

Fear creates chilly climate for gays on campus

Editor's Note: This is the last in a three-part series on gays and lesbian students at the University. Today's article deals with homophobia and the social problems facing homosexuals.

By ERIC SCHMIDT
Collegian Staff Writer

The signs are evident on campus. In Pattee, the graffiti on the walls includes the word "faggots" slashed out, and the party jokes about the students who make up an estimated 10 percent of the University population continue.

One of the major problems facing University gays and lesbians is homophobia — the fear of homosexuals or homosexuality, said Ray Bortner, a 1983 University alumnus who works for an AIDS task force in Pittsburgh.

Bortner, who returns to the University occasionally to speak to groups about homosexuality and homophobia, added that sometimes people understand these difficulties. "Occasionally you see a glimmer of light in someone's eyes," he said. "But it is rare."

People are homophobic because they don't really understand homosexuals or homosexuality, Bortner said.

Another reason, he said, is people's inability to deal with their own homosexual feelings. Because they are confused about themselves, they take it out on others.

Heidi, a sophomore who asked that her last name not be used, realized that she was a

lesbian about three months before coming to the University.

Most of her friends in high school were women, Heidi said, "and I knew I would do anything for them. . . . Hard as it is to tell other people, it's so much harder to tell yourself."

The University environment is difficult for gay people to deal with, Heidi said, because of its structure. The Office of Housing puts students in residence halls at its own discretion, leaving the individuals with limited control over where they live, Heidi said.

"It's where you put yourself," she said. "At home, I put myself into this (lesbian) environment. Here, I'm put into the dorm."

Because some homosexuals have to live in the residence hall environment, where others may react badly to their sexuality, they are forced to curb their lifestyles, Heidi said. Almost everything they do takes into account the opinions of their neighbors.

The sheer number of students is also an issue. "There are so many people so much of the time that you notice the prejudice," she said.

At home, Heidi said, she can go to bars or other places where being openly lesbian is accepted. In State College, the number of places is limited, she added.

Tracy Alderman, co-director of the Lesbian Gay Student Alliance, said gays must deal with a university whose statement of non-discrimination lacks a specific clause naming gays and lesbians as a recognized minori-

ties. Another barrier is the fear of homosexuals on campus because people do not understand what it means to be homosexual.

Alderman said, however, that the University is not more hostile than most other areas to homosexuals.

Moises J. Torrescano, assistant affirmative action officer for the University, said no clause protecting homosexuals exists because — in the absence of state and federal laws that protect homosexuals' rights — there is no way to enforce one.

Although the Office of Affirmative Action will investigate any reported case of discrimination against homosexuals, he added, there is no legal basis to enforce any code against those cases.

Sim David Aberson, co-director of LGSA, said that while no laws exist specifically naming gays and lesbians as minorities, certain legal precedents help strengthen the legal standing of gays in discrimination cases.

Among those precedents are a Philadelphia law banning discrimination against gays and lesbians, and an executive order from the governor's office doing the same.

He added that the University will look into cases of gay and lesbian discrimination and deal with the discrimination as an act of sexual harassment.

LGSA, in cooperation with the University, is conducting a survey to determine the

nature of the environment for homosexuals here, Alderman said.

The survey includes questions such as: "Do you know anyone who has been harassed, spit on, beaten up or called names because of their sexual orientation?"

Aberson said the survey is aimed at determining the effect that students' sexual orientations have on their grades and employment possibilities.

LGSA meets the second and fourth Monday of each month and the meetings usually attract between 30 and 70 people, Alderman said.

The numbers of organization members have remained much the same over the two years that it has existed, Alderman said, although the actual people who made up the group have changed.

Those who want to attend a meeting can contact LGSA at the HUB desk or call the Gay, Lesbian Switchboard of State College from 6 to 9 p.m. at 237-1950.

LGSA is not primarily a social group, Alderman said, but it is a place where homosexuals can meet other homosexuals and not worry about their sexuality becoming an issue.

"At the meetings, we just sort of assume that if you're there, you're gay," Alderman said.

Aberson agreed that the organization is not primarily a social group — it has several purposes, including support and education. However, the social aspect of the group is

an important one because gay men and lesbian women are not able to meet other gays and lesbians in the same ways that non-gay students meet other non-gay students, Aberson said.

Heidi said the area has only two bars where homosexual students can socialize openly, and they are open only to students over 21. Students below the legal drinking age have almost nowhere to go, she said.

LGSA provides a forum where gays and lesbians can interact socially.

In addition, the group has an educational function, Alderman said. It sponsored a program on AIDS at its last meeting, and other functions include sponsoring dances and movies.

LGSA receives its funding from the University as a registered group, Alderman said, and has also received a \$2,500 grant from the Chicago Resource Institute that it uses to rent movies as fund raisers. University funds cannot be used to raise money, she added.

Aberson said the University has not granted the organization office space despite several attempts by LGSA members to point out offices that could be used.

LGSA finally approached the Free University without the help of University administration, Aberson said, and is sharing office space with that organization in 223 HUB.

Alderman disagreed, saying that the University administration has not given the organization office space because none is available, but that it has tried.

Satellite is launched; marks 4th straight

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A powerful rocket propelled a \$125 million military communications satellite into orbit Thursday night, logging a fourth straight U.S. space launch success after a string of disasters earlier this year.

The 137-foot-tall Atlas-Centaur rocket blasted away from its launch pad at 9:30 p.m. EST and carved a fiery path in a cloudy night sky as it hoisted a 5,200-pound payload designed to link land, sea and air forces

with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Command Authority and the president.

Twenty-eight minutes later, NASA launch commentator George Diller reported the two-stage booster had done its job and hurled the satellite into a great elliptical orbit ranging from about 103 to 22,330 miles high.

"All mission elements have been accomplished; we've had a very successful mission," Diller said. He reported good data was being received.

India Parliament reacts to terrorism

NEW DELHI, India (AP) — The government said yesterday it has begun opening private mail, tapping telephones and restricting the entry of foreigners as part of its fight against Sikh terrorism.

The announcement in Parliament said the government had assumed the special powers Nov. 13 under a provision of the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act.

Civil liberties groups and opposition lawmakers have condemned the law, passed in May 1985, because it permits detention of suspects for up to two years without trial. It also lets the government adopt, without Parliament's approval, other

measures such as those revealed Thursday. The measures are intended to fight the terrorism centered in northern Punjab state, where Sikhs predominate.

The new measures let police tap telephones lines, listen to conversations and take control of telephones if they are "satisfied or have reasonable grounds to suspect" a telephone is being used to aid terrorism, Parliament was told.

Using a telephone to abet terrorism would be punishable up to seven years imprisonment and a fine.

The measures also let police search for and confiscate letters or tape cassettes from travel-

ers if they are believed to be aimed at inciting civil disorder. Foreigners found to have entered India illegally face up to five years in jail, while communication with people assisting terrorists is punishable by a five-year sentence.

Punjab has been torn by four years of violence by Sikhs demanding greater autonomy. More than 650 people have been killed there this year, and the government on Wednesday declared nearly half of Punjab "disturbed."

On Sunday, Sikhs massacred 24 Hindu bus passengers in Punjab, sparking two days of violent anti-Sikh demonstrations in New Delhi and other cities.

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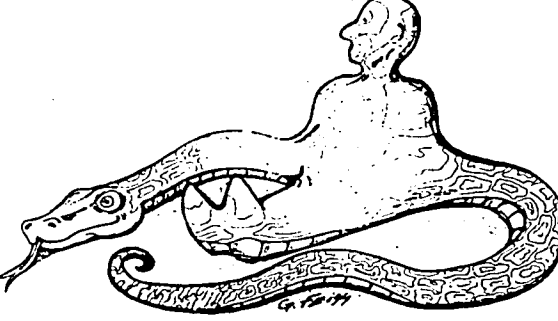
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