

Recognizing Sexual Diversity at McMaster University

*Experiences of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer
Students, Staff and Faculty Members*

September 2001

Prepared for the McMaster Committee Against Homophobia &
Heterosexism

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iii
<i>Background</i>	1
<i>The Project</i>	2
<i>Negotiating Homophobia & Heterosexism at Mac</i>	3
<i>Three Campus Perspectives</i>	6
<i>Students</i>	7
Curriculum/Classes	7
Residence Life	7
Social Spaces	9
Graduate Student Concerns	9
<i>Faculty</i>	10
Classroom/Curriculum	10
Research	11
Tenure	12
<i>Staff</i>	13
Supervisory/Coworker Relations	13
The Work/Community Balance	13
Human Resources	15
<i>What Makes A Difference</i>	16
<i>Recommendations</i>	19

13 March 1997

Letter to the editor, *The Silhouette*

On behalf of the entire McMaster Community, I would like to express my outrage at the recent incidents of homophobic behaviour on our campus.

These despicable acts of cowardice are antithetical to all the values and principles that we, as a university, hold dear. Respect for individual differences is something all of us at McMaster have worked very hard to maintain, and it saddens me deeply to know that any of our students have been made to suffer the fear and pain of discriminatory behaviour while attending our university.

To those students who were targeted and to all gay, lesbian and bisexual students at McMaster, you have my personal commitment that these incidents will not go unanswered. Hate crime is a criminal offence. The university will cooperate with the Hamilton Wentworth Regional Police to apprehend the perpetrators of these crimes and to bring charges against them.

This commitment extends to all members of the McMaster community, whatever their faith, culture, colour, gender or sexual preference. We must remember that when one person or group is threatened by discrimination, we are all threatened.

It is vital that we work together to fight discrimination wherever it rears its ugly head, to be ever vigilant, and to uphold our reputation as a university where understanding, cooperation and respect for diversity are valued and protected.

Peter George, President & Vice Chancellor

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the generous support of a number of individuals and organizations. Thanks go to the McMaster Students Union, the McMaster University Faculty Association, the McMaster University Staff Association, and the office of Dr. Mary Keyes, Associate Vice President (Student Affairs), for providing funding for the project. Thanks to Shoshana Magnet and Derek Billsman for conducting the interviews. Sarah Todd played the key role in data collection and analysis, spending more time and energy on the project than anyone – especially Sarah – ever expected. Appreciation is due, too, to Roy Cain who took responsibility for shepherding the project along throughout the entire process. Finally, special thanks go to all those individuals who agreed to be interviewed to help bring about change at McMaster.

Background

McMaster University's Senate and Board of Governors approved in December 1995 the *Directions* document that outlined the university's mission, vision, and goals. The document included an explicit commitment to valuing and respecting the diverse members of the McMaster community. Under the goal of "Enhanced Respect," the document states:

We will achieve our mission only if all faculty, staff and students respect and take pride in one another. Accordingly, we will continue to develop policies that protect academic freedom, reduce barriers to university education, and foster the realization of potential. We will support programs that ensure equal treatment, assist those with special needs, maintain a workplace that is free of fear, and provide a welcome environment for all students. We serve our community and our society by ensuring that we remain open to different modes of thought and different traditions. We inspire personal growth by showing respect for the contributions made by every member of this community

This institutional commitment to create “a workplace that is free of fear” and “a welcome environment for all students” is particularly salient for members of McMaster's diverse community of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer (GLBQ), students, staff and faculty. McMaster University for many, if not most, GLBQ individuals feels neither safe nor welcoming, despite a number of initiatives on campus that seek to provide support and address their concerns. Homophobic comments, anti-gay graffiti, social exclusion, and invisibility continue to be features of campus life at McMaster.

Like all institutions, universities are embedded in a society and culture that are characterized by forms of systematic discrimination and inequity – among them, homophobia and heterosexism. As organizations concerned with fostering the exchange of ideas and respect for different perspectives, universities may be expected to combat such inequities, a challenge taken up in the *Directions* document. Generating an environment respectful of diversity is, of course, a work in progress. This report, produced under the auspice

of the McMaster Committee Against Homophobia and Heterosexism (CAHH), is a contribution to that endeavour.

The McMaster University Committee Against Homophobia & Heterosexism was formed in 1997 in response to a number of homophobic incidents on campus. Comprising gay/lesbian/bisexual and heterosexual students, staff, and faculty and members of the McMaster community who support them, the Committee works to ensure that the university is a safe and welcoming learning and working environment for its lesbian, gay, and bisexual members.

Recognizing the need for more systematic information on the experiences of GLBQ individuals at McMaster, the Committee initiated a small research project of GLBQ staff, students and faculty. In the following report, we summarize the findings from this project. The report first outlines broad, common concerns of GLBQ students, staff, and faculty. It then identifies particular concerns of students, staff and faculty members. Finally, the report ends with a discussion of recommended policy and programme changes.

The Project

We interviewed thirty students, ten faculty members and eleven staff members over a period of six months in 2000. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and consisted of a semi-structured discussion about how welcoming and safe respondents found McMaster, their connections with other GLBQ persons on campus, and what McMaster could do to become a more supportive and inclusive environment.

Respondents for the project were recruited through personal contacts of Committee members, the GBLT Centre, an advertisement in the *Courier* and e-mail solicitations. The McMaster University Committee on Research Ethics approved the project before any interviews were conducted. Confidentiality was a central concern. No names were used in this report and identifying information has been changed. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Quotes are included in the text of the report to illustrate respondents' concerns.

This report provides a snapshot of experiences, but does not represent the range of GLBQ experiences at McMaster. Absent from this project are the voices of people who are struggling with their sexual orientation, but who do not identify as members of the GLBQ community. Also missing are the experiences of people who feel too unsafe or vulnerable to participate in this type of project. We were not successful in our efforts to include transgendered members of the McMaster Community in this study.

We attempted to recruit respondents with a wide range of experiences. Most faculties are represented, but we were unable to gain much participation from the Faculties of Business, Science and Engineering. As well, we lack any respondents who work in Food Services or Physical Plant. Our examination of GLBQ experiences is limited in these ways, but it provides a valuable preliminary picture and highlights a number of key concerns and strategies for change.

Negotiating Homophobia & Heterosexism at Mac

Homophobia refers to individual reactions of hatred, fear and discomfort towards gay, lesbian and bisexual persons. It may be revealed in attitudes, statements, or acts. Anti-gay comments, name-calling, intimidation, threats, or incidences of violence against someone believed to be gay, are all examples of homophobia.

Heterosexism refers to the social structures and cultural attitudes that systematically privilege heterosexuals and serve to oppress gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. Heterosexism can be revealed as much by exclusion and invisibility as by explicit statements or acts.

Homophobia: Our respondents reported relatively few incidents of homophobia: they were largely limited to acts such as anti-gay graffiti. There are incidences of graffiti saying “die faggot die” or “kill French fags.” Posters advertizing GLBQ community events are regularly vandalized.

Posters have been defaced outside my office. I put up posters [produced by the Committee Against Homophobia and Heterosexism] and someone wrote “kill all fags.” I put up

GLBAM¹ activities. A colleague ripped it down and said “we don’t need that around here.” I think when he realized I was a lesbian there was some coldness.

The defacement of posters relating to the GLBQ community has become somewhat routinized. For example, two years ago, the McMaster Committee Against Homophobia & Heterosexism (CAHH) received support to produce some ‘positive space’ posters that depicted the presence of GLBQ community members. The Vice President for Student Affairs provided some financial support for the project. Some key allies, such as the University President and the President of the MSU, supported it by taking part in photo shoots and thus lending it legitimacy. Posters were to be distributed throughout the campus. That these posters would be defaced was simply assumed, and in the final stages of the project, discussion revolved around producing enough copies to allow for their replacement. We also sought to place as many posters as possible in glassed-in and locked bulletin boards.

Some gay men reported incidents of stalking and verbal harassment. Several respondents reported hearing people make homophobic jokes and derogatory remarks towards other GLBQ persons.

I was sitting in front of Burke Science and someone yelled “fag got.”

I’ve been harassed and stalked on campus. - There was a note on my car saying, do not push gay and lesbian issues because it betrays the natural order . . .

Respondents generally viewed these as isolated incidents, but they occur often enough to make them cautious in their dealings with others. For most respondents, homophobia is not a daily reality, but the *potential* for homophobia, created by our heterosexist culture, is. As a result, our respondents, like GLBQ individuals generally, exercise great care in how they manage information about their sexual identity to minimize the likelihood of homophobic reactions from others. As a result, the relative lack of overt homophobia may

¹ GLBAM was the acronym for McMaster’s Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Association, which became the GLBT Centre in 1998.

be less a reflection of the climate at McMaster than of the care taken by respondents in choosing when and where to make disclosures.

Question: "Do you find McMaster to be supportive?"

Answer: "I've never met anyone on campus who is homophobic."

Question: "Do you consider yourself to be 'out' on campus?"

Answer: "I don't come out. I've never told anybody."

Heterosexism: Homophobia was reported to be fairly rare at McMaster, but heterosexism is pervasive. Indeed, heterosexism at McMaster is communicated even before students arrive on campus: the absence of any explicit mention in McMaster's printed material, policy statements, or calendars about GLBQ individuals or activities on campus communicates a message that sexual diversity is not recognized, much less welcomed. A student notes:

I don't feel comfortable. There is nothing welcoming - 'don't ask, don't tell.'

Faculty members face a similar situation when they first arrive at McMaster in that they receive no material from the university indicating that the institution recognizes and supports same-sex partnerships.

Faced with a heterosexist culture on campus and beyond, GLBQ individuals often disclose their sexual identities only in those situations they judge to be safe. In the university context, this constant assessment might mean that students living in residence may not tell their hall mates about their sexual identity or even much about their personal lives. Similarly, staff members may not reveal their personal lives to co-workers or supervisors fearing ostracism or isolation. This felt need for secrecy can have important and concrete ramifications that go well beyond the isolation and loneliness it can create: as will be discussed below, some staff and faculty members choose not to claim benefits for their partners, fearing that their sexual identities may be revealed by claiming benefits to which they are entitled.

Respondents read situations and conversations and try to assess how people will respond to their coming out. They listen for homophobic jokes and attend to whether people use inclusive language and gender-neutral terms such as 'partner' or 'spouse' rather than husband or wife.

Most people do not realize that there are gay people around them who are listening for signals as to whether it's safe to be out or not, and that many of us have grown up feeling out where we can tell our secret. It would be useful for people to be aware of what they say and do and how it affects others.

Of the many issues relating to homophobia and heterosexism, safety is, perhaps, the most immediate. Safety concerns can take a variety of forms: physical safety, people's sense of job security or the degree of emotional safety felt in residences, classes, departments, workplaces and social spaces. Most respondents reported feeling physically safe on campus. Some lesbians and bisexual women expressed safety concerns, but were uncertain as to whether their concerns were connected with their gender more than their sexual identity.

Respondents may not feel that they are particularly unsafe, but they do not feel supported at McMaster. Heterosexuals at McMaster see themselves and their relationships represented and validated throughout the university. Heterosexuals often take-for-granted the ability to show affection, to hold hands in public or to display photos of their spouse in their office. Most GLBQ individuals at McMaster do not feel that they can claim the same kind of 'ordinary' presence on campus. The silence that often surrounds gay lives and activities on campus communicates, for many, that the university is not a supportive or welcoming environment:

People are tolerant, but not accepting. It creates a hostile environment for people coming out. It's difficult to read heterosexist articles in the Sil, but it's getting better.

There's lots of invisibility on campus. The message seems to be we're fine with it, but don't talk about it.

Such indifference and lack of visibility is not discriminatory per se, but it does little to nourish people and their relationships, communicate a sense of belonging or reflect a commitment to equity.

Three Campus Perspectives

While there are a number of broad, common concerns among respondents, there is no single “GLBQ experience” at McMaster. The experience of GLBQ individuals at McMaster is often dependent upon their social location. Tenured professors’ experiences vary depending upon the departments in which they work, but there are also variations between tenured and non-tenured faculty, library staff, food service employees, graduate students and undergraduate students. Students and staff reported more homophobic experiences on campus than tenured professors. Among the staff members there also seemed to be varying degrees of vulnerability depending upon the status of the job they held and in what area of the university they worked. In the following section, we describe some of the specific experiences and issues identified by students, faculty and staff members.

Students

Curriculum/Classes

The classroom experience remains pivotal to the university community and is often the space where a sense of connection is rooted. For students who live off campus or attend part time, the classroom experience defines their connection to McMaster. GLBQ students often find themselves to be invisible in the university curriculum, whether in representations of history, culture, or the social world. A number of students expressed concern that course content and texts were often devoid of any GLBQ content in contexts where they perceived it relevant to the subject matter. For example, one student noted that his history courses did not contain any reference to the Stonewall riots, an important event in the history of the North American gay and lesbian political movement. Another respondent observed that none of the case examples in the medical school related to people from GLBQ communities until the final year of study.

Individual instructors can sometimes be supportive around GLBQ issues, but many are not. Students told stories of directly asking professors about GLBQ issues via e-mail and receiving no response. One student even approached a professor about a homophobic reference in one of the course texts. The professor agreed with the student, but made no acknowledgement or correction to the class. At other times, students felt that GLBQ issues were given low priority and addressed in a cursory fashion, if at all. When accorded visibility, they often find GLBQ experiences characterized in stereotypic and offensive ways.

Students expressed fears around coming out to classmates as their peers were often seen to have considerable influence over their academic success. This was particularly true for students doing lab work. The possible problems which could result if a disclosure was not well received often dissuaded students from coming out in class, further isolating them on campus.

I don't say anything. I just don't participate in the discussion. If I thought there would be no repercussions I would probably say something, but these are people who have some influence over my future, so I let it pass.

Residence Life

Living in residence can be one of the most important aspects of university life. However, student residences can be a particularly difficult part of university life for many GLBQ students. Some respondents talked appreciatively about the support they received from their hall mates:

Many negative experiences have been shielded because of friends and roommates. I was out in Edwards. I found out after there was graffiti. There was a meeting where they were told that it was unacceptable behaviour. My friends shielded us.

Others told stories of homophobic roommates and floor mates.

I was in my room. The door was closed. [My roommate] didn't realize I was home. Some guys came in who I didn't know. She goes, "That's my roommate. I think she's gay." The

guy goes "lesbian or bisexual?". She goes, "bi, I guess, but its gross either way." I cried all weekend.

The heterosexism of the residence life was reinforced through Welcome Week activities, the IRC dating game and Valentine's Day events.

Heterosexism is impossible to avoid. It's everywhere. The dinner date was a heterosexist event. Everyone assuming you are heterosexual leaves you no options.

At times, people in residence can be overtly homophobic:

I came out to the assistant residence manager. He stated that he thought that homosexuality is morally wrong and compared it with a family member in prison. I left in tears. I can't believe he was hired. We got along ok, but it does bother me.

As a result, many students failed to report homophobic incidences or chose not to disclose their sexual identity to others. Once again, GLBQ members remain in a rather tenuous situation on campus: they are often not explicitly targeted, nor are they explicitly welcomed into the community.

Social Spaces

Student respondents did not feel that the campus bars were gay-positive, leaving GLBQ students to socialize off-campus. This can isolate students from their peers and reinforce the sense that McMaster does not welcome them.

Students identified a number of spaces on campus which have a strong gay-positive atmosphere resulting in a welcoming place. These included OPIRG, SHADO and the GBLT Centre. The safety of these groups was created by staff who used gender neutral language, gay positive posters, and an explicit commitment to anti-oppression. They provided a safe place for people to make friends and to receive support around challenges they were experiencing.

OPIRG is an open environment - it is the perfect environment to come out in. It was very encouraging. Never anything negative. OPIRG couldn't be matched in the real world or the rest of the university. Everything was positive.

Graduate Student Concerns

Graduate students reported experiencing a greater degree of isolation than undergraduate students as many of the gay-positive supportive spaces were more oriented towards and populated by undergraduates. Without a strong network of GLBQ graduate students, these individuals often felt quite alone.

The GLBT Centre is quite a positive influence in my life . . . but it doesn't have a large grad student population. I am not sure if it is about the centre or because there is not the critical mass of gay grad students. A grad student gay organization would have to be structured quite differently from an undergrad organization because we are older and issues like residence or coming out are not as important. What is important is a social component. It is harder for grad students than undergraduates to find other GLBT students.

Graduate students are particularly vulnerable in their relationships with their research advisors and supervisory committees – relationships that are more private and personalized than those between undergraduate students and professors. Graduate students often have few, if any, ties outside of their own department. They may work in their advisor's laboratory. Graduate students are dependent on advisors for ongoing support and advice, funding, and references for employment. Graduate students' academic careers can be severely jeopardized if they do not have a strong and supportive relationship with their advisor. As a result, coming-out can be a particularly difficult decision:

Last year at a supervisory committee meeting one person gave me a really rough time. I couldn't understand it. My supervisor suggested it might have been that the other member did not like that I was gay. It was just an observation. There was no follow up.

Faculty

Classroom/Curriculum

The classroom is a challenging space for GLBQ professors to negotiate. The vast majority of professors did not come out in the classroom though some would ensure that they had a rainbow sign visible or ensured that their course material included gay-positive content. A small number of professors would selectively come out to students.

The few professors who routinely came out in the classroom teach in the School of Social Work. These professors would use personal disclosures as a tool for discussing various aspects of social work practice and for exploring social work's commitment to understanding and working across differences in identity and social location. By doing so, GLBQ issues are more likely to be discussed in class and taken up individually by students. Relatively small classes, other GLBQ professors, gay-positive professors, and a professional Code of Ethics facilitated this openness:

Coming out in the classroom is still tricky. I don't make a big issue of it, but am clear that I am speaking as a gay person. In the human sexuality course it is pretty straightforward. In the fourth year practice class, I do it in the context of "use of self" (e.g., What does the fact I'm white, male, gay, mean for my practice as a social worker). It is easier to make it part of class discussion because it relates to course material. I don't know what I would do if I taught chemical engineering.

Faculty members can feel pressure to come out. Some faculty experienced a certain degree of guilt that they could not be more open role models for GLBT students.

I wish I had been more out. In our department we run across a lot of lesbians and it would be nice to be a role model. I haven't been out because of being afraid of homophobia. I have often felt that I had a tenuous employment position. I gradually got tenure but a lot of the time I felt my job was quite vulnerable.

These faculty members recognized a need for role models so that others could feel safe and supported on campus. At the same time, many were facing their own fears and possible repercussions if they were to be out to colleagues and students. In this way, the university's inability to create a safe space becomes a burden borne on the shoulders of individuals who are already negotiating their sexual orientation in a challenging environment. A faculty member stated:

I never come out to students. [When I worked in Toronto] I made jokes, but not here. Here there are lots of examples of people not necessarily open, but also not making any pretense about it. But I have heard nasty innuendo - surgeons making fun. My impression is that it is deemed inappropriate . . . I feel bad for people coming up behind me. I feel a sense of obligation because of people who did different things ahead of me.

Research

A few faculty members have conducted research on gay and lesbian issues, though not always with a sense of safety. One respondent recounted how, during his hiring process, a senior university administrator spoke disapprovingly about gay academics who do research on the gay community issues. Another recalled how, pre-tenure, she chose not to write on lesbian issues:

In the data I gathered for my dissertation, there were some avenues I could have pursued concerned with negotiating aging, chronic illness among lesbians. At that time, though, I thought an article with that focus on my CV might jeopardize me. Later, I went back to it. Having tenure and finding myself in a supportive department were very freeing.

A couple of respondents had found the ethics review process difficult in projects addressing GLBQ issues. They believed that their research proposals were delayed or challenged because the Ethics Committee was more concerned than usual about possible breaches of ethics, simply because GLBQ issues were integral to their projects.

I submitted an ethics application and wasn't hearing back. I phoned to get an answer ... I ended up sending the application

out to other people to gather support. Then I hear they are having a meeting. The process was alarming ... It was offensive because I pride myself on being ethical ... when comparing this project to other project it seems as if the issue was the gay and lesbian content.

Beyond the impediments and anxieties they create for individual researchers, the social processes and institutional silences that generate such experiences constrain the pursuit of scholarship on GLBQ issues and in theoretical fields burgeoning in other universities in cultural and queer studies.

Tenure

The tenure process represents another moment of particular exposure and institutional scrutiny that generates anxiety for GLBQ faculty members. The tenure process left many of our respondents feeling quite vulnerable. Many professors stated they were more cautious about coming out until they had tenure, and several would recommend that untenured professors keep a "low profile" until they had completed the process.

I didn't appear on the gay-positive posters [created by CAHH] because I was coming up for tenure.

The manner in which faculty members choose to negotiate heterosexism on campus may ultimately reinforce the very climate they would hope to change. One of the implications of faculty members choosing to not be more open is that younger colleagues may also choose to be careful about saying too much about their own lives:

When I arrived, most of the gay faculty were closeted. It had a strong silencing effect. There is a lot of tenure track pressure . . . I worked hard at teaching and researching. Seeing all the closeted people sent me a message. I remained in the closet until getting tenure.

Many professors were concerned about the possibility that homophobic peers could effectively deny them tenure. Others respondents felt that the reason they had difficulty with the tenure process was because they had been "too out" and some students had

expressed disapproval. We cannot, in this report, fully examine the complex dynamics of these particular situations. It is, however, clear that the anxiety and tension they generate for faculty members merit serious attention.

Staff

Supervisory/Coworker Relations

When compared to faculty members, staff members are more dependent on immediate supervisors, and often, coworkers. As a result, staff members can feel more vulnerable to homophobia and heterosexism:

I work with the guys from physical plant. They are pretty, you know, I've heard the odd racist comment so I know what they are all about. I just ignore them. So I was typing in a password . . . There was this guy who saw my password and it had the word "dyke" in it and he just laughed. I was horrified because I was worried about what am I going to get from these guys now.

One person recalled going to speak to his supervisor at the time of his annual review.

At the time of the review I was ending a relationship and thought I should discuss it with my boss as it was impacting on my work performance. I explained the situation using gender neutral language. My boss said something about hoping we didn't have kids and right near the end of the conversation my boss mentioned something about a "wife." I was going to go back and correct him then decided to just let it go - my sense is he's fine, but why not use a generic term or give me an opening?

The Work/Community Balance

McMaster is solely a workplace for some staff members, while for others, it is an important part of their social lives. They may create strong ties to other staff members, and sometimes, to students. For these respondents, creating a supportive social life at work is important:

I can't separate what I do from who I am. They inform each other - so I am always out. Sometimes I chose when to come out. I wish there was a greater sense of community at the staff/faculty level.

Some respondents want to keep their work life at McMaster and their social life separate. This decision can result in a rather isolated work life. One staff member talked about how he used to have friends with whom he could go for coffee. He no longer has such ties on campus, fearing that such colleagues would eventually start asking questions about his personal life:

I would like contact [with other gay people on campus], but won't pursue anything . . . I go to work to get it over with . It would be nice to go to coffee. That option is available to me, but it's easier to do it this way.

Coworkers who use gender specific language or who fail to ask the types of questions that they would to their straight peers can reinforce the sense of separation from others in the workplace. Respondents often found that coworkers never asked about their partner. One respondent talked about how his personal life is implicitly devalued in scheduling decisions:

I've become the person who can work holidays, the person who is supposed to stay all night and fix this problem. And the reason is because my wife won't mind. I don't have kids. So therefore my life is expendable.

The experience of working in a heterosexist environment can be isolating because the spaces where members of GLBQ communities can see their identity reflected back in a positive manner are very limited. This sense is magnified when an individual does not know many other GLBQ individuals. A staff person noted:

There are no other GLBT persons in my building. There is no other gay or lesbian person. I have to go out to be a lesbian. There is nothing that means I can't be a lesbian here, but there's nothing to help that part, so I have to go to Toron to where I am surrounded by things . . . then I realize it's missing at work. You want that part of you accepted and

reinforced. At my work place that part of living is not seen . . . I know about [co-workers'] husbands, but [my personal life is] not open for discussion in the same way.

In the end, most staff members cultivate their social ties in the broader Hamilton community or in Toronto.

Human Resources

Despite some supportive policy changes, the Human Resources Department at McMaster remained a place where staff often felt quite vulnerable. Many faculty members also had troubling experiences with Human Resources, but staff members expressed far more concern about their interactions. Most respondents felt that HR staff members were polite, but some individuals were nervous about having to declare their sexual identity to access benefits for their partners. Many respondents felt it would be far more helpful if information was distributed that would communicate more clearly a sensitivity and support for GLBQ issues and concerns. Some respondents raised concerns that some staff members were unaware of the resources available to them and that many would be too afraid to ask. One respondent recalled a human resources employee:

An HR person had an interview with me and one of their comments when they found out that I was gay was that I shouldn't put 'Y' on my medical coverage. They didn't feel that my job was secure enough to have him on the roster for medical coverage.

Even when HR staff tried to be helpful, heterosexist assumptions can be very apparent:

*Applying for same sex benefits went smoothly. There were no issues, no questions even from people doing the paper work. There was just one moment when I was explaining the form and I said "She's my partner". She responded, "well you can't apply for your business partner". I just clarified "no, she's **my partner**". The woman was embarrassed "oh, oh, ok".*

Since Human Resources is a key entry point and communicator of institutional 'tone,' a number of faculty and staff members of CAHH

offered in 1998-99 to consult with the department on incorporating inclusive language in HR documents and forms and working toward the spirit of the University's commitment outlined in the *Directions* document. HR staff did not seem particularly interested in such a review, and no changes or ongoing discussions resulted from the offer.

What Makes A Difference

Our interviews revealed numerous problems that need to be addressed at McMaster, but respondents also identified a number of useful projects and initiatives. Students, faculty and staff expressed support and appreciation for a number of recent events:

- the Rainbow flag, symbolizing diverse GLBQ communities, was flown during the campus gay pride activities for the past two years;
- the Chalking Campaign, where messages are written in chalk on sidewalks and buildings to increase visibility and awareness of McMaster's GLBQ members;
- the Queer Symposium, that was organized by students to showcase study and research in Queer Theory and to present research from McMaster and across Canada on GLBQ issues;
- the Ally Program, where members of the McMaster Community wear pins to indicate their support of GLBQ individuals on campus; and
- the creation of the GLBT centre as a service of the McMaster Student Union.

These activities provided occasions where GLBQ persons felt welcomed on campus. Respondents appreciated the visibility of gay positive people and spaces which made them feel more welcome on campus.

When they chaked all over the sidewalks, I had a little surge of joy when I saw that. I feel connected in that way because I know they are there . . . The visibility is important for all of

us. I almost breathed a sigh of relief when I saw the damn flag up there because I also believe it's important for the people I work with to see. It makes me feel good.

I remember the pink buttons caught my eye. The Ally Program that required people make a pledge. Big change to have people wearing those buttons. I feel acceptance here that I continue to find remarkable. Quite something to see the rainbow flag - it was great.

These initiatives are important steps towards creating a gay-positive campus. The queer symposium was also seen by several respondents as an invaluable part of the McMaster experience. Many expressed hopes that the symposium would gradually become a more integrated and popular component of McMaster life.

The significance of the formation of CAHH was noted by several people. One faculty member recalled:

I remember vividly the meeting that Mary Keyes [Associate Vice President, Student Affairs] convened in the Winter of 1997 after the appearance of homophobic graffiti on campus. She put out a wide invitation to gather people concerned about it. The meeting was held in the SHADO office, and as I recall, some 30 or so people came. Some, I'd have expected: GLBQ faculty, staff, students, and people involved with equity issues on campus. But then there were others who just came to be supportive and who wanted to protest the hateful graffiti with us: someone from the chaplaincy, straight colleagues, etc. ... I was very moved and warmed by it. I was struck, too, that in my nearly ten years at Mac, this was the first time an officially-initiated event concerned with gay and lesbian concerns had ever been held.

That first meeting eventually led to the formation of CAHH, which has enjoyed the support of Mary Keyes, as Associate Vice President for Student Affairs. Her office has given the Committee institutional anchorage and, when needed, practical support and legitimacy (The first meeting led to a quick response from Peter George, University President, in the form of a letter in the *Silhouette*, which appears at the beginning of this report). This response, in conjunction with the

support and leadership from Cindy Player and the Sexual Harassment and Anti-discrimination Office (SHADO) has been critical. The resources and time of both Dr. Keyes' office and SHADO are, however, limited and strained, and members of CAHH participate voluntarily. The completion of this report, for example, required many more resources than those generously provided by the University, MUSA, MUFA and the MSU. Its completion has depended on the good-will and voluntary efforts of a number of committee members who believe that it represents a useful building block for the future.

Students, faculty and staff stressed the importance of knowing other GLBQ people on campus. Respondents who know or work with other GLBQ people found their support invaluable. GLBQ role models are also important. Many of the respondents made reference to students, staff and faculty who are openly gay. These people not only provided GLBQ communities with some important visibility, but also set a welcoming tone on campus.

Respondents noted the remarkable difference that gay-positive straight people make in their experience at McMaster. Students told stories of how they were shielded from homophobic students by their gay positive friends. Staff members appreciated it when coworkers and supervisors would ask about their partner or whether they had met someone. Even respectful questions were helpful because they opened up spaces of communication.

Explicit gay-positive policies are important. The School of Social Work at McMaster provides an example of how gay-positive policies can make a significant difference to both students and faculty. The School has a set of principles that guide its work. These principles include a specific commitment to anti-oppression politics and practices. Part of this commitment is to challenge heterosexism and homophobia. This principle has had a significant impact on the faculty of that department who feel they are supported for being out to students. In turn, this approach has provided GLBQ students with important role models and creates spaces in the school for all students to learn about GLBQ issues and to challenge heterosexism and homophobia. Courses address issues of sexual orientation, both when specific to course content and as an important dimension of social experience. A resource manual has been provided to educate

students, faculty and staff about how to understand and challenge heterosexism and homophobia. These principles do not prescribe what people are or are not allowed to think, but they do provide a range of what is acceptable in the school's learning environment and in preparation for working in social services. It also provides a space for these issues to be discussed in a respectful manner. To be fair, these principles are more easily enacted in an environment where classes are relatively small and where critical self-reflection is seen as part of professional development. However, it also provides an interesting model for teaching, learning and working environments on campus.

The statement of philosophy is an institutional initiative. And as a professional school, there is a certain cohesion. It would feel weird not to be out. There is an expectation that other faculty members are dealing with this, as well. The entrance exam to the program has included a question about gay and lesbian issues.

Recommendations

There is no neutral silence. McMaster needs explicit policies and processes that foster a gay positive university environment. The current failure to address homophobia and heterosexism in systematic and consistent ways means that McMaster will continue to be an unwelcoming and potentially unsafe space for GLBQ staff, students and faculty. Institutional policies cannot regulate individual behaviours, but they can establish a range of behaviours that are acceptable and can provide a framework for holding people accountable their actions. Importantly, they provide the moral and political leadership needed to support social change and create a greater sense of inclusion.

1. University Commitment:

It is crucial that the university express in clear and unequivocal terms its commitment to addressing homophobia and heterosexism. The development of a clear university policy against heterosexism and homophobia on campus would help provide leadership and guidelines that will be useful in creating a welcoming environment.

The current Anti-Discrimination Policy is helpful in that it provides a mechanism with which to address discrimination. The experiences of GLBQ community members are distinct, but also related to the experiences of other marginalized groups. By working to eradicate homophobia and heterosexism we are simultaneously trying to find ways for everyone on campus to learn, work and teach in a welcoming and supportive environment.

For such policies to really make a significant difference, it is critical that there be ongoing institutional attention devoted to their implementation and a clear expectation that they be incorporated into all areas of institutional life. At present, such attention tends to be very narrowly concentrated in a few particular university offices and functions and in the voluntary efforts of a small number of concerned groups on campus. To extend and strengthen institutional attention it will be important that the Senior Administration communicate clear expectation and support for inclusive and non-discriminatory practices in all domains.

2. Orientation & Training

People have many reasons for not coming out, but McMaster needs to create a climate that is safe enough for people to be able to make choices around coming out that are not dictated by fears that the community would be unsupportive. The findings in this report describe the ways GLBQ persons remain vulnerable on campus while also exploring some of the gay-positive spaces that have been created and are working quite successfully.

Developing and funding an ongoing educational program for faculty, staff and students to promote a gay positive environment is imperative. This would include educating people about appropriate language, providing people with resources, providing faculty support and syllabus reviews to ensure GLBQ content when appropriate.

Continued training and support for residence employees and health service employees to help them develop the knowledge and

sensitivity to provide appropriate services to GLBQ members of the McMaster Community is needed.

It is clear that some additional HR staff support and training, combined with a more direct and broad system of providing new employees with gay positive HR information, would be helpful.

Working with Human Resources to develop information packages for new employees outlining what resources are available for GLBQ staff and faculty is also needed. HR also needs to develop processes whereby people do not have to publicly disclose their sexual orientation to receive benefits.

3. Strategies for Visibility

University publications and communications (e.g. calendars, orientation materials, welcome week materials, the website) make little or no mention of sexual diversity in the university community. Inclusion of information about the existence of the GLBT Centre, CAHH and gay-positive endeavours on campus would increase visibility.

The profile of places such as SHADO, OPIRG, the GLBT Centre should be raised, especially for staff, students who attend McMaster in the summer, faculty and graduate students.

There was some confusion among respondents about where one could go to lodge complaints and whether a process existed for addressing any concerns that were brought to a formal body. Without sufficient advertising for the Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Office (SHADO) and the Ombudsman, many students and staff who experienced homophobia felt quite isolated on campus.

Visibility projects such as flying the rainbow flag, poster campaigns, chalking, the queer symposium, all help to provide people with a sense that McMaster is a gay positive environment.

The bookstore should carry magazines and books that reflect positively on gay and lesbian issues and communities (i.e. *Xtra!*)

Many universities have interdisciplinary programmes concerned with GLBT experiences that draw on scholarship in, for example, queer theory, cultural studies and identity politics. This burgeoning area of study is not clearly represented at McMaster although it is an interest for some individual faculty and, increasingly, for graduate students. Support would be welcome for the development of ties between faculty members presently dispersed across disciplines and, thus for the work of students interested in the area.

These recommendations have implications for many parts of the university. Accordingly, we are distributing the report as widely as possible to: departments concerned directly with employee and student relations; to all academic units; Faculty Deans and senior members of the University Administration; and, of course, the university's three constituent groups, MUSA, MSU and MUFA. We hope that it will be thought-provoking and helpful in our collective efforts to live up to McMaster's aspirations to be an institutional culture that is welcoming, inclusive and fair.