Lambda Coalition continues on path to recognition

Kevin Kendall
Editor

Ed. Note: Because of the sensitive nature of this story, the names of University of Richmond students interviewed have been changed.

During the weekend, David Braverman, assistant dean of Richmond College and faculty advisor to the Lambda Coalition, received about six prank phone calls.

Most were made by drunken callers and all made jokes about the idea of a support group for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and heterosexuals.

Braverman estimated about 10 people were involved because each caller seemed to have a different audience.

"It was just like immature kids making prank calls," Braverman said. "I was disappointed, but I would estimate that only about 10 people were involved. So out of a population of about 3,500 students on campus, we have about 10-12 years out of it."

In perspective it is really not that bad, but one negative experience can tend to color your perception. But I have had enough feedback from faculty and administrators to more than offset that.

One positive thing for the group is that the Lambda Coalition banner has remained up in the Tyler Hayes Commons for an entire week. Also, the group has received two letters of support from students in the "supporters of their rights category."

Initial University Approval

Yesterday the Richmond College Student Affairs Committee, made up of administrators, faculty, and students, voted to recommend that the faculty of arts and sciences recognize the support group as an official student organization on the University's campus at its meeting Feb. 20.

Of the calls Braverman said he received over the weekend, half were from women, and many asked questions about why the group was needed.

"Out of those women asked, 'Why do we need a homosexual support group? There's no heterosexual support group," Braverman said. "I wish she had left her name and number on my answering machine so that I could tell her to start a heterosexual support group if she feels that we need one."

"One of the most important things any college student has to come terms with is his or her sexual identity. Dealing with sexuality is not easy and generally we do a lousy job of talking about it in this country."

One of the first steps for the Lambda Coalition is the support that it provides its members, Braverman said. "They are so thrilled to have a group," he said, "and to have the opportunity to come together and talk in a place that is free of moralistic judgments where they feel they are normal."

Students who feel alienated socially often have difficulty performing in many areas, Braverman said. "To know that they have the support of the University and each other makes them feel good.

Braverman said he is a believer in the group process and that he wanted to make it clear that the Lambda Coalition is a support group and not a dating service.

As long as there is a need for such a group it should be there, he said. "Many of the students who called made comments like, 'Didn't they know this was a conservative campus when the came?' and 'If they don't like it here why don't they just leave.'"

Braverman said, "But most students don't pay much attention to the political environment of the campus when they choose a school and why they should have to leave just because that one part of their lives makes them feel uncomfortable."

It is difficult for students to move on campus safely, knowing they are living in a state of fear or denial, Braverman said.

Some choose to repress feelings about their true sexual orientation, "he said. "And many don't develop any close personal relationships; these feelings until they are away from home and without family pressure."

"The goal of liberal arts education is to explore yourself and your own sexual identity—and to grow with the experience of that education, said Joseph, a senior member of the Lambda Coalition, said. "College is supposed to be a place where you challenge your ideas. But it seems like people here are afraid to have their own ideas when college is the best chance to get away from home and experience new ideas. That's not happening enough here. It's almost a sheltered little campus out on the Eastern Shore of the Eastern Shore. It's just not real."

Homosexuals in the Military

But the issues of homosexuality are real and they go far beyond this sheltered campus.

See LAMBDA page 11

Michael, a sophomore, said, "We [the Lambda Coalition] had nothing to do with the University's decision to review this issue. We didn't begin or stop ROTC because that would be unfair to students who rely on those scholarships for their education as it is for the ROTC to discriminate against homosexuals."

"But the most disheartening thing is that officers who have identified their sexual orientation were discharged and billeted for the college loans paid by the U.S. military."

The University Department of Defense Committee found no case in which a University student was dropped from ROTC for being homosexual. Also, it found no case in which a student who had tried to become a contracted ROTC cadre.

"But the most disheartening thing is that officers who have identified their sexual orientation were discharged and billeted for the college loans paid by the U.S. military."

The University ROTC Program

The ROTC program at the University currently has 127 students enrolled. Of those, 36 are contracted or enlisted in the Army ROTC. Those last students are required to sign a statement disclaiming any homosexual conduct or tendencies.

"As freshmen some students may have signed that statement," Joseph said, "but as they work through their feelings in the next couple of years they may realize that they are homosexual."

For most students the coming out process doesn't take place until the junior or senior year."