

BUILDING COMMUNITY:  
THE INCLUSION OF GAYS, LESBIANS, AND BISEXUALS

President's Task Force on Discrimination  
Based on Sexual Orientation

Northern Illinois University

9-27-93

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have been active contributing members of the Northern Illinois University community for decades. A recognized student organization to support these individuals and to address their concerns has existed since 1970. More recently, a faculty, staff, and non-traditional student group has also been formed. In 1988 the NIU Constitution and Bylaws was revised to affirm that all members of the University community must be afforded fair, impartial, and equal treatment regardless of any factor unrelated to scholarly or professional performance, including sexual orientation. Evidence of discrimination and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation prompted President LaTourette to form the Task Force on Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation in 1992.

The Task Force engaged in numerous qualitative and quantitative research activities during the 1992-93 academic year. These research efforts included a written survey questionnaire to faculty, staff, and students, an open forum, structured discussion groups, and other activities. The data collected confirm that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals continue to be the victims of discrimination and harassment, and that these individuals generally do not perceive the campus environment to be receptive or supportive of their presence or their concerns. In addition, nearly 87% of all survey respondents (including

heterosexuals) felt that the University was obligated to assure that the campus is a safe, secure, and accepting place for homosexuals; and over 56% felt that the University should do more than it does now to make NIU a better place for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.

In the area of academic affairs, it was determined that:

- 1) no specific procedure currently exists to monitor discrimination based on sexual orientation in the faculty hiring process;
- 2) courses on gay, lesbian, and bisexual experiences are few in number and not regularly offered;
- 3) little integration of these issues is realized in the content of other classes; and
- 4) students and faculty alike are reluctant to identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or to pursue research or class projects regarding these issues, for fear of negative responses from instructors and colleagues.

Environmental concerns were noted in several areas of student affairs. These areas include student organizations, residence halls, and other venues which are viewed by many members of the campus community to be uncomfortable settings for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. The need for additional institutional support services, including a coordinator for gay, lesbian, and bisexual concerns, was also identified.

Personnel policies and procedures for all employment categories were also reviewed. The absence of employee benefits for the domestic partners of homosexuals was identified as one important area of discriminatory policy. The Task Force

conducted extensive research nationally to ascertain the existence and practices associated with this need at other institutions of higher education. Such benefits are indeed available elsewhere at very limited cost to the institution.

The need for ongoing educational programming and staff training was clearly identified. Such co-curricular activities are of value to, and should be required of, all departments and individuals in our community. The content and format of such programs should be designed to meet the needs of the specific audience, but should minimally include affirmation of the University's non-discrimination policy and serve to heighten awareness regarding the special concerns of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals on our campus.

The Task Force strongly recommends the establishment of a Presidential Commission on the Status of Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals. The existence of such a group would serve to monitor progress toward improvement of the campus climate and serve as a resource to all members of the University community in much the same manner as those presidential commissions already in existence.

Incidents of discrimination and harassment on the basis of sexual orientation continue to occur on the campus of Northern Illinois University, regardless of policies which prohibit such behavior. We believe that the University has an administrative responsibility to take the steps necessary to ensure compliance with its policies. We also believe that the institution has a

moral and ethical obligation to ensure a supportive environment for all members of its community, regardless of their sexual orientation. The Task Force has developed a set of recommendations designed to assist the University in achieving these goals. These recommendations are summarized in the following pages and discussed at length throughout the body of this report.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In January, 1992, President John LaTourette established a Task Force on Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation charged with:

Evaluating the frequency, form, and circumstance under which such discrimination and/or harassment takes place and what regulations, programs, and processes are currently in place for addressing same. The Task Force is to recommend any additional procedures, training, and/or educational interventions which are needed to address and eliminate any such discrimination and/or harassment.

In partial fulfillment of its charge, the Task Force respectfully submits the following summary of recommendations. For rationale and further detail concerning each recommendation, please refer to the page number appearing immediately following the recommendation.

### Academic Affairs Issues

- A-1 Establishment of an introductory survey course on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues (page 33)
- A-2 Development of a gay, lesbian, and bisexual studies major or minor academic program (page 34)
- A-3 Greater inclusion in existing courses of course content on issues of relevance to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (page 35)
- A-4 Courses on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues already listed in the NIU Catalog should be offered on a more regular basis (page 35)
- A-5 The development of additional courses around gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues in appropriate departments (page 36)

- A-6 Required enrollment in a "Freshman Experience" class, including significant content on diversity issues, for all freshman students during their first semester (page 37)
- A-7 Attendance by all deans and department chairs at seminars addressing specific issues relevant to gay, lesbian, and bisexual faculty (page 37)
- A-8 Creation of an ongoing discussion group of faculty and students interested in gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues (page 38)
- A-9 Inclusion of content on campus organizations and services for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the orientation program for new faculty (page 39)
- A-10 Establishment of a file in the Faculty Development Office and the Office of Sponsored Projects of information regarding opportunities for research of gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues (page 39)
- A-11 Inclusion in the Graduate Colloquium and Distinguished Lecturer Series, of presentations by, and issues of relevance to, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (page 40)
- A-12 Enhance faculty hiring practices to specifically ensure non-discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual applicants (page 40)
- A-13 Enhance faculty tenure and promotion procedures to specifically ensure non-discrimination against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, and those who study related issues (page 41)
- A-14 Inclusion of content on student evaluations of faculty related to the establishment and maintenance of a classroom atmosphere receptive to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (page 41)
- A-15 All reasonable efforts should be made by academic administrators to ensure that classrooms are perceived as safe and accepting environments for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (page 42)

### Student Affairs/Life Issues

- S-1 Establishment of a full-time staff position to be titled "Coordinator of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Programs" (page 50)
- S-2 Establishment of an Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Programs (page 51)
- S-3 Expansion of the summer orientation program to include significant programming on diversity issues (page 52)
- S-4 Residence hall programming on gay, lesbian, and bisexual concerns (page 52)
- S-5 Availability of student health insurance privileges to same-sex and opposite-sex domestic partners (page 52)
- S-6 Availability of University-owned apartments to same-sex and opposite-sex domestic partners (page 53)
- S-7 Addition to the membership of the Unity in Diversity Steering Committee of one or more representatives of the gay/lesbian/bisexual community (page 54)
- S-8 Continuation of the current Counseling and Student Development Center staffing pattern which seeks to have a staff psychologist with expertise in gay, lesbian, and bisexual concerns (page 54)

### Personnel Issues

- P-1 Staff orientation programs should be expanded and made inclusive of gay-, lesbian-, and bisexual-related services and issues (page 58)
- P-2 The formal recognition by the Board of Regents of same-sex and opposite-sex domestic partnerships (page 58)
- P-3 The extension by the Board of Regents of the full range of benefit options to same-sex and opposite-sex domestic partners and dependents available to married partners and dependents (page 58)
- P-4 The development and implementation of ongoing mandatory training programs for supervisors to heighten awareness of gay, lesbian, and bisexual employee issues and concerns (page 75)

- P-5 The inclusion of a representative of the NIU gay/lesbian/bisexual community on all search committees seeking to fill faculty or administrative positions (page 75)

General/Campus-wide/Other Issues

- G-1 Development of a brochure for use in University admission recruitment efforts that describes the academic and non-academic opportunities and support services for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students (page 77)
- G-2 Inclusion of a listing of services and resources for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in the NIU Graduate Catalog, Undergraduate Catalog, and the Student Handbook, as well as the appearance of the terms "gays," "lesbians," and "bisexuals" in the indexes of these publications (page 78)
- G-3 Inclusion in the President's letter in the Student Handbook of an affirmation of the University's commitment to diversity and intolerance of discrimination, including a specific listing of those groups mentioned in the NIU Constitution (page 79)
- G-4 Consistent wording in all publications of the University's anti-discrimination statement (Such wording should be comprehensive, and specifically cite gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.) (page 80)
- G-5 Where relevant, all University forms, surveys, and applications should be revised to allow gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals to voluntarily indicate their sexual orientation and relationship status (page 81)
- G-6 Meaningful efforts on the part of the University to urge the state legislature to repeal Public Act 87-788 (page 86)
- G-7 Meaningful efforts on the part of the University to urge federal officials to lift the ban on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the armed services (page 86)
- G-8 Development and implementation of workshops for students participating in ROTC on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues (page 86)

- G-9 Development of required co-curricular educational programs for all segments of the University community on gay, lesbian, and bisexual concerns (page 89)
- G-10 Centralization of University functions designed to receive reports of discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation to a single office (page 90)
- G-11 Publicize outcomes of discrimination and harassment charges made against members of the University community (page 92)
- G-12 Establishment of an ongoing presidential commission on the status of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (page 92)
- G-13 Development of other support services and programs, including an ally program and a mentoring program (page 94)
- G-14 Development of procedures designed to ensure that any individual or organization utilizing campus facilities complies with University policies on non-discrimination (page 95)