

## APPENDIX C

### **Proposal for Creating a LGBT Liaison and Outreach Coordinator Position**

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#### Background

In 2004, Stony Brook completed a Campus Climate Survey of the University's paid employees, which included faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate students. Results of Stony Brook's study show that 39.9% of self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) respondents have experienced harassment on campus. Nearly half of these respondents (49.5%) were not out among their co-workers, and 8.3% of total respondents felt that coming out to their co-workers would constitute committing "career suicide." Survey respondents were least likely to agree with the statement that Stony Brook is a good place to work if you are LGBT, and LGBT respondents were more likely than heterosexual respondents to disagree with the statement that they feel a strong sense of belonging to the University.

Although Stony Brook's study did not examine the experiences of undergraduate students, in a recent study of 14 educational institutions across the country representing both public and private universities and colleges, 36% of self-identified undergraduate LGBT students reported having experienced harassment on campus (Rankin, 2003). 51% of students reported concealing their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid harassment or intimidation, with 20% fearing for their physical safety as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, within the institutions surveyed, 73% of faculty and staff members, 74% of students, and 81% of administrators felt that their campuses were homophobic (Rankin, 2005). 41% of self-identified LGBT respondents felt that their institutions did not thoroughly address these issues. These findings demonstrate not only a need for greater support for LGBT students on college and university campuses, but also the prevalence of hostile and unwelcoming environments in which LGBT students, faculty, and staff feel the need to guard their true identities.

This has far-reaching implications that go beyond student development and learning and involve enrollment, retention, and attrition and the broader mission of the University to provide comprehensive undergraduate, graduate, and professional education of the highest quality while celebrating diversity and participating in a global community. In light of Stony Brook's Campus Climate results, Rankin's (2005) study, and an institutional history where very few resources have been directed towards meeting the needs of the LGBT community on campus, there is need to take action and implement efforts that will help to create a more inclusive and welcoming campus for LGBT students, prospective students, faculty, and staff. We are proposing the creation of a new professional position in the Wo/Men's and Gender Resource Center for an LGBT Liaison and Outreach Coordinator whose primary responsibility would be to develop and implement, in collaboration with other University departments and divisions, programming and services to meet the needs of the LGBT community on our campus.

#### Rationale

#### **Campus Climate**

The presence of institutional support of the LGBT community on campus is central in creating a climate where LGBT members can feel safer and more able to engage in the campus community. Institutions of higher education historically have directed resources toward the support of the LGBT community for one of three reasons:

1. Administration's response to incidents of homophobic harassment on campus.
2. Administration's response to requests by faculty/staff/students for outreach/education geared towards LGBT issues and/or a safe space
3. Administration's recognition that an LGBT Center was "an important step toward fostering diversity and providing a welcoming campus climate" (Rankin, Sanlo, & Schoenberg, 2002).

The work of reaching out to the LGBT community on campus cannot be done on a volunteer basis by people who otherwise have a separate set of job responsibilities. The type of outreach needed and demonstration of institutional support requires a more formal effort through the creation of a professional staff position whose primary responsibilities would involve outreach and program development and coordination for LGBT students, faculty, and staff.

The importance of campus climate is not one based solely on the mission to celebrate diversity, but also on an understanding that diversity makes the University stronger and more competitive. Campus climate relates closely to recruitment, retention and attrition, and in this time of growth, Stony Brook has an opportunity to improve and make use of its climate as a competitive tool in recruiting and retaining talented students, faculty, and staff.

### **Enrollment, Retention and Attrition**

Students who enroll at Stony Brook and other higher education institutions come from high school settings where harassment based on sexual orientation or gender expression/gender identity is prevalent. In the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) 2005 National Report on School Climate within high schools, 1,732 LGBT students between 13 and 20 were surveyed. 89.2% reported hearing remarks such as "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" in a context where it is meant to indicate someone is stupid (GLSEN, 2005, p. 4). 64.3% reported feeling unsafe at school due to sexual orientation while 40.7% reported feeling unsafe due to gender expression. 64.1% reported verbal harassment; 41.2% reported experiencing "cyberbullying"; 37.8% experienced physical harassment; 17.6% had been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation; and 11.8% had been physically assaulted because of their gender expression. Furthermore, family support of these students cannot be assumed. 43.6% reported that their guardian took no action after being informed of the harassment, and 55.1% never reported an incident of harassment to their parents/guardians (GLSEN, 2005, p. 6).

GLSEN (2005) found that the "severity of harassment directly correlates with lower academic achievement," (p. 7) as is evidenced in the difference in average GPA of students who were frequently physically harassed based on sexual orientation and the GPA of other students (2.6 versus 3.1). Furthermore, the pressures of growing up as a sexual minority in a sociocultural context where GLBT communities are marginalized have an effect on personal wellbeing. A study done in Massachusetts of 4,159 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders showed that 35.3% LGB youth reported a suicide attempt compared to 9.9% of their heterosexual peers (Garafalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998). However, despite these sobering numbers, the research is promising and indicates that the provision of support at the institutional level can have positive effects for these students. GLSEN (2005) found that the presence of supportive student personnel and student ally

clubs contributed to students' sense of safety, belonging, and higher incidence of planning to attend college (p. 9).

There have been efforts to increase formal support for LGBT students in high schools, and with a rise in the number of Gay-Straight Alliances in high schools across the country<sup>1</sup>, prospective college students will be more inclined to consider campus climate when making decisions about where to go to college. Some institutions have picked up on this trend. For example, Duke University's Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Life devotes a webpage to prospective students which provides LGBT Liaison contact information, a list of student groups, scholarships, and safe zone programs, and an information piece entitled, "How to Choose an LGBT-Friendly College or University" (<http://lgbt.studentaffairs.duke.edu/audiencenav/prospective.html>). Research also reflects the importance of campus climate for LGBT students. In a study of 189 colleges and universities and 1,400 LGBT student-respondents, 40 percent of the students stated that their choice of university would be different if they had prior information concerning LGBT support and services on their prospective campuses (Sherrill & Hardesty, 1994).

Students experience significant sexual identity formation during their college years. Once in college, they seek guidance and typically look within the support structures of student affairs for assistance (Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981; Cass, 1979; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Meyer & Schwitzer, 1999; Sanlo, 1988; Troiden, 1979). When support structures fall short and/or the campus climate is one that is unwelcoming, the learning environment for the LGBT student becomes compromised and thus, affects LGBT student learning and success. In the 1994 study cited above, "31% [of respondents] left school for one semester or longer and 33 percent dropped out or transferred due to coming out issues or harassment prior to coming out" (Sherrill & Hardesty, 1994, p. 269). If Stony Brook is to continue to be competitive, resources will need to be devoted to formal, institutional efforts that will help to secure a safe and rich learning environment for all students, faculty, and staff.

#### Function of LGBT Liaison/Outreach Coordinator

1. Work with departments and divisions across campus to develop and implement a Safe Zone program for students, faculty and staff. The LGBT liaison will work with the Campus Climate subcommittees and other University offices to develop a Safe Zone implementation plan that will begin with the undergraduate population and expand to cover the entire campus community. The LGBT liaison will also explore with subcommittees and offices the pros and cons of LGBT-specific and open Safe Zone programs and implement the type of program that is determined to be most appropriate for Stony Brook's campus community.
2. Work with current undergraduate and graduate LGBT student groups to ensure the organizational strength through the continuous development of student leaders.
3. Serve as a clearly identified person within the institution whose concern is the wellbeing and safety of LGBT members of the campus community.
4. Provide information, support, and referrals to LGBT students, faculty, and staff.
5. Coordinate and provide education, outreach, and advocacy on LGBT concerns within the campus community.

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<sup>1</sup> GLSEN reports that in New York State alone, there are 235 registered Gay-Straight Alliances in high schools across the state.

We are proposing the creation of this position in the Wo/Men's and Gender Resource Center because the Center has been an office that has worked to raise awareness about LGBT concerns through staff development trainings, programming, and counseling services, and is a place where LGBT students have come to seek support. In the last two semesters alone, we have reached nearly 400 students, faculty, and staff regarding LGBT concerns. Currently, the Center is involved in the following LGBT related projects:

- Collaborating with the GSO to establish a gay-straight alliance for graduate students
- Working with the undergraduate student group, LGBTQA, to organize a welcome barbeque for LGBTQ and ally students for opening events in Fall 2006
- Hosting a student affairs conference on creating inclusive campuses for transgender students
- Serving on a task force to develop gender neutral housing policies for recommendation to the Division of Campus Residences

With the creation of a new position and additional funding, the Wo/Men's and Gender Resource Center could expand its focus on LGBT concerns and contribute to the University's efforts to create a more welcoming and safe environment for all its students, faculty, and staff.

Resource Needs:

Salary for LGBT Liaison/Outreach Coordinator	\$55000
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Funds to support increase in LGBT outreach efforts including money for supplies, advertising, program Materials, etc.	\$7500
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Total Funding Requested	\$62,500
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