



SIGnals

Rainbow SIG Newsletter

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Rainbow SIGnals is published once a semester by the Rainbow Specific Interest Group (SIG) of NAFSA: Association of International Educators. The Rainbow SIG is comprised of diverse NAFSAs whose goals are to combat homophobia, heterosexism and transphobia within NAFSA, to counsel international students and study abroad students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, and to support gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered professionals in international education

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Join us in Seville, Spain!!
During the CIEE Conference in Spain, the NAFSA Rainbow SIG will hold a brief meeting on Wednesday, November 8, 6:00-7:00pm in the hotel room, Andalucia 8.

Interview With Our New Co-Chair

Submitted by: Thomas Lavenir (James Madison University)



Mark became co-chair when Jan passed on the boat!

Mark Lenhart became really interested in the field of study abroad when he first went to China as a CET student in 1987, and over the course of his year there. "It was fascinating to me to watch students learn language and culture skills outside of the classroom, and I often wondered how I might facilitate such learning if I could design or manage programs myself." When he studied at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center a year later, he conducted a research project on US-Chinese cultural relations, and spent his free time trying to find an RD job. He ended up finding a job at CET's Harbin campus in the fall of 1990 and has been working at CET ever since in different positions. "I can't think of a more rewarding career, and I feel lucky that I've been able to do what I love." While Mark enjoyed the benefits of being abroad being out was challenging for him. "I had had a painful closeted relationship my sophomore year of college, and perhaps that experience motivated me to bury the issue and create a new

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Going Dutch: Student Perspective from Amsterdam

Submitted by: Fall 2006 Participant from Wellesley College (MA)

Rainbow SIG Newsletter Reporter: Why did you choose the Netherlands as a study abroad location?
Wellesley student: In the Netherlands sexual-ity is not a statement, its a fact. What I mean by this is there is a very subtle but profound difference between queer couples in the Netherlands and in the U.S. At first I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but then I realized that in the Netherlands walking down the street holding hands or arm in arm with one's partner is not a sign of protest, it does not require a special kind of pride or bravery, and one is not potentially endangering oneself like in the States. Even the most confident of couples in the most liberal cities or towns in the U.S still walk around aware that they are a spectacle and that people will see, and immediately judge them. I have not found that here. People

Rainbow SIG Newsletter Reporter: What have you learned about sexuality while in Amsterdam?

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NAFSA Conference Session Breaks New Ground

Submitted by Kevin Morrison (Meredith College)

On the final afternoon of the NAFSA Annual Conference in Montreal a new milestone was reached in conference programming, the first session devoted exclusively to transgender issues was presented. Approximately 50 people hung on until the very end of the conference to join Peggy Pusch, Rob Pusch, and Kevin Morrison in exploring issues related to gender identity, understanding terminology and key concepts, and developing a deeper understanding regarding the ways that transgender identity creates situations we should be aware of as educators on college campuses and as administrators of study abroad programs. This session was groundbreaking for NAFSA in the sense that it was the first to give full attention to transgender issues, rather than lumping them in with GLBT issues as a whole. In doing this, the session was able to more fully explore the complexities surrounding gender identity and the issues that it raises for education abroad professionals. Participants were given an opportunity to reflect on the role gender plays in their own life and in their interactions with others. Time was also spent discussing transgender concepts and terminology. Rob Pusch provided an excellent resource regarding experiences of transgender people and the process of transition. The final portion of the program allowed participants to examine and work through some real life situations regarding transgender students in a study abroad context. Discussions of scenarios in small groups raised many excellent questions and identified multiple challenges that educators need to be prepared to address when working with transgender students in study abroad. Some of the topics touched on in discussions included passport issuance, travel, restrooms, living situations, receiving health service while abroad, living in a culture that is highly structured around gender roles, and advising students in various stages of transition. During the discussions, some participants were also able to relate their experiences working with transgender students both in pre-departure advising and on site. Such experiences highlighted the need for us to all be more aware and prepared for our students. The session closed with a strong sense that more



Kevin Morrison [L] and Rob Pusch while presenting their session on Transgender issues at last year's NAFSA Conference

work is yet to be done in this area. Evaluations rated the session highly for the content of the information presented and many commented that they hope to see further exploration of these issues in future conference sessions. Copies of handouts from the session are available on the Rainbow SIG website at http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/advise/nafsa_trans_handout.doc The handout includes the reflection and discussion activities used during the session, lists of terminology and key concepts and issues relating to transgender students, and a brief list of resources for working with transgender students.

A Glimpse at the Information Found in the NAFSA Transgender Session Handout

What is gender identity?

The sense of one's self as a particular gender. Typically we assume that there are only two gender categories, man/boy and woman/girl.

How is sex different from gender?

Sex is a set of biological categories. At birth an infant's sex is assigned based on a combination of bodily characteristics, including genital configuration, internal reproductive organs, and chromosomes.

What is gender expression?

Gender expression is the way individuals express their gender in degrees of masculinity and femininity.

Who are transgender people?

I am always a bit reluctant to put definitions down because, particularly when it comes to gender identity, they are not stable. But we must begin someplace. The list below are only a few of the identities transgender people use.

Transgender—an umbrella term that includes transsexuals, crossdressers, womanish men, mannish women, and anyone whose gender identity crosses the line of what is considered normal. Below are some terms you may hear transgender people use to define their identity:

- Genderqueer—an individual who does not identify as either man or woman.
- Transsexual—an individual who desires to align his/her physical sex with his/her gender identity. Transsexuals may refer to themselves as pre-operative, post-operative, or non-operative transsexuals.
 - + Female-to-Male (FTM)—a transgender person identified female at birth, but self-identifies as a male.
 - + Male-to-Female (MTF)—a transgender person identified male at birth, but self-identifies as a female.

How does gender identity relate to sexual orientation?

Gender identity and sexual orientation are different issues. Gender identity is your sense of yourself as a gendered person. Sexual orientation refers to whom you choose as your romantic and/or sexual partner(s). People who identify as transgender may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or straight.

What does it mean to transition?

Transition is a term used by transgender people to refer to the process of coming out and beginning to live as one's self-identified gender. This may or may not include medical intervention. Transition can include: changing one's name, pronouns use, changing their gender presentation. Some people may choose medically transition. This can include hormone therapy, some form of chest surgery, and/or genital alteration. Transgender people may identify as pre-op(erative), post-op, or non-op.

Going Dutch

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are just living their lives, and it's amazing.

Rainbow SIG Newsletter Reporter: There were news reports this past year about a group of adolescents who harrassed gay men in Amsterdam as they were leaving dance clubs, etc. What have you learned about the existence of homophobia in a city that has historically been very progressive? Is it media hype, or should out American students be concerned about their safety when it comes to sexuality issues?

Wellesley student: In my experience I have found the general Dutch attitude towards homosexuality to be one of tolerance and disinterest rather than the more polarized attitudes of hatred, or acceptance found in the U.S. That being said, I am sure there are some who harbor negative feelings towards any number of minorities and that is perhaps an unfortunate truth of humanity--therefore it is important to be generally aware of one's surroundings as always--however in my personal experience I have never felt unsafe to be openly gay in Amsterdam, perhaps with the exception of being around other American students. There is a general attitude in Dutch culture which drives their legacy of tolerance and that is indifference to another person's private life, and so although one may not experience the same type of acceptance and celebration of ones sexual orientation in Amsterdam as one would expect among allies in the U.S, I have been scarcely met with bigotry here.

Rainbow SIG Newsletter Reporter: Any other comment, fact or issue that you think a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender student at a US college should consider when thinking to study abroad based on your "Dutch" experience?

Wellesley student: Be aware that the concept of "gaydar" is very culturally subjective, and you may find it difficult to identify other queer students in the international student community. Do not be discouraged, it just takes some time getting used to the standards of different cultures, gender expression etc, but in the long run you have an great excuse to get now all kinds of interesting people, not just the queer ones.

Editor's note: This student has requested to remain anonymous.

Dear Rainbow SIG Members,

Greetings! We hope this finds you all well and enjoying the fall.

We wanted to send out a general update to let you know what has been happening with the SIG since Montreal. We have mostly been organizing and updating projects that we hope to tackle in the coming weeks and months. Many people have been in touch to report that they are also working on projects:

- * Membership & listserve. Scott Van Der Meid and Susan Carty have been making sure that our listserv is up-to-date and includes all people who are current Rainbow SIG members. We hope to have this work completed in the next few weeks.

- * Website changes. Peter Johnson is contacting Kathy Sideli to discuss ideas for improving the content and organization of our site.

- * Tabling Instructions. Eero Jesurun and Bradley Rink have put together helpful instructions for volunteers who table at the NAFSA national conference.

- * Minutes from Montreal Advisory Board Meeting. Ismael Crotte has drafted useful minutes from our last meeting. We will be distributing these minutes soon.

- * Dave Burkhart Scholarship next steps. Mark Lenhart has been in touch with Bo Keppel and NAFSA to discuss next steps in creating a study abroad scholarship to which Rainbow SIG members could contribute.

- * Co-Chair Transitions. Scott Van Der Meid and Mark Lenhart learned that we are free to keep July 1 as the transition date for Co-Chairs. Jan passed on the boa in Montreal, and Mark officially became Co-Chair on July 1.

Thanks to everyone who is working on or has already completed projects!

J. Scott Van Der Meid & Mark Lenhart
Rainbow SIG Co-Chairs

Photos Taken During
Rainbow SIG's
Annual Reception
in Montreal, May 2006
Submitted by Thomas Lavenir
(James Madison University)



Make sure to check out Rainbow SIG's website at: <http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay>

identity overseas.” He stayed in China for close to five years, and it wasn’t until he returned to live in the US that he felt ready to accept his orientation. “Chinese culture is less tolerant of homosexuality than American culture, so while I travel in China for work, I discuss my orientation only when it seems important or helpful to do so.” Mark knows of some students who struggle with knowing when to discuss their orientation, and he’s happy to advise them when he can. Mark has been attending NAFSA conferences since 1996, but was not out at work in those days... until he ran into Rainbow SIG members who were wearing rainbow stickers on their nametags, and decided to walk into a meeting to see what it was about. He was a bit nervous at first, but when he sat down, and saw Rick Russo, whom he knew from work. He gave Mark a big welcome “I think he shouted “girl, welcome!”” It was great a moment, and he has enjoyed being involved with the Rainbow SIG ever since to the point of becoming our Co-Chair.

Rainbow SIG Advisory Committee Members:

* Mark Lenhart (CET Academic Programs) *Co-Chair*, * J Scott Van Der Meid (Brandeis University) *Co-Chair*, * Daniel Soto (Indiana University) *Listserv Manager*, * Susan Carty (Indiana University) *Membership Coordinator*, * Eero Jese-run (CIEE- Spain) *Newsletter Editor*, * Thomas Lavenir (James Madison University) *Newsletter Editor*, * Ismael Crotte (Universidad de Guadalajara - Mexico) *Recording Secretary*, * Rick Russo (University of California, Berkeley) *Treasurer*, * Pete Johnson (University of California, Berkeley) *Web Content Manager*.

* Amy Bartnick-Blume (Butler University), * Jacqueline Bedard (Camosun College - Canada), * Mark Beirn (Tulane University), * David W. Brannonn (University of Washington), * Erin Burt (University of California, Berkeley), * Bruce Carolan (Dublin School of Technology - Ireland), * Michael Carter (University of Alabama at Birmingham), * Kevin Coyne (International Students House - United Kingdom), Terry Crouch (Rotary International), * Andreas Eimer (University of Muenster - Germany), * Cristina Florez (University of Miami), * Paul Geis (Bentley College), * Steve Jacques (The University of Hawai'i System), * Bo Keppel (Retired), * Peter Kerrigan (DAAD-New York), * Jan Kieling (University of California, Berkeley), * Kim Killingsworth (Cornell University), * Alan Lawrie (Monash University- Australia), * Michael Mahan (University of Massachusetts, Boston), * Louis M. Meucci (Showa Boston), * Kevin Morrison (Meredith College), * Joe Murnan (Hariri Foundation) * Josh Newman (John Carroll University), * Tony Ogden (Penn State), * Peggy Pusch (Intercultural Communication Institute), * Bradley Rink (CIEE - South Africa), * Oktay Sekercisoy (Binghamton University), * Kathleen Sideli (Indiana University), * Greg Slatcher (University of Melbourne - Australia), * Jerald Thornton (Marist College), * Julie Trimpe (Augsburg College), * Art Turmelle (Foothill College), * Kevin A. Zajac (Saint Joseph's University)

The French Benefit: Being An “Out” Professional in Study Abroad

Submitted by: Loren Ringer, CIEE Rennes, France

Rainbow SIG Newsletter Reporter: What are the benefits of being an “out” professional in study abroad?

L. Ringer: I see only advantages for being an out professional. I cannot think of any negative feedback. Firstly, thinking of my students, it would be hypocritical not to come out to them as a gay man because we discuss gay and lesbian issues during orientation. I would feel uncomfortable not addressing these issues openly. However, if I were a French person, I would not necessarily come out to my students in a public venue. There is a distinct notion of what is considered private and what is considered public. In France, there is much more respect for one’s private life and not a need to display everything into the public realm. My experience as an out professional has been rewarding. By coming out to my students and sharing some bits and pieces of my experience, students approach me quicker. For example, I had two straight male students who separately met with me to inquire about HIV testing. Both of them commented that me being an out professional made it easier for them to approach me. Also, not all gay students from the US have approached me for help in their personal lives while in Rennes. This may be a generation gap where “out” students are not looking for a support network per sé, but may be possible, too,

that they can already discuss sexual orientation issues with other peers. At the end of the day, I feel I have opened up myself as a professional and make myself available as an advisor to all my students by approaching my job with sincerity. With colleagues at the university, I share things of my family life, and they share some of theirs with me. Those conversations are sincere as well. I do not necessarily discuss my sexual orientation with all families of our study member where the of State and Church is very wide. I have colleagues who are Church-going catholics, but you would not necessarily know this. Cultural definitions of the private and public spheres transcend various levels in French society.

Rainbow SIG Newsletter Reporter: Is there a cultural difference between the US and France as far as being an “out” professional?
L. Ringer: Yes, there is a difference. From a US perspective, there is much more empathy if you are an out professional. As a Resident Director for a US study abroad program in France, I am

expected to advise students on various matters, including personal issues. This is especially true when discussing the student’s personal objectives for his or her semester during orientation. I spend several sessions with students, talking about personal goals, but also private and public matters as they relate to their semester abroad. In France, if you choose not to discuss your private life and, thus, not “come out” regarding your sexual orientation, it will be commonly accepted. There is an unspoken rule that you have the right not to come out as a gay person. This is socially respected by both straight and gay people in France. Contrary to my own beliefs, a French person would not feel hypocritical about keeping silent regarding his or her sexual orientation. When it comes to being “out” in the US and what it means to be “out” in France, I often think of the “Don’t Ask. Don’t Tell” policy that the US military has implemented. In France, a positive version of this policy can be witnessed in society. Part of this is to have the freedom to be oneself while also having the freedom not to define oneself in public. The French act out by being themselves and not using a label in public. I often feel that in the US, you are required to wear a visible identity more openly. Everything is much more public and more politicized in the US, even one’s own body has to carry a political label.

