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University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign

Campus
Climate Project
Executive Summary

Final Report
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Executive Summary

Colleges and universities are more aware of the challenges facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and ally members in their communities. Literature from the past two decades documents the harassment, discrimination, and violence experienced by LGBT¹ people on campus. In response, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) conducted an internal assessment of the climate for LGBT persons and Allies within the campus to help lay the groundwork for future initiatives. This assessment was a proactive initiative, and is intended to be used to identify specific strategies for addressing the challenges facing the community and support positive initiatives on campus.

Surveys were distributed during the spring semester 2004. Twelve hundred thirty employees (72 administrators, 305 civil service staff, 488 academic professionals, and 207 faculty) 2,538 students (1786 undergraduate students, and 752 graduate students), and 159 individuals who identified as “other” returned surveys.² Approximately 491 LGB persons, 2884 heterosexual persons, and 85 individuals who are uncertain about their sexual orientation responded to the survey. Individual comments were also received, and are included in Appendix B of the enclosed report.³ Some of the findings include the following:

- A majority of the LGBT participants and straight allies are “out” to their friends and nuclear family. Approximately 24% of the LGB participants are completely closeted to colleagues.
- Among the participants, LGB individuals and those who are uncertain about their sexual orientation perceived the campus climate as less positive and less affirming than their heterosexual counterparts; transgender individuals and females perceived the climate as less positive than males; and, “people of color” perceived the climate as less positive than White/European Americans.

¹ This report uses the term “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people” or “LGBT people” to describe individuals who share related experiences of bias based on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, this language is employed with the understanding that many individuals identified as LGBT may choose to use other self-identifying terms or none at all. Recent research (Rankin, 2003) suggests that many sexual minorities prefer choices such as “same-gender loving,” “gender-queer,” “pansexual,” “queer,” “woman-loving-woman,” etc. Some considered the “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” and “transgender” categories to be predominately white social constructs of identity, and therefore not relevant to their personal experiences. “Queer” was overwhelmingly not the self-identity choice of black LGBT people, in fact, most chose gay or lesbian. This report acknowledges the personal and political import of language and the need to recognize a broad range of self-identity choices.

² The total number of surveys received is 3595 suggesting that at least 332 respondents identify more than one position.

³ Some comments are provided throughout the narrative to provide “voice” for the quantitative data.

- Approximately six percent of LGB respondents of color often feared for their personal safety on campus because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, and four percent often concealed their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to avoid intimidation. Approximately one percent of LGB participants of color often avoided self-disclosure due to fear of negative consequences.
- Nine percent of respondents have been victims of harassment due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. LGB participants and those uncertain about their sexual orientation, transgender individuals, and people of color reported more experiences with harassment. Derogatory remarks (80%) by other students were the most common form of harassment, which mostly occurred in a public space on campus or off campus.
- Almost one-third of participants have witnessed an event or events of discrimination or harassment based on an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Of those, students (78%) and staff (8%) were most likely to experience such events and they usually occurred in a public space on campus. Derogatory remarks (90%) were the most common form of observed harassment.
- The majority of participants denied that they had experienced negative treatment due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For those who did experience such treatment, the sources of harassment were another UIUC student, an unknown person on campus, or an unknown person in Urbana or Champaign. Transgender individuals were identified as the most likely group to be harassed on campus.
- Respondents felt most safe in the Illini Union, Main Quad, classroom buildings, Krannert Center for Performing Arts, and in campus libraries, and felt least safe at parking lots and fraternity and sorority houses.
- A majority of participants (more than 55%) suggested that issues related to LGBT and intersex persons, or homophobia and heterosexism were never addressed in their academic classes. Transgender authors or readings about transgender issues were the least likely to be included in the curriculum. The Humanities and Social Sciences were identified as the academic areas that provided the most information related to LGBT people and issues.
- The majority of respondents agreed that the climate of classes at UIUC is accepting of LGBT people and that UIUC jobsites are affirming of LGBT people.
- Participants reported that LGBT counseling/support groups, especially the Coming Out Support Group, are the most important activities sponsored by UIUC.
- Some findings also underscore that the campus is non-racist, non-sexist, and positive for lesbians and gay men.

Ways in which the University could improve the climate for LGBT people have been thematically compiled from respondents' comments in the following categories:

- More representation and action from University administration
- Inclusion of more LGBT-related topics and LGBT persons in curriculum and instruction
- Professional development for faculty, civil service staff, and other employees
- Increase in LGBT-related events, programs, organizations, outreach, and support groups

The recommended next steps include sharing a review of the results with campus constituent groups (e.g. administrators, students, faculty, staff, and underrepresented groups) who will work together to create and support initiatives that will foster an inclusive, welcoming climate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.