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See Page 4

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“That’s So Gay!”

National Coming Out Week Kicks Off With
Academic Discussion Forum

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National Coming Out Week was commemorated in highly academic fashion on Monday, October 11, during Common Hour in the Lion's Den. The round-table discussion was in regard to homosexuality in America.

The discussion opened with a pair of internet Public Service Announcements referencing the use of the phrase “that’s so gay!” showing that the purpose of the discussion was to take a look at the treatment of the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgendered community with regard to the use of language.

Ronika Money, the Coordinator of Student Affairs, set the ground rules, emphasizing that there were no experts in the room and that the room was a safe place for the expression of opinions. Lastly, there was a request for honesty from all participants.

A list of true/false statements about students’ perceptions of sexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and humanity in general. It quickly became clear that the list was comprised completely of stereotypes to be challenged. As a testament to the widespread disbelief of at least one of the statements by the students in attendance, giggling could be heard throughout the audience.

During the gathering, there were times when the lives of fellow Americans were offered up as examples to the sufferings of homosexuals in the United States. The tragic invasion of privacy-turned-suicide case of Tyler Clementi was among the first examples used. In addition to being timely, the case illustrated both the negative views towards gays as well as the shame felt by many closet-homosexuals.

In discussing disrespect towards homosexuals, the topic then arose about the attitudes about homosexuality in high schools. Repeated testimonies of abuse and bullying were brought forth, with students saying that homosexuals were reportedly called “juicy,” “sissies,” “muff divers,” “sweet,” “pillow biters,” “faggots,” and “dykes.” Furthermore, they were said to be “light in the loafers” or “have a little sugar in their tank.”

The use of blatantly offensive language was both intentional and expected. The purpose of the discussion was to honestly lay all of the cards onto the table, and then analyze those cards carefully.

The most common slanders of homosexuals, it was discovered, came at the expense of their gender-identity. Societal expectations, it was said, teach boys to wear blue and play with action figures, while girls wear pink and play with dolls. Most importantly of all, however, was the expectation that boys grow up to like girls and, likewise, girls grow up to like boys. Because homosexuals challenge these traditional societal expectations, they are often met with difficulties.

It was mentioned by one student that the use of the phrase “that’s so gay” is not meant to be a commentary on homosexuality, but a word-substitute for “stupid,” “dumb,” or “lame.” Upon further discussion, it then became generally accepted within the forum that such use of language is offensive, regardless of the intent of the speaker. Dr. Matthew Shupp, the Director of Student Affairs also raised the questions of legality regarding the rights of speakers to say harmful things.

“If offensive words can cause young people to kill themselves,” he stated, “isn’t it a disservice by the framers of the Constitution to protect the speakers responsible for such hatred?”

Although no hard lines were drawn in reference to the freedom of speech, students seemed intrigued at the contrasting moral implications of protecting the speakers, as opposed to the listeners, of hateful speech. It was not long thereafter when one female student inadvertently remarked that a society must change its beliefs about homosexuality before the legal system can be changed.

In the closing moments of the forum, one student, Lamont Jackson (Freshman, Business Law) claimed that the forum was enjoyable, and though his thoughts on the issue remained unchanged, that it was good to hear the opinions of others. Bobbi Laprice (Sophomore, HDFS) stated that she believed that the forum was a bit short but well-organized and that it was successful in raising awareness about the hurtful nature of phrases such as “that’s so gay.”

More ethical discussions are being planned, according to Ronika Money as a jumping off event for Multicultural Week on campus.

Campus Safety: Is Any Campus Truly Safe?

By Justin Le Pore -

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Campus safety—we all know the media’s portrayal, which goes a little something like this: it begins with the misguided loner who decides to bring a weapon on campus, then terrorizes the campus with said weapon, and ends with victims, panic, and grief. The media then shows interviews of students talking about how they ‘would have never thought in a million years that something like that could occur on campus.’

When in reality it is something that is very possible.

The question of the decade among college campuses nationally has increasingly become how safe do you feel on campus? The potential threat of an emergency occurring on this campus, the Brandywine campus, is very real and very probable.

In the past ten years the issue of campus safety and the creation of safety protocols for emergencies have grown exponentially—in part because of campus shootings.

These shootings have occurred all over the nation from the University of Arkansas, University of Iowa, University of Arizona, Virginia Tech, and most recently, University of Texas at Austin.

On September 21, 2010 another shooting occurred at the University of Texas when sophomore Colton Tooley opened fire on fellow students and then committed suicide.

This recent shooting has sparked an interest in our own campus and on what measures are being taken to ensure our safety here at Penn State Brandywine. Our campus has an emergency management team which plans and creates protocol for any sort of emergency that could happen—from electrical fires and bomb threats to active gunmen on campus.

The Director of Student Affairs here at Brandywine, Matthew Shupp, is on the emergency management team, which is made up of division heads and governed by Chancellor Dr. Sophia T. Wisniewska. According to Shupp, the team comes up with different response plans depending on the emergency, and each of the members has their own particular role in each plan.

Depending on the situation the emergency management team must decide who communicates to the students (through the PSUTXT or web news), who communicates to the police, and so on. For example, Campus Security is responsible for the protection of life, and preservation of peace, the Director of Information Technology is responsible for securing data and voice communications, and the Director of Student Affairs is responsible for ensuring the safety of students and to serve as a point of contact for students and their families. Each designated role’s involvement is determined by the extent and type of emergency that occurs.

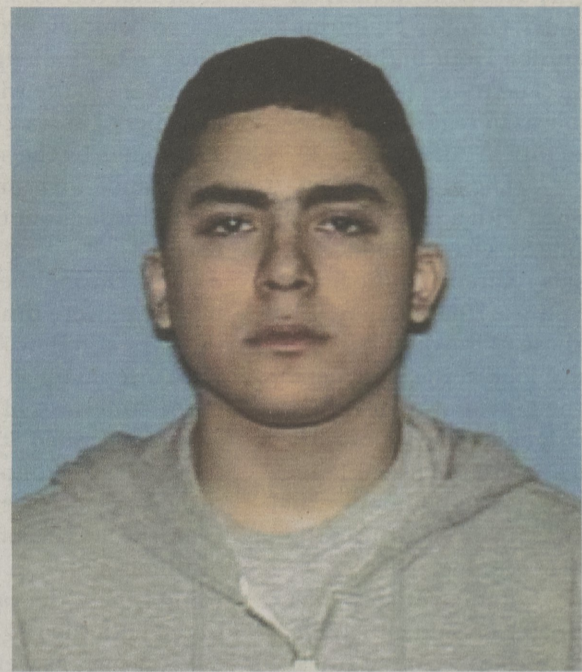
Since our campus is an open public institution it is vulnerable. Shupp explained that with three bus routes coming to and from our campus, and with various entry points to our buildings, we are at any given time at risk. However, this is true for the majority of public buildings all across the nation.

“[Brandywine] is a safe campus but we can never be too safe,” says Shupp.

Because we cannot guarantee one hundred percent safety we must be prepared and cautious. Students who see anyone suspicious lingering on campus, or who feel that a particular individual is dangerous, are advised to find a faculty member and inform them. If a faculty member cannot be reached the student should then contact 9-1-1.

Security for the Brandywine Campus, David Horevay, said that if there were a shooter on campus this would be the protocol:

“Once Security is notified of a possible



Colton Tooley, a 19-year-old mathematics major from Austin, Texas, fired several shots with an AK-47 rifle at different points around campus before fatally shooting himself in a library. (Photo courtesy of the Texas Department of Public Safety.)

shooter or any type of weapon on campus, Security is to notify the State Police, then the Director of Business Services—who initiates the emergency procedures plan and secures in place protocol. The response time for the State Police for an emergency on campus has been excellent.

The responding Penn State Security Officer would monitor the area until the arrival of the State Police. Upon arrival of the State Police, the officer would advise the responding troopers of the incident and give a description of the event.”

The Brandywine campus has always taken campus safety very seriously. In March 2009 the campus tested its emergency response time with an ‘emergency preparedness drill’. The exercise simulated an active gunman on campus. The emergency management team partnered with state police, campus security, and Riddle Memorial Hospital paramedics.

This gave the team feedback as to what the Brandywine campus was good at and what needs to be fixed. The Brandywine website states that the team’s planning is ‘ongoing and continuous’. Emergency Procedures flyers have been placed in each of the rooms on campus for students and faculty to observe. These flyers give instructions on what to do in any sort of emergencies that may occur.

Aside from all the potential risk Brandywine and any other public institution have for these sorts of emergencies, Shupp and Horevay feel very safe on campus.

“I feel very safe...Brandywine has been an extremely safe campus and our goal is that it will continue to be so,” says Shupp.

Horevay added this about his own feeling of safety:

“At this time, I feel that the campus is safe. During the time that I have worked here, there have been no major incidents on campus.”

For more information on campus safety at Penn State Brandywine please visit <http://www.brandywine.psu.edu/Information/Safety/default.htm>. To report any incidents of violence, theft, or emergencies Security can be reached at 610-496-2522 or ext. 496 from any campus phone.