Rainbow SIG Newsletter

Out in Beijing?!
Submitted by: Lauren Reed - Resident Director of CET’s Chinese Language Program in Beijing

For many friends, coming to Beijing for the first time as a study abroad student was a de facto vow of closeted life and “singlesdom” for a few months to a year. I know for me it felt that way. Vows, when decided with one’s own free will, can be at the least a productive lesson and at best a life-changing experience—but I think it goes without saying that resigning oneself to hide one’s sexual identity does not constitute a healthy vow, even less so a positive start to living abroad. But before embarking on a journey halfway across the globe, it is hard not to think about what may factor into your willingness to be out, or how you will cope with being outraged just by being yourself. This is true especially when you are confronted with the knowledge that homosexuality used to be labeled as “hooliganism” under the Chinese criminal code until 1997 and then was considered a major psychological disorder until 2001. Making decisions about how you want to portray yourself (or accepting how you may be portrayed in certain situations) is anything but easy: How are you supposed to prepare when you are told that Confucian values still rule the way people form relationships, sexuality is a taboo subject in its own right and homosexuality is seen as a perverse disease by mainstream society? Even for someone who is determined to live their life without being influenced by the political or social climate of the country they are about to call home for a few months, similar thoughts and questions must surely cross their mind. Luckily for us, in reality living in Beijing as a queer person, out or not, is far from the bleak picture painted above. In fact, I can safely say that Beijing’s queer scene is on the up and up, and if you aren’t joining in, you are missing out. The queer community in Beijing is surprising large—queer men and women of all nationalities abound, but remain well-hidden if you don’t know what you are looking for. In the past few years, queer clubs have cropped up.

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all over the city, some falling by the wayside but most continuing strong to the present day. As a local event-listings website, thebei-

Rainbow SIG Leadership:
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* Peter Kerrigan (DAAD-New York) Co-Chair,  
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* Eero Jesurun (CIEE-Spain) Newsletter Editor,  
* Thomas Lavenir (James Madison University) Newsletter Editor,  
* Ismael Crotte (Universidad de Guadalajara - Mexico) Secretary,  
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* Pete Johnson (University of California, Berkeley) Web Content Manager.

The more Beijing and China develop economically and open up to the rest of the world, the more room there is for Chinese nationals and foreigners alike to express their sexualities.

jinger.com suggests, the success of these clubs are no doubt “all a matter of finding the right target demographic.” And the demo-

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graphic exists indeed. Gay men, trans people, lesbians and other folks with non-normative sexualities emerge at night to patronize clubs such as Destination, Pipe’s Café and West Wing Café and Bar, or faithfully frequent White Rabbit’s “Queerscence” event which markets itself with the statement “每周都聚在一起...your Thursday nights just became very queer...” Every Saturday night there is an all drag show at (Love Island) varying from performances one act plays.

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Also, for almost a year now, the latest buzz in Beijing has been about a weekly video podcast of “Queer as Folk Beijing”, a mini-talk show that serves as a forum for all issues related to LGBT rights. Also, for almost a year now, the latest buzz in Beijing has been about a weekly video podcast of “Queer as Folk Beijing”, a mini-talk show that serves as a forum for all issues related to LGBT rights.

However, one thing that has not yet to be out as a delegate for the National People’s Congress, foreigners working and studying in Beijing should be able to find supportive and fun communities without giving up parts of their identity along the way.

Inspector’s Guide to Beijing correspondent Eric Abrahamsen admits, “even now we’re years away from rainbow car stickers ad gay pride parades, but there have been subtle, significant changes in Beijing’s attitudes toward alternative sexualities.” In the end, while it may not be possible yet to be out as a delegate for the National People’s Congress, foreigners working and studying in Beijing should be able to find supportive and fun communities without giving up parts of their identity along the way.

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Why are we discussing this?

- In the U.S., you are likely to encounter people who are openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT).
- It is illegal to discriminate against LGBT people in Washington, D.C.
- You may be curious about cultural differences.
- You might be LGBT or know someone who is LGBT.

going downstairs and fostering dialogue

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apprehensive at first. How would we be treated: as Americans, as gay men, as outsiders? American students are always told that Eastern Europeans are distant in public, warm and welcoming in private. Did that standard hold with the local LGBT community as well? All our knowledge at that time came from the internet and an outdated Time Out Guidebook, worn down by oversea travel and some milk I accidentally spilled on it. With not much else to do except enter, we descended into Friends.

It was like stepping down into a LGBT bar in New York City – friendly people, plenty of good music, and of course, decorated with class and velvet. Johnson and I spent a lot of that night at the bar talking with a gay couple, an ex-pat from London and his Czech boyfriend, about the LGBT “scene” of Prague and how things were changing. They told us how social acceptance continued to grow in Prague, and the Czech Republic in general, towards LGBT persons and how the younger generation was helping to plant the seeds towards this positive direction. It was for me, exhilarating, besides my excitement to dance to Madonna’s new song, “Hung Up” (it had just been released in Europe), to feel how a country once overshadowed by communism was emerging and changing. Suddenly, I felt a part of something; I was and am a part of an international LGBT community.

My friend and I could have turned back that night. We had no reason to feel uncertain. I now know that wherever I may travel, I will find others in this international LGBT community willing to talk, will be silent it only harbors hesitation. Bringing them into public awareness can lessen the ambivalence of students who may see themselves as a minority – as is the case sometimes with LGBT students.

It starts with a dialogue – whether between student and administrator, student and student, or as in my case, with a local. This dialogue can be structured in the form of a student pamphlet, a discussion session, or even an event. When we allow the concerns of students to be silent it only harbors hesitation. Bringing them into public awareness can lessen the ambivalence of students who may see themselves as a minority – as is the case sometimes with LGBT students.

After that night at Friends, I no longer felt my original hesitation. By recognizing myself as part of a community, there was no need or reason to feel uncertain. I now know that wherever I may travel, I will find others in this international LGBT community willing to talk, willing to introduce me into their culture. The transition may not always be an easy one, but it was through my first pathway down those stairs that granted me this confidence. I share my story and hope to inspire other Study Abroad students and administrators alike: to find ways to open a dialogue of the international LGBT community.
15th Annual NAFSA Reception
Wednesday, May 28 2008
8:00 – 10:00 p.m.

Be-Bar is a popular destination for the local community. We’ll have a cash bar, DJ, and plenty of great food. Look for some “local celebrities” as well!

**Be-Bar:** 1318 9th Street NW
located at 9th Street NW and N Street NW and Mt. Vernon Place in downtown DC,
(right across from the new Washington Convention Center)

Website: [http://bebardc.com](http://bebardc.com)

The Rainbow SIG is raising funds for our reception and we will be thanking our generous sponsors in the coming weeks.

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**2008 NAFSA Annual Conference Rainbow SIG Related Sessions**

:: Impact of LGBT Identity and Human Rights on Students ::

*Session abstract:* An international focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues has provided insights into principles of non-discrimination, personal and bodily integrity, health and social development and complexities of sexuality and gender. Panelists will discuss their domestic and international work’s relevance to the college experience for internation and study abroad students.

*Presenters include:*
- Mark Bromley, Global Rights
- Angela C. Shaeffer, Goucher College
- Nicholas S. Sakurai, American University
- Michael Ulrich, University of Maryland

:: Coming Out Across Borders: Outcomes of GLBT Study Abroad Experiences ::

*Session abstract:* This session examines the life-changing impact of study abroad for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) students. Personal experiences will be presented in addition to a DVD highlighting research on the GLBT study abroad experience. Study abroad professionals will gain programmatic, advising and other related resources as well as insight into this complex developmental process.

*Presenters include:*
- Bradley Rink, CIEE- Stellenbosch South Africa
- Maria Hoffman, University of Colorado at Boulder
- Kristi Kremers, College of St. Benedict- St. John’s University

:: Diverse Identities: Personal Challenges for International Education Professionals ::

*Session abstract:* Do personal identities such as sexual orientation, gender, and ethnicity impact the ability of international educators to work effectively and respectfully across cultures? This session explores identity-related challenges and benefits faced by professionals. U.S. and overseas administrators will discuss their workplace experiences and offer practical suggestions through case studies.

*Presenters include:*
- Paul Geis, Elon University

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**Rainbow SIG’s Conference Schedule at a Glance:**

*Monday, May 26, 2008*
4-5pm - Rainbow SIG Advisory Board Meeting. Location TBA

*Wednesday, May 28, 2008*
1:45-3pm - Rainbow SIG Annual Business Mtg. in the Washington Renaissance Hotel Meeting Room 5
3:45-5pm - “Impact of LGBT Identity and Human Rights on Students.” Location TBA
8-10pm - Rainbow SIG 15th Annual Reception at Be-Bar (1318 9th Street NW)

*Thursday, May 29, 2008*
2:45-4pm - Session: “Coming Out Across Borders: Outcomes of GLBT Study Abroad Experiences.” Location TBA

*Friday, May 30, 2008*
2:45-4pm - Session: “Diverse Identities: Personal Challenges for International Education Professionals” Location TBA