

LGBT Advisory Committee

Report to Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Tony Lemelle

May 8, 2006

The Advisory Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Affairs currently has the following charge:

To study and make recommendations concerning current and proposed UWM policies and practices that do, or could, differentially affect LGBT employees and students; to collaborate with campus groups and offices to increase awareness and understanding of LGBT issues; and to work with others to improve campus climate for LGBT people and the University community as a whole.

This report represents our activities, past and future, as well as our recommendations.

Activities for the Academic year 2005-2006

- We have reworked the Advisory Committee's bylaws in order to further strengthen the Advisory Committee as a group and also within the administrative structure of UWM (see Appendix A).
- In accordance with our efforts to work collaboratively, we have worked in tangent with the LGBT Committee at UW-Madison concerning our respective university's investment in domestic partner benefits, and our concerns regarding the potential impact of the proposed amendment banning domestic partnerships on those benefits.
- As a part of our charge to increase awareness of LGBT issues, we have crafted an educational paper on how the proposed amendment banning domestic partnerships may affect diversity, climate, recruitment and retention at UWM (see Appendix B), which we presented to the Council on Inclusion (3.31.2006) and to Faculty Senate.
- In light of the increased presence of LGBT issues in the media (and most notably, as regards the proposed constitutional amendment), we have begun recording the increasing occurrences of anti-gay graffiti in restrooms and other public areas around campus (see Appendix C).
- We have planned an educational forum concerning the potential impact of the proposed amendment banning domestic partnerships on UWM as an institution and as a community of faculty, staff, and students, which will be held in the Fall semester of 2006.

Proposed Activities for the Academic Year 2006-2007 (selected)

- We intend to increase the visibility of the LGBT Advisory Committee. For example, we would like to add to the LGBT website, and even include an interactive site in which LGBT members of the UWM community may voice their concerns.
- We plan to continue our work as regards improving the climate at UWM for LGBT people, including continuing to record anti-gay graffiti.
- We will also continue to work on the educational forum described above.

Recommendations

Chancellor Santiago has identified three fundamental concepts at the core of UWM's identity: (1) UWM's historical commitment to educational access and opportunity; (2) the relation of human diversity to academic excellence; and (3), the commitment to UWM as a safe haven for the diversity of ideas. All three concepts are germane to the LGBT Advisory Committee, in particular, and in general to LGBT people on campus. It is clear that diversity does not stop at race, but includes (among other things) class and religious expression as well as sexual orientation. The LGBT Advisory Committee would like to praise Chancellor Santiago for his work toward increasing diversity at UWM, and to encourage him to continue his efforts to make UWM an accessible, equitable, and safe place in which LGBT people can thrive and excel. We make the following recommendations in order to move toward this goal.

- UWSA Inclusivity Initiative.

The University of Wisconsin System is planning to conduct an Inclusivity Initiative, which will put forth a climate survey specifically for LGBT issues. The last time a similar campus climate survey was done was in 1994, and it is clear that such a survey is long overdue. We encourage UWM to give strong support to the Inclusivity Initiative, and to participate in it fully.

- Visibility

The LGBT Advisory Committee has suffered in the past from a lack of a strong visible presence on the UWM campus, and especially as regards the administration. We would like to recommend that the administration support the efforts of the LGBT Advisory Committee to become more visible by 1) providing more website space devoted to the LGBT Advisory Committee, its reports, and its outreach efforts; and 2) facilitating the publicizing of the events and membership and service opportunities of the LGBT Advisory Committee through UWM news outlets (electronic and paper).

➤ Administrative Support

Our membership comprises various administrators, both as full members and in ex-officio positions, including the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (and currently for Diversity and Climate) and the E/DS Director. These administrators are vital links between the LGBT Advisory Committee and the administration of UWM, and yet they have but rarely attended the monthly meetings in the past. The irregular attendance of such administrative members at monthly meetings suggests a *de facto* lack of administrative support for the LGBT Advisory Committee and its activities. We would recommend that the administration strongly encourage regular attendance at these meetings, and in so doing, affirm its commitment to the LGBT Advisory Committee's important work.

➤ Climate

The climate on campus for LGBT people is not as welcoming and supportive as it could be. For example, the graffiti witnessed this Spring creates a chilling atmosphere. We have made little progress in improving the climate on campus for transgendered students and employees; for example, there are still far too few gender neutral bathrooms on campus. We encourage the administration to publicly and repeatedly proclaim its mission for UWM to remain a safe haven for a diversity of people as well as ideas. We also recommend that UWM take concrete steps to ensure that all people feel safe in all areas of campus, and particularly in the Student Union, at the Norris Health Center, and in the dormitories.

➤ Benefits

Despite the fact that UWM's policies provide equal opportunity in its admissions, employment, educational programs, and activities without regard to sexual orientation, the benefits it offers does not reflect this non-discriminatory mission. The lack of full domestic partner benefits (and the fact that those benefits may potentially be lost as a result of the statewide referendum on state recognition of domestic partnership) has the effect of creating a two-tiered system of citizens. Further, the uncertainty of UWM's response to this proposed amendment banning domestic partnerships adds to the fear: it is as yet unclear what UWM may do to protect the benefits that its employees currently hold. We recommend that UWM be clear in its communications with the LGBT community as regards benefits, and what it will do to pursue equity.