

January, 1978

Interim Report of the Subcommittee on Gay Affairs

The Subcommittee on Gay Affairs (GAS) has moved slowly and has taken little for granted. The first order of business was to define the scope of the GAS charge and establish groundrules.

The question of the "validity," "normality," or "legitimacy" of a "gay lifestyle" was raised by a community member at the first meeting. GAS determined this question to be outside the scope of the charge, and GAS work and recommendations have consistently avoided expressing any views on these questions.

Groundrules were established for GAS. The committee's purpose is advisory and requires the collection of information about gay student problems. Muckraking was systematically avoided, and care was to be shown in dealing with the press. Most important, GAS must represent the majority view that established it and gave it its charge. All GAS actions must be consistent at least in a broad sense, with a Council consensus. The rights of homophobic persons must be respected.

The approach has been to first identify gay student problems, gather information on them to the maximum extent possible, then weigh possible solutions carefully in light of Council and general student opinion.

A number of gay student concerns were identified. Discussions yielded limited information on problems in the provision of student services. Discrimination, particularly in the area of employment, was found to be of the very greatest concern. GAS decided not to proceed with any discussions with University organizations until a determination was made of what discrimination if any was legally permissible, as this would affect the way in which GAS should respond in given cases. GAS attempted to get such legal information from the University's Legal Advisor, but was unsuccessful. GAS found however that (at least at that time) there was little apparent disagreement among Council members with the notion that all discrimination should be opposed even if legal.

Therefore, GAS drew up a resolution opposing discrimination at the University, and requesting that the Equal Opportunity Counselor be instructed to accept such cases. A number of appropriate "Whereas" clauses were tacked on. These drew attention to the scientific view of the professional health societies which characterize homosexuality per se to imply no functional impairment or handicap in and of itself, and pointing to the detrimental effects of discrimination on students.

GAS verified student support for the resolution by gaining over 500 petition signatures, which was clearly an overwhelming response given the very few hours that GAS members spent acquiring them (verbal abuse and social penalties served to intimidate the effort). Many University groups endorsed the resolution, all of them unanimously.

On December 6, 1977, the GAS presented the resolution with a summary of relevant findings. The primary points made were that:

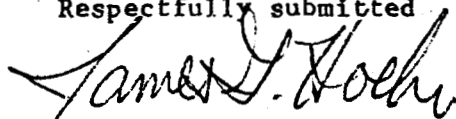
- 1) discrimination, not private sexual behavior or "lifestyles" is at issue.
- 2) discrimination was a real concern among students
- 3) discrimination against students was Council business since it involved the rights of students.
- 4) students were virtually unanimous in opposing discrimination
- and 5) the proposal was the most appropriate and effective means of expressing the students' views.

GAS has had four serious problems. First, there has been a vast cloud of misunderstandings and misrepresentations among Council members regarding the character, position, and purposes of GAS. Council members may be in part responsible for this, but GAS must acknowledge a serious general communications problem. It appears as though the nature of the issue tends to general emotionally charged disagreements based on misunderstandings. Second, one member found the informality and free-discussion format of GAS meetings very conducive to his own extreme disruptiveness and lack of decor. Third, social intimidation of subtle and not-so-subtle forms has hampered the capabilities of many GAS members to serve fully. This atmosphere of fear would be less serious if communications problems with Council were alleviated. Fourth but by no means of least importance is the difficulty of overcoming the level of fear and social mistrust at the University on this issue. This level of fear makes information collection on gay student problems relatively slow. It is hoped that continued support for GAS by the student community will help remove this distrust.

Many of these problems are internal to Council, and could in part be eliminated by meaningful dialogue between GAS and Council members. This would, however be difficult to arrange, however, because of cumulative misunderstandings. Other problems, such as the difficulty of acquiring data, will require a continuing of the new awareness of these problems, time, and patience.

For next term, GAS will presumably take up problems relating to student services, since the issue of the legality of discrimination can be considered somewhat less of a dilemma, since Council has taken an official stand against all such discrimination.

Respectfully submitted



James G. Hoehn
Chairperson of Gay Affairs