for GLBT students and enrich the understanding and appreciation of diversity among all members of the UNL campus community. The goal is a campus that not only tolerates diversity but also celebrates it. As the dialogue progresses, it is hoped that it will provide additional insights into the meaning of the study's findings and lead to actions designed to improve the campus climate for GLBT students.

Contents

Project Director Profile	2
Student Voices	3
Executive Summary	4
Recommendations	8
"A Day in the Life of a GLBT Student at UNL"	13

*(See "Campus Climate and Needs Assessment Study for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Students at the University of Nebraska: Moving Beyond Tolerance Toward Empowerment. Report" for the full report with tables and references.)

Dr. Robert D. Brown is the Carl A. Happold Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology and Senior Associate with Aspen Professional Development Associates.

Dr. Brown was one of the first researchers to study living-learning residence halls and has written extensively about learning communities. Since coming to UNL in 1968, he served as consultant-evaluator for the experimental college program, Centennial Educational Program; studied co-ed residence education at UNL, examined drug usage among UNL students, studied stress among UNL faculty and staff, researched instructional practices and use of examinations among UNL faculty, and developed instruments and studied the ethical climate at UNL. His publications from these studies and others resulted in Dr. Brown receiving research honors from the American Psychological Association, the American Evaluation Association, the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, as well as the Burlington-Northern Teacher-Scholar Award from UNL.

Acknowledgements

The GLBT UNL Campus Climate Study Team would like to thank all the participants who completed surveys and volunteered to be interviewed. The Committee on GLBT Concerns provided counsel as well as financial support, and members of the GLBT student organization, Spectrum, provided useful feedback on possible survey questions. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Emeriti Association also provided funding support through the Maude Wisherd Fund.

Several national campus climate experts provided consultation on methodology. These included Dr. Nancy Evans from Iowa State University, Dr. Gary Malaney from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Dr. Susan Rankin from Pennsylvania State University, and Dr. William Sedlacek from the University of Maryland.

The Office of Student Affairs and the Housing Office were helpful in getting needed rosters and preparing mailing labels. Secretarial staff in Teachers College provided logistical support with mailings. Mike Toland of the Nebraska Evaluation and Research Center in Teachers College provided invaluable guidance and assistance in analyzing data. We also thank Karen Head for her editorial assistance and her staff including Mike Schueth, Darcie Rives, and Josh Dolezal.

Student Voices*

GLBT Students

Female Undergraduate Student: “Being a GLBT student on campus means being very anxious all of the time about how open I can be—of where I am. I’m constantly reading between the lines and looking for people who might be supportive. I live with a general feeling of anxiousness. In class, for example, --not knowing if the professor will be cool if you say something GLBT related, or will a roommate or another student.”

Male Graduate Student: “The climate for GLBT students is really bad compared to where I came from. Here it is largely a closeted community, just socially never mentioned. There are no positive messages from the media; it is a “climate of fear.” I have to closet myself more than I am comfortable with.”

Male Undergraduate Student: “The atmosphere at UNL is a generally cold and sterile acceptance of the gay community. People on campus have adopted a sort of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy toward GLBT people. The environment fosters staying in the closet...”

General Students

Male, senior: “GLBT is a disgrace to humans over the world. GLBT is a very bad sexual deviance and should be discouraged rather than encouraged with pink triangles and acceptance groups.”

Male, sophomore: “I believe we live in a truly tragic state where unfortunately everyone is not considered equal. I hope this survey and the work GLBT and other advocates of gay rights can someday get Nebraska on the right path to understanding and acceptance.”

Female undergraduate: “Up until this year I’ve never really had any contact with a homosexual. All I knew was what I saw from TV and movies. After becoming friends with someone gay I’ve found a new respect for them and realize that they have wants and desires just like heterosexuals, even though I have been taught that it’s wrong biblically.”

* These quotes and others throughout the report are taken from interviews and statements made on the surveys.

Executive Summary*

The 2001-2002 UNL GLBT Campus Climate study gathered multiple-perspectives about the campus from faculty, students, and staff through surveys, as well as conducted interviews with GLBT students, the prime focus of the study. The study collected information about the participants' knowledge, interest, attitudes, and behaviors regarding GLBT topics and student life.

Samples were drawn from the faculty, staff, and general students so that they would be representative of the campus community in key demographic characteristics. Return rates were over 80% from all groups and statistical analyses indicate that the over 500 respondents were accurate proportional representations of their respective groups by college for faculty, and for academic class and college for students.

Eighty GLBT students completed surveys made available through announcements and placement of the surveys at various campus and community locations. GLBT student volunteers were solicited for the interviews.

The high return rates and the analyses support a high degree of confidence that the results are representative of the faculty, staff, and the general student body, particularly students residing in the residence halls. Like similar studies, the GLBT respondents are likely to be more representative of students who are "out" than those who are not.

The GLBT climate study focused on answering six general questions. Here are the questions and resulting conclusions:

1. What is the extent of anti-GLBT attitudes on campus?

Anti-GLBT attitudes exist at UNL at least to "some extent" in the minds of most members of the UNL campus community and to a "great extent" in the minds of many.

All 80 GLBT survey respondents reported that anti-GLBT attitudes exist on campus to at least some extent with nearly half indicating they existed to a "great" or "very great" extent. Three-fourths of the faculty, general students, and student affairs members agreed with the GLBT students that anti-GLBT attitudes exist to at least some extent and approximately a fourth of each group felt the anti-GLBT attitudes are present on campus to a "great" extent or more.

2. What is life like for GLBT students at UNL?

An underlying tone of anxiousness pervades many of the GLBT students' lives. The anxiety level varies among individual students depending on their past experiences in high school or at other institutions and their comfort level with being "out."

*(See "Campus Climate and Needs Assessment Study for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Students at the University of Nebraska: Moving Beyond Tolerance Toward Empowerment. Report" for the full report with tables and references.)

Nearly a third of the GLBT students reported having had verbal insults directed at them in the past academic year. No one reported being physically assaulted, but 3% percent had been threatened with physical violence and 9% had personal property damaged or destroyed.

Unfair treatment to GLBT students is most likely to come from other students, though GLBT students perceive an “institutional unfairness” (e.g., lack of space in the Culture Center, and even though on the surface a faculty rather than a student concern, students thought the lack of support for Domestic Partner Benefits mirrored the institution’s attitude toward them). Many GLBT students feel they must “protect” themselves from unfair treatment by hiding their identity from other students, faculty, administrators, and staff.

Most GLBT students believe the frequency of abuse, unfair treatment, and the need to hide their identity has not changed from past years.

GLBT students often hear derogatory remarks about GLBT persons from other students and though it is substantially less likely, it is not uncommon to hear similar comments from course instructors and other University staff. Other members of the UNL campus community were less likely to hear such remarks than were GLBT students, but nevertheless they did hear them from faculty and staff, and again mostly from students.

Life in the residence halls can be a problem for GLBT students. Most have either experienced harassment themselves or heard about harassment of another GLBT student. Despite support from a housing staff person or a residence hall assistant here or there, most are eager to move out of the residence halls. Life in the classroom is mostly characterized by “silence” rather than outright hostility. GLBT students often feel like they are “invisible” in the classroom.

Life for a GLBT student at UNL is clearly more complex and fraught with more potential difficulties than it is for the typical UNL student.

GLBT students give testimony to the importance of small things. All attest to a general pervasive institutional silence about GLBT issues. The GLBT students interviewed are strikingly strong individuals. For the most part, they focus on positive rather than negative experiences. They can recall when a faculty or staff person made the right supportive remark at the right time,” but they affirm that overall the anxiety is very “real.”

3. Does the UNL Campus Climate empower GLBT students and enhance UNL’s commitment to diversity?

The UNL campus climate is not an empowering climate for GLBT students nor is UNL’s commitment to diversity with regard to GLBT students sufficiently visible.

GLBT students characterize the campus, faculty, and administration as mostly silent on GLBT issues. They read and hear many negative voices in the campus and local newspapers and through other media, but they don’t hear responses from the UNL administration. Also, they and other students don’t often hear students, faculty or staff members challenged or confronted when they make derogatory remarks about GLBT persons in the presence of instructors or staff members.

The curriculum is also silent. A few classes that discuss GLBT issues are available, but students rely mostly on word of mouth to find them. Having a faculty or staff member for a mentor is invaluable to GLBT students, but role models or mentors are not always visible. Infusion of GLBT topics into the academic curriculum is nearly non-existent except for a few scattered courses and is certainly not systematic.

It is dispiriting for GLBT students to know that they have to do most of the work to develop programs of interest to them and to know they must raise their own money to pay for routine organizational expenses. A few volunteer faculty and staff provide assistance but attrition of just a couple of the volunteers could significantly deplete this informal support system available to GLBT students.

Campus Resources (persons/agencies) to gain information about GLBT topics are generally underutilized. Most respondents are not aware of their existence or if they are aware, they have never used them. Of all respondents, Student Affairs staff members are most likely to use the resources.

General Students report knowing, on the average, just over two GLBT persons, RAs about three. General Students are likely to know one GLBT person well, RAs about two. The General Students who know more GLBT persons are generally more positive toward GLBT issues and interested in learning more about GLBT topics and issues than are other students.

Assessment of the UNL community's attitudes toward GLBT issues which have been in the media in recent years (e.g., GLBT persons serving openly in the military or teaching in the public schools, same-sex marriage, and adoption) indicates that student support is moderate and that Faculty and Student Affairs staff members support is stronger than the students.

4. How receptive is the UNL campus community to improving the campus climate for GLBT students ?

A core group of members of the UNL campus community, faculty, students, and student affairs staff members are interested in expanding the options for GLBT students and others to learn more about GLBT topics.

GLBT students are eager to learn more about GLBT concerns, history and culture. They express a strong interest in taking academic courses that would provide them with more information and would like to see a blend of separate courses focusing on GLBT topics and the infusion of GLBT topics into other courses where appropriate.

The level of interest in learning more about GLBT topics within the UNL campus community varies. Half the Faculty and General Students express some level of interest, whereas three-fourths of the Student Affairs staff express interest in learning more. Most Student Affairs staff members expressed interest in attending workshops that would help them incorporate GLBT topics into their programs; the percentage for Faculty members is significantly lower, but still suggests that a sizeable number would be interested. About a third of the residence hall students and about two-thirds of the Residence Hall Assistants indicated it was somewhat or very likely they would attend a program focused on GLBT topics if held in their residence unit.

5. Are there different perceptions of the campus climate depending on academic class, gender, and college?

Statistical analyses indicate differences in responses by academic class and gender within the General Student sample and within the GLBT students. Among the General Students surveyed, females, for example, were more positive about GLBT issues than were males and first-year students were often the least positive or interested. These results are complex, however, as there were numerous interactions among the findings. (E.g., male first-year students responded less positively than male seniors on one issue while at the same time female first-year students responded more positively than female seniors on the same issue.) These findings will be presented to campus staff and persons who will find them useful for developing programs designed to improve the campus climate for GLBT students.

This study was not designed to compare students or faculty members from college to college but rather across major disciplines. These results will also be made available to campus staff and persons responsible for program and curriculum development.

6. What programmatic changes will help UNL fulfill its commitment to diversity on campus?

The program areas garnering the highest need ratings by the GLBT students surveyed are academic (library, books, magazines, class discussions, and GLBT courses), administrative action (in the form of policy statements), and GLBT training for student leaders, faculty, and staff). These programmatic needs were also frequently mentioned during the focus group interviews with GLBT students.

A constant refrain heard from GLBT students is the need to hear administrators and faculty break their silence, to openly express their support for GLBT students, and that GLBT topics become a customary part of the curriculum, where appropriate.

In trying to understand these findings, it is important to remember that the GLBT students who responded to the survey and certainly those interviewed are likely to be more "out" than GLBT students who did not participate. The research literature suggests that their counterparts who are not "out" may well be more anxious and

need more supportive programming. The data on the suicide rates for college-age youth coping with issues of sexual orientation/identity must be considered as additional evidence of GLBT student needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this comprehensive Campus Climate Study and a thorough review of the theoretical and research literature on campus climates for GLBT students across the country prompt recommendations that, if implemented, will improve the campus climate for GLBT students.

These recommendations are suggestive; they represent a beginning, a starting place for dialogue leading to decisive action and implementation. They are intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive. The competence and creativity of UNL faculty, staff, students, and administrators can lead to strengthening the potential impact of the recommendations.

Publicly supporting GLBT issues and concerns (e.g., Domestic Partner Benefits) may be politically risky, given the political climate in Nebraska. The University, however, is not fulfilling its educational and moral responsibility unless it assumes a leadership role within the State on matters of social justice as they relate to GLBT students. UNL administrators, faculty, and staff need to respond to these recommendations with a spirit that seeks to help UNL fulfill its educational mission for all students.

The listed recommendations are interrelated but to facilitate their examination they are divided into the following categories: A. Recommendations for the UNL Administration, B. Recommendations for Faculty and Curriculum Development, C. Recommendations for Student Affairs, and D. Recommendations for Staffing.

A. Recommendations for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Administration.

1. Issue a policy statement that:

(a) Supports improving the UNL campus climate for GLBT students because a healthy climate for GLBT students serves to enhance the education and development of all UNL students through the promotion of diversity and recognition of the need for social justice for all.

(b) Encourages programs and policies that emphasize the importance of moving beyond creating a “tolerant” campus climate for GLBT students and toward fostering a campus climate that “empowers” GLBT students, maximizing their learning and development potential.

(c) Recognizes that the entire campus community, not just GLBT students and faculty members, must engage in actions that will improve the campus climate for GLBT students and that this necessitates the active, visible, and financial support of the UNL administration.

(d) Establishes the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as an institutional ally of GLBT students. Lucozzi’s (1998) specific suggestions on how institutions can become allies, coupled with this report’s recommendations, are excellent starting points for providing the GLBT community with a sense of belonging to the larger campus community.

2. Implement a three-year plan to improve the campus climate for GLBT students.

3. Issue public statements that are supportive of GLBT students on campus.

4. Develop strategies to recruit and retain GLBT faculty and staff (perhaps analogous to those used for women and ethnic minorities). This is essential. UNL is already losing GLBT faculty, and that, in combination with faculty retirements; could deplete GLBT faculty/staff available to serve on campus as leaders, role models, and mentors for GLBT students.

5. Study where and how policy statements need to be revised or strengthened to indicate clearly the importance of providing a safe learning environment for GLBT students and the educational value for all students of gaining an understanding of GLBT student issues and culture.
6. Utilize research findings based on community psychology and personal development theories to design programs and environmental interventions appropriate for a student body and a population base that has limited experience with GLBT persons and also probably has many misconceptions.
7. Conduct periodic campus climate studies on a regular basis.
8. Appoint a campus-wide task force charged with designing an implementation plan for improving the campus climate for GLBT students and enhancing appreciation of diversity among all members of the UNL campus community.

An effective management plan for improving the campus climate will include: (a) an overall model for change, (b) goals and time-lines, and (c) an evaluation plan.

(a) Model for Change. Several excellent change models can serve as the framework for designing a management plan for improving the campus climate for GLBT students. Tully (2000) provides a schema for changing environments for GLBT persons that she applies to social workers but which could also be applied to a college campus. She categorizes interventions into three categories: (1) Micro-level, which focuses on individual GLBT persons, (2) Mezzo-level, which focuses on providing services and on policies affecting groups, and (3) Macro-level, which focuses on institutional issues.

A three-dimensional cube model (Huebner, 1989) has been extremely useful for several decades for designing change strategies for college campus environments. One dimension is: 1. Focus of Concern: (a) Person or Persons (e.g., the individual student or specific groups of students), and (b) Environment (e.g., the physical environment such as the residence halls, organizational space in the Union or Culture Center; institutional policies). Another dimension is: 2. Focus of the Intervention: (a) Persons or Persons (e.g., counseling, crisis intervention, skill training for staff), (b) Environment (e.g., changing or establishing policies, changing the physical environment, providing social networks and support systems), and: 3. Specifying the Goals of the Intervention (e.g., changing attitudes or behaviors, increasing staff skills, adding courses).

(b) Goals and Time-Lines. Establishing goals is essential for the success of any intervention program and setting time-lines with benchmarks is useful for assessing progress. It is unrealistic to expect the campus climate for GLBT students to be dramatically improved overnight, but a reasonable time-line with appropriate benchmarks using focused intervention models (such as Huebner, 1989; Tully, 2000) can help ensure progress. Goals can be classified as Remedial (e.g., intervening in a crisis environment), Preventative (e.g., programming to prevent problems from occurring), or Developmental (moving individuals and the campus in a positive direction). All categories are important, but Developmental goals are critical if the UNL campus is to move beyond tolerance and toward empowerment for GLBT students

(c) Evaluation Plan. Innovative programming and interventions should be based on the research evidence of what has proven effective on other comparable campuses based on sound psychological and educational theory. Evaluations should be tied to the specific intervention programs and examine the effectiveness of the process as well as educational outcomes. For example: What works best for professors who infuse GLBT topics into their courses and how do students react? How can a Residence Hall Assistant best provide a hall environment that is supportive for a student who comes “out”? What staff training best provides Residence Hall Directors with the skills to improve the climate in their residence halls? What are the best strategies for targeting new students and when is the time to begin? Clearly, these questions cannot be answered, or even asked in one year. But if the UNL campus asks a few each year, much can be learned over time. (This may also necessitate the development of benchmark indicators such as incidence reports from the residence halls and/or campus police.)

B. Recommendations for Faculty and Curriculum Development.

1. Support efforts to infuse GLBT topics into current course content where appropriate.
2. Consider developing an interdisciplinary minor in GLBT Studies.
3. Encourage and provide incentives for departments to have a panel of GLBT students discuss their concerns.
4. Provide statements in syllabi that refer to how derogatory and “put down” remarks about GLBT persons will be treated in class.
5. Provide illustrations of how GLBT topics might be appropriate for a class paper or research topic. (This assumes that the nature of the class content is suitable for such a topic, which is true for most social science classes and many humanities classes).
6. Look into ways the University Library staff can assist GLBT students who want to explore personal and social issues related to GLBT concerns. (See Lutes & Montgomery, 1998.)

C. Recommendations for Student Affairs

When students feel they belong to a group or setting (and the people in that environment do things to help them feel they belong) they are going to be more satisfied, stay in that setting, and learn more as a result. Three core theories, supported by extensive empirical research, can serve as the framework for structuring services and programs for GLBT students that will enhance their learning and development and increase their likelihood of staying at UNL: (1) Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory, proposes that the more students are involved on campus the more personal development will occur and the more likely the students will remain in college, (2) Kuh’s (1991) research on faculty-student interactions supports the premise that the more students interact with faculty outside the classroom the more they will learn and again the more the retention rate will be improved, and (3) Banning’s and Huebner’s (Banning, 1989; Huebner, 1989) campus environment perspectives emphasize the efficiency and impact that changing the campus environment as a whole has on student life.

Student Affairs can be a forceful agent for improving the campus climate, if it will:

1. Conduct a thorough canvassing, every other year, of what practices for working with GLBT students and with the general student body have been implemented and found successful on other campuses.
2. Have each Student Affairs unit develop a mission statement related to GLBT students.
3. Have each Student Affairs unit establish objectives each year toward improving the campus climate for GLBT students and increasing the appreciation of cultural diversity by all UNL students.
4. Foster a welcoming spirit for GLBT students.
 - (a) Place information about GLBT services, programs, and organizations in student recruitment literature.
 - (b) Inform students of GLBT programs and services during on-site campus visits.
 - (c) Consider using GLBT students for presentations during New Student Orientation.
 - (d) Cooperate with Graduate Studies in providing appropriate orientations to graduate students.
5. Create Safe Spaces on Campus for GLBT Students.
 - (a) Provide a space for GLBT organizations within the new Campus Culture Center.

(Currently, one of the few places GLBT students can safely congregate socially is at the local bars, thereby heightening all the problems associated with alcohol consumption.)

(b) Promote annually the Safe Zone project (Pink Triangles) targeting the most receptive faculty and staff members.

(c) Explore the feasibility and potential effectiveness of a GLBT living unit.

(d) Intensify the training of Residence Hall Assistants, Residence Hall Directors, and Greek Housing staff so they are: (1) aware of the issues and concerns confronting GLBT students who may be in the process of coming out during the school year, (2) skilled in using environmental programming to enhance the safety of life in a campus residence setting for GLBT students, and (3) knowledgeable about referral sources for GLBT students.

(e) Provide incentives for GLBT students to serve on panels available for presentations/discussions in classes, residence units, and other campus settings. (Special attention must be given to guarding against tokenism and overworking a select few GLBT student volunteers.)

6. Provide staff development opportunities on GLBT issues for student service units such as Career Counseling and Placement, Financial Aid, and staff who work with the Greek system.

D. Recommendations for Staffing

The University needs to hire faculty, as well the staff in Student Affairs, and support staff needed to fulfill the listed objectives and complete the tasks mentioned in the body of these recommendations.

The goals and activities within Student Affairs alone suggest the need for a full-time Director to implement the suggested policies and programs. The position of Campus Resource Director for GLBT students is now recognized as a professional position within Student Affairs (Sanlo, 2000) and over 95 major public institutions have professional directors.

Developing a GLBT Studies program at UNL, as recommended, will require an appropriate academically trained director or coordinator, comparable to the Director of the Ethnic Studies program.

There is a need to have the appropriate blend of staffing that meets the needs of the student affairs staff component to develop programs, services, and staff training for GLBT students and the need for an academic component to develop curriculum, using separate courses and infusing topics into existing courses, and to respond to GLBT faculty and staff needs.

The details of the professional training, competencies, and responsibilities of these positions should be worked out in consultation with the Committee on GLBT Concerns and other appropriate academic and student affairs campus groups, and after a review of similar programs at other universities.

A Day in the Life of a GLBT Student at UNL

[UNL GLBT students are unique individuals with varying interests and personalities. Recognizing that caveat, many share common experiences on campus. This brief composite vignette attempts to capture some of their experiences.]

Joseph is a sophomore, living in the residence halls. He is “out” to a few friends on campus but is not out to faculty, to most other students, or to his family. Despite hiding his sexual orientation, Joseph knows several students in the dorm suspect he is gay; however he has never told anyone on his floor, even his roommate.

Joseph definitely plans to move off-campus next year. Life in the dorm has been a bummer, especially since he began coming out. A month or so ago he had too many beers with a few fellows down the hall and though he wasn’t drunk, he got careless and probably said a few things he shouldn’t have. Since then there have been a few incidents on the floor. One morning he found the words, “I hate faggots” on the message board on his door. He hopes he erased it before his roommate saw it. He may be imagining things but he believes he’s noticed more graffiti in the john recently. He wonders if he said even more than he remembers that night he went drinking.

He’s been pretty tight-lipped as far as faculty members go. He just doesn’t know how his instructors would react to him if they knew he was gay. He doesn’t want to jeopardize his grades. He doesn’t really have any complaints about the faculty, but he just doesn’t know. Nothing is ever really said about homosexuality in any of his classes. He remembers that in one of his classes last semester the professor was talking about several prominent people from the past, mentioning their sexual histories, marriages and mistresses, but never mentioned the fact that one of them was an “out” gay man. The same thing happened in a class last year.

Once Joseph thought about writing a paper in one of his classes on how being gay might have affected one of the persons the class was studying and, in turn, how this might have affected history. He got up enough courage to ask the professor if the person was gay, but after the prof said, “Yes,” and didn’t add any other comments, Joseph decided not to ask about writing a paper on the man. Joseph realizes that homosexuality is not a relevant topic for all of his classes, but the silence about GLBT issues makes Joseph feel invisible. An important dimension of his life seems to be a “non-mentionable” topic in classes where it could easily be relevant.

In fact, Joseph believes “silence” about GLBT issues would be a good way to characterize the UNL campus. The DN prints hate letters and the campus plaza preachers spew hate messages, but aside from the few supportive DN editorials he doesn’t hear much that is positive.

Joseph’s heard from some of his friends that the English Department has several courses and professors who are receptive to discussing homosexuality and he is thinking of taking a course even though it probably won’t fit into any of his graduation requirements. He has to check that out. He hasn’t heard about any other relevant courses in any other department.

Joseph hasn’t been physically attacked or threatened himself, outside of the writing on his message board, but he has heard stories from a couple of his gay friends. One on another floor kept getting his room door duct-taped and another had his room trashed when he was out. Joseph will feel safer when he gets moves out of the dorm.

The other day, one of the students he had been drinking with, asked him how it felt to be gay. At first Joseph thought about making a smart-ass remark, but when he remembered that the student said he was from a small town and didn’t know any GLBT people before he came to UNL, Joseph felt his question was sincere. He told the student, “Sometimes it feels like I am a spy in a foreign country. I can speak the language and I know how to dress and behave, but I have to be almost constantly on my guard about what I say and do in case I slip. I don’t know how the person I am with will react to me if they find out I’m gay. I want them to know me as a person first before I take the risk of letting them know I am gay. The student said, “Gee, that must be tough.” Joseph saw this as an opening to say more, but he held back.

Joseph thinks his parents have strong suspicions that he is gay but they have never brought the topic up. He worries a lot about what their reaction will be. He is trying to set a deadline as to when he will come out to his

parents, maybe at the end of this semester. It would be nice to talk to someone about this, but he doesn't know who this might be. He definitely would not talk to his RA, but the RD might be OK. He's heard about a GLBT organization that has an office in the Union; maybe he should check that out. Perhaps someone in that organization can tell him if the Counseling and Psychological Services is "safe" for gay students. He promises himself, he will do that before this semester ends.

Joseph has a lot on his mind. He is trying to figure out who he is; if, when, and how he should come out to different persons, whether or not he wants to get politically active in GLBT campus issues, and oh yes, he also has to study for the 17 credit hours of course work he is taking this semester.