



# SIGnals

Rainbow SIG Newsletter

NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Spring 2007, Vol. 14

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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## *Walking a fine line: A student's perspective on being out and studying abroad*

Submitted by: Thomas Lavenir - James Madison University, USA

While feelings of duality and of being "constantly on a tight rope" with who one is, is not uncommon for many LGBT individuals, it is especially an issue for queer people of color. This one James Madison University student attributes her 'balancing act' to her traditional Korean upbringing while living in the very liberal environment of the US of America. While she is comfortable being out, she is selective in terms of whom she shares and tells. "To me, it's a merit system as to whether or not you get to know my personal and private life. I'm very social, but I'm also very private as well." Chris is a Korean American student, senior at JMU, who spent her life "half in the city, half of it in the countryside."

During the Spring 2006 semester she decided to study abroad in England.

Her decision of being out was based on her connection with the other individuals involved in her program. "I was out while studying abroad only to the few blockmates whom I was sure would be okay with it." A lot of her blockmates were a few years younger than she was, and being in a new place she did not want to exclude herself more "by making all the girls on my wing wonder if I was checking them out... in hindsight I probably should have told more of them... The only thing I feel bad about was not going out with them more often!"

Her fear of being disowned by her family if they were to find out is very real to her since "everywhere I go, there seems to be an ear or linkage to my family name which I'm not supposed to 'dishonor' in any way." Nevertheless her being

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## *Mexico City in favor of gay ceremony*

Submitted by: Ismael Crôte - University of Guadalajara, Mexico

For years I have been longing to submit an article worthy of our RAINBOW SIG Newsletter. Mexico is not really the best place for good news as far as GLBTQ issues are concerned... until recently.

Mexico City's Legislative Assembly had a majority vote in November of last year to legalize unions of people of the same gender. It was designed to give judicial recognition to de facto relationships. March 20, 2007 was set as date to start receiving applications for partnerships. So far, there are twenty eight applicants awaiting for doors to open. Not all of them are gay love relationships. This new legislation drafted a much broader recognition to include heterosexual couples that chose not to get married, distant relatives that live under the same roof to become legal "next of kin" and multiple possible combinations of non-traditional family situations. It is not as comprehensive as the ones approved in The Netherlands (2000), Belgium (2002), Massachusetts (2004), and Spain (2005) since it does not authorize adoption, and is not equal to marriage, but it does protect

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## Mexico City in favor of gay ceremony

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inheritance rights, and the legal obligation to reciprocate on providing meals, and care for each other –benefits included.

If this were not good enough news for Mexicans, the northern state of Coahuila's congress voted to include the "civil pact of solidarity" on January of this year. This one too is very similar to Mexico City's version of partnership legal recognition to include all non-traditional possibilities. Its availability was also worth noticing. It came into effect on the very following day of its approval. Karla López and Karina Almaguer became the first GLBTTQ couple to say "I do" in all of Mexico.

These changes do not have a federal impact yet. They are groundbreaking in Mexico nonetheless.

As an international education administrator, it was always difficult for me to witness legal and social advancement as far as equating rights for GLBTTQ members in some countries of the western world. 110 million Mexicans still have a long way to go, but what was just a Cinderella dream to many of us not long ago, became true this year. Now I just need to find Prince Charming.



### A Few LGBT Related Quotes:

- *"In itself, homosexuality is as limiting as heterosexuality: the ideal should be to be capable of loving a woman or a man; either, a human being, without feeling fear, restraint, or obligation."* [by: Simone de Beauvoir]
- *"You'll never find peace of mind until you listen to your heart."* [by: George Michael- Kissing A Fool]
- *"If homosexuality is a disease, let's all call in queer to work: "Hello. Can't work today, still queer"* [by: Robin Tyler quotes]
- *"Why is it that, as a culture, we are more comfortable seeing two men holding guns than holding hands?"* [by: Ernest Gaines]

## A session not to be missed during NAFSA's National Conference

Submitted by: Bradley Rink - CIEE Study Center, South Africa

While there are no specific GLBT-focused workshops or session this year during NAFSA's 59th Annual Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota that the SIG leadership team is aware of, Bradley Rink (Resident Director, CIEE Study Center - South Africa) will be co-presenting a session entitled: *A Dialogue on Diversity as a Learning/Training Tool* during which he will be sharing "GLBTQIA examples." The session will take place on June 1, 2007 from 8am until 9:15am.

The session abstract reads as follows:

"Incorporate these strategies as learning tools to expand the notion of diversity in an education abroad context. This panel offers an alternative to traditional diversity training. Our model includes country-specific historical and political background with in-depth discussions on gender, ethnicity, GLBT and disability issues."

The presenters are:

- Thuy Doan - University of Minnesota,
- Irene Gawel - interstudy,
- Bradley Rink - CIEE, and
- Bradley J. Titus - University of Minnesota

"Dialogues on diversity frequently establish lines along traditional binaries of identity: male/female; black/white; gay/straight. While it may seem obvious to think beyond these, examples or case studies are not easy to find. Using the South African example, this presentation is intended to illuminate opportunities to discuss issues of identity and culture—focusing on GLBTQIA examples—beyond traditional thinking. This presentation intends to highlight examples of sexual and gender identity across racial/ethnic and traditional/modern cultural lines." -Bradley Rink

# Questions About Being an "Out" Teacher in Germany

Submitted by: Andrew Marcione, TEFL/TESOL Berlin

*Rainbow SIG Newsletter Reporter:* What are the benefits of being an "out" professional in TEFL/TESOL education?

*A. Marcione:* My students do not necessarily know that I am gay. There is no direct benefit for me to say that I am gay. Saying that I am American to a German person will probably have the same effect and not cause any immediate concern. Being an out professional is not really an issue as Berlin is a very liberal city. In my daily routine, I have to judge my students when it comes to issues of my own sexual orientation and assess if they are accepting of it or not. For instance, I listen to my students and comments that they make on current events. Like anywhere else, Berlin also has conservative people who have very strong feelings, for instance, towards the local Turkish population and what they perceive as the lack of Turkish integration into German life. In my professional life, I do not behave in a way that is camp albeit I am sure that some of my students have an idea about my sexual orientation. Overall, it is not an issue that I bring up unless the students inquire about it. Being a gay man in Berlin has a lot of advantages because there is a lot of social and cultural offerings. However, I am also prone to caution regarding one's personal safety in any large city

Before coming to Germany, I was warned about the presence of skinheads who are known for their violent behavior against immigrant and gays. I do not see such youths a lot, but in the very few occasions that I have seen them on the street, I just walked towards another direction. I don't feel personally threatened but it is common sense to avoid trouble if you can. I have also been inspired by the mayor of Berlin, who is openly out as a gay politician. During his first election campaign, the now mayor said "I am gay and that is good." He just won re-election and his partner is also visible in public. The mayor of Hamburg is also gay and you notice that Germans in general do not blink an eye with gay men in public offices.

*Rainbow SIG Newsletter Reporter:* Is there a cultural difference between the US and Germany with regards to being an "out" professional?

*A. Marcione:* Berlin is a very relaxed city when it comes to sexuality. People in the US make a much bigger deal about such issues and it also depends on what industry you work in as a gay person. There are a lot of religious people in the US who make a "gay" issue out of nothing. In Germany, on the other hand, religion plays less of an issue in public roles. The current Pope,



who is German, has a lot of popular support in Bavaria, the catholic south of Germany. He touches on a lot of issues, including his disapproval of gay marriage, that reveal a certain degree of controversy within Germany. There are distinct catholic and lutheran ethics that stand in contrast with one another. The northern parts of Germany, which have a distinct lutheran heritage, are seemingly more open minded about sexuality issues. Being in Berlin, I have not uncovered that people express any (degrading) moral judgement regarding sexual orientation as I have experienced in the US. When I lived in Arizona, it seemed that Americans were always fighting more about their civil rights whereas here in the European Union all of the member countries have to sign an agreement that requires the protection of minority groups, including people with a different sexual orientation.

## UK Perspective: Being "out" as gay and working "in" international education

Submitted by: Mark Simmons, University of London

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

*M. Simmons:* I don't feel it is necessary to tell people that I am gay, but I do not hide it either, especially if I am asked about it. I never had any negative experience in the work place. Overall, I don't want to label myself as gay albeit that I still think that it is relevant to discuss sexual orientation. In the UK, I am happy with the legislation that has been enacted. Now we just have to be aware of not becoming complacent about the public recognition we have achieved. I appreciate that I can have a picture of my partner on my office desk without being questioned about it. As a gay professional in international education it makes it easier to travel a lot for work. I don't have a family life commitment in the traditional sense. I enjoy my life and my present job because I live in London where diversity is valued. Previously, I worked with the British Council, which was awarded last year by a UK lobbying group as the friendliest GLBT employee organization in the country. The Council was credited for offering partner benefits for gay employees and its value towards cultural diversity. On a more personal level, I believe that as an openly



gay person this became a benefit as I was more likely to be considered for a promotion in such an organization. With my present employer, sexual orientation is also respected in the workplace. Especially, working in London is a benefit because it is a much more liberal place. For instance, if I were in Bradford or Wales, it would be much more difficult to be an out professional because there is less acceptance of cultural diversity. I feel much more comfortable being out in London. There are a lot of gay professional groups such as, for example, the Gay Chamber of Commerce where you can network and meet other gay professionals. The University of London has the largest workforce in British education with nearly 15,000 employees. There is a gay network-

ing group in our organization that allows me to mix with other colleagues from different departments. I see this as a benefit because I am meeting people across a wide spectrum of the university and gives my job another dimension. On a side note, albeit it is not a taboo topic at my work or the field of international education, I still have not met a large number of professionals who self identify as lesbian or transgender. It is something I would have to investigate further or simply have not noticed. I don't have an explanation why gay men seem to have more visibility in the workplace than lesbians or transgender colleagues.

*Rainbow SIG Newsletter Reporter:* Is there a cultural difference between the US and UK as far as being an "out" professional?

*M. Simmons:* Growing up gay in the UK, I was always looking towards the US as an example of freedom. I thought it was a very open and liberal society. My view has changed when I started working as an out professional in international education. Through American friends and personal visits, I now know that it is a more socially conservative country. I do not find it an attractive place for gays. I would not seek out employment opportunities there, know

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## Walking a fine line..

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out was never a consideration for the selection of her study abroad program destination.

The intricacies of being out was put to another level for Chris when she lived in Ashby Hall (a residence hall where foreign and US American students share, explore and challenge their passion for, lifestyles of other cultures, countries and languages). "Ashby had many conservatives, and of course many boys who thought it was 'hot' for girls to make out with each other." She ended up telling one person whom she thought she could trust since he had come out to her, but instead gossiped about her sexuality to everyone. "It was a shame, because he was in the same situation as I was [in not letting everyone know]."

As a result of living in Ashby Hall and befriending many foreign students, she has not ever come across a foreign student who has come out to her. She has had friends cry on her shoulder because of the various culture clashes, issues with friends and the "rudeness" of Americans, but they never came out to me "... though I've had a few hit-on me while intoxicated but never really come out." She doesn't blame them for not coming out. It is stressful enough to be in a foreign country trying to make friends, especially in the South of the US where people are very conservative and "with the Christian kids being the ones so apt to take the international kids under their wings."

Chris' experiences in the Ashby residence hall did not deter her from playing an active role in JMU's LGBT student association. While she may not be exactly sure what the future holds for her, she is definitely ready to show her pride during the Lavender graduation!

## UK Perspective... [Continued from Page 3]

ing that there is a large lack of civil rights for gays. I also think that the gay man's view of "family" in the UK may be somewhat different to North America. By family, I mean the nuclear family of a couple who can be either same sex or otherwise with children. The number of gay male couples who are bringing up adopted or surrogate children is tiny, so small that it makes the front page headlines when either they adopt or arrange a surrogate birth. In general, I know that in North America that it is much more common than here. Perhaps this is due to British gay men being more conservative and conventional, I do not know. I know of no one first hand or by association that has adopted here, whilst I know of at least six gay couples in North America who have adopted. British law allows gays to adopt, it is just not common, perhaps it is due to the acute shortage of available babies? I don't know.



## Rainbow SIG Leadership:

- \* 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 Jesurun (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*.

## Rainbow SIG Advisory Board:

- \* Mark Lenhart (CET Academic Programs) *Co-Chair*,
- \* J Scott Van Der Meid (Brandeis University) *Co-Chair*,
- \* Amy Bartnick-Blume (IFSA-Butler, 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 (Middlebury College),
- \* 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 (IES),
- \* 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)

# Rainbow SIG

## 14th Annual NAFSA Reception

Wednesday, May 30 2007

8:00 – 10:00 p.m.

Hors d'oeuvres and cash bar

**Palomino:** 825 Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55402  
(in LaSalle Plaza on Hennepin between 8th and 9th Avenue- Skyway Level)  
<http://www.palomino.com/index.php?cook=1&locations=Minneapolis>

Validated Parking after 4pm: LaSalle Plaza Garage -  
Enter on 9th Street (between LaSalle & Hennepin, near the YMCA sign)

The Rainbow SIG Co-Chairs and Advisory Board gratefully acknowledge:  
CIEE, CET Academic Programs, Denmark's International Study Program, interstudy,  
the Institute for Study Abroad at Butler University, and SIT Study Abroad  
for their generous contributions to this event.

### Updates from your Co-Chairs:

Submitted by: Mark and Scott

The following two projects will be outlined and members will be encouraged to participate, in various elements of these two projects, during the annual business meeting in Minneapolis.

\* Website Redesign/ Content Management:

Based on the SIG Survey conducted last spring, the Co-Chairs along with several advisory board members have been discussing upgrades to the SIG web site. The web site was created and has been maintained by the hard work and contributions of Kathy Sideli, Susan Carty, and their colleagues at Indiana. Discussions to date indicate a desire to share the burden of maintaining the site and upgrade the content/navigation.

\* GLBT Scholarship Options:

We continue to explore different options with various foundations with the hopes of establishing a way to offer up GLBT scholarships to students.

Volunteers Needed in MN:

The Rainbow SIG needs volunteers to help staff the SIG information table during the conference. Our Rainbow SIG banner will be displayed and materials need to be handed out to people who walk by: SIG newsletters, brochures, rainbow flag stickers, and invitations to our reception. You will also have a supply of SIG logo pins which you can sell for \$5.00. We request volunteers for a minimum of a 1 hour block - longer blocks of time would be wonderful. We need volunteers from Tuesday through Friday noon; generally from 8am – 5pm. Please e-mail Mark Lenhart <[mlenhart@academic-travel.com](mailto:mlenhart@academic-travel.com)> with tentative or confirmed blocks of time that you could help out with.

Nominations for New Co-Chair Urgently Needed:

J. Scott Van Der Meid will be stepping down this summer as Co-Chair after two years. Mark Lenhart will continue for 2008. We are seeking a SIG member to replace Scott for a two-year term. We also are seeking names to place in nomination, preferably a woman to reach a form of gender balance again, but this is not a requirement. Send any names to either Mark <[mlenhart@academic-travel.com](mailto:mlenhart@academic-travel.com)> or Scott <[svanderm@brandeis.edu](mailto:svanderm@brandeis.edu)> so that we have a nomination slate going into the Annual Meeting where we will hold the election of officers.

### Rainbow SIG's Conference Schedule:

**\*Monday, May 28, 2007\***

4-5pm - *Rainbow SIG Advisory Board Mtg.* IFSA-Butler Suite, Hilton Hotel (Suite # TBA)

**\*Wednesday, May 30, 2007\***

1:45-3pm - *Rainbow SIG Annual Business Mtg.* in the "Regency" room of the Hyatt Regency Hotel

8-10pm - *Rainbow SIG 14th Annual Reception* at the Palomino- 825 Hennepin Avenue

**\*Friday, June 1, 2007\***

8-9:15am - *Session: "A Dialogue on Diversity as a Learning/Training Tool"*  
Location TBA

The Rainbow SIG has not designated a SIG hotel as in previous years, but you might find the following resources helpful:

1. <http://www.gaympls.com/>
2. <http://www.lavendermagazine.com/>
3. <http://www.glbtminneapolis.org/>

If you would like to submit an item, or article for our next edition, or if you have any questions, and/or comments regarding the Rainbow SIG Newsletter: *SIGnals*, please feel free to contact

Newsletter Co-Editors: Eero Jesurun <[ejesurun@ciee.org](mailto:ejesurun@ciee.org)>, Thomas Lavenir <[lavenitp@jmu.edu](mailto:lavenitp@jmu.edu)>