

Rainbow SIG Newsletter

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Rainbow SIG Celebrates Its 10th Anniversary in Salt Lake City

Jacqueline Bedard, University of California

We have come a long way! This year the NAFSA Rainbow SIG (formerly the Lesbigan SIG) will celebrate its 10th Anniversary as a gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender interest and service group. We hope you can join us at the NAFSA National Conference in Salt Lake City from May 24-30, 2003 to help celebrate with various professional and social activities. In addition, the Rainbow SIG has coordinated several GLBT-content sessions for the entire NAFSA community.

We hope you will schedule time to take part in the Rainbow SIG's most exciting series of visible events and meetings yet. Additional information can be found at the Rainbow SIG table near the conference registration area.

For those who would like to learn more about and participate in the activities of the largest NAFSA SIG, there are two meetings scheduled in Salt Lake City: the SIG Advisory Board Meeting and the Annual Public Meeting.

NAFSA Workshop and Sessions

On **Sunday, May 24**, there is a one-day workshop from **8:00 am-5:00 pm** that helps to prepare educators to meet the differing cultural concepts of sexuality and identity, entitled: "Same Sex, Different Cultures: Examining Intersections of Culture, Identity and

Sexuality." Experienced professionals in the field and overseas resident directors will conduct this pioneering workshop.

On **Tuesday, May 27, from 8:00-9:00 pm** the Rainbow SIG advisory Board will hold its annual face-to-face advisory board meeting. The Board is comprised of volunteer advisors from around the globe and meets annually to informally discuss matters of significance to the Rainbow SIG. Throughout the year the two co-chairs call on the Advisory Board with regularity, requesting feedback, suggestions and advice on a range of matters.

On **Wednesday, May 28, from 1:45-3:00 pm** the Rainbow SIG will hold its annual public meeting and elect new members to serve in various SIG positions. This meeting is open to the public. Come learn about the SIG's operation and activities.

On **Wednesday, May 28**, the Rainbow SIG will have its 10th Anniversary Celebration reception (with a cash bar) from **7:00-9:00 pm** at the **Peery Hotel** in Salt Lake City. Many sponsors have contributed to this event.

On **Thursday, May 29, from 1:00-2:15 pm**, please join us at the poster session "Celebrating Ten Years of Education and Service," with nearly 15 different presenters who will be providing information on current GLBT issues within the field, representing various world regions, and offering resources available to serve students, advisors, and scholars.

On **Friday, May 30, from 9:30-10:45 am** there is a panel session with GLBT content entitled: "Dating and Sexuality Issues Abroad." This will include a discussion by study abroad professionals and a resident director who will also share results of a sexual activity and dating abroad survey.

Recognition and Support from the Field for the Rainbow SIG

The Rainbow SIG would like to express a special thank you to the following organizations and individuals for their financial support and contribution to the Tenth Anniversary Celebration SIG reception. This year's gathering recognizes ten years of providing services and resources that pertain to GLBT issues in the field of international education. With much appreciation to the following:

GOLD

Boston University
Butler IFSA
IES
Earlham College
CIEE

SILVER

Jan Moore Kieling
AIFS in London
DIS
Kathy Sideli
Anonymous
Kevin Morrison
Mark Lenhart
Susan Carty
Jeanette Mancusi & Kim Killingsworth
Mark Thackaberry
Andrew Haukebu
Bo Keppel

BRONZE

Pusch Family
Julie Trimpe
Jacqueline Bedard
Peter Kerrigan
Gonzolo Isidro
Joe Murnan
Susan Schmidt

Additional Resources - NAFSA Salt Lake City

Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Utah www.glccu.com/home.html
Unity Utah, the State's Gay and Lesbian Political Action Committee
www.unityutah.org/
University of Utah, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Resource Center
www.sa.utah.edu/lgbt/

SIG Reports to NAFSA Board of Directors

Kevin Morrison, Earlham College

Every winter, all NAFSA Special Interest Groups are asked to provide an annual report on their activities to the NAFSA Board of Directors. This year's report included information on our recent name change to Rainbow SIG, as well as the change in our mission statement to reflect a more welcoming environment for transgendered persons within our SIG. The report also talked about services provided to SIG members, such as the SIG website, the Rainbow listserv, and the new members guide. In addition to providing service for our members, the report also included information as to how the Rainbow SIG provides services to the wider NAFSA and International Education community through the website, and through presentations and workshops presented

by SIG members at regional and national conferences. In looking back at our work the past year, it is clear to see that the work of the Rainbow SIG is done by many, and we greatly appreciate everyone's involvement in the success of our SIG.

Coming Out and Coming Back: Re-entry Issues for GLBT College Students who Study Abroad

Andy Dunlap, Susquehanna University

Note: This is Text from a panel presentation at the CIEE Conference on "Underrepresented Faces and Non-Traditional Places", Atlanta, GA, November 2002.

Re-entry issues for GLBT students can be assessed within the framework of clinical social work. Identity development for gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual youth touch on some of the issues that they may face upon returning from study abroad. It might be useful to consider as a beginning conversation towards understanding developmental issues as they apply to study abroad and GLBT students. Notably, transgender and bisexual people will experience different challenges in establishing positive identities. Also, it should be noted that members of multiple minority groups are likely to have much richer challenges associated with developing positive GLBT identities.

Let me begin by sharing some ideas about human development. Eric Erickson, a psychologist and prominent voice in the field of developmental psychology suggests the idea of developmental tasks over the course of a lifetime. Erickson proposes that as we move through life we first must learn to trust, then to be autonomous, then to learn to take initiative, then to learn to be industrious, next comes establishing a secure sense of identity, then resolving issues about intimacy, then move towards creation in our lives, and finally establish an integrated sense of who we are in the face of our impending deaths.

As traditional aged college students struggle with these issues they can be said to be experiencing developmental difficulties. Some students might struggle for a semester or two, some for longer, obviously they are not mentally ill, simply figuring themselves out. Typically, once underclassmen have mastered being at school (i.e. trust, autonomy, initiative, and industriousness) they come to the larger issues of college life. Identity: Who am I? And Intimacy: Can my genuine self be with someone else?

Students who study abroad are on a multi-layered voyage; one of those layers has to do with developing a firmer sense of who they are in the world. For most students study abroad is an opportunity to move out of the comfortable incubator of their culture and into the world. Our hope is that through the action of stepping outside of their comfort zone, they will return with a greater perspective on that which is familiar. We hope that

they will return with a greater understanding of their role in the world, and with a stronger sense of who they are.

Enter the gay or lesbian student who for years has been aware (or unaware) of their difference. Who for years may have worked just as diligently (or not) as their heterosexual peers towards greater competency and maturity, and, who, for years may have been dreaming of studying abroad. Unfortunately for them, the challenge of developing a secure identity gets a little more complicated.

Since the early 1970s, researchers have noted a predictable set of stages that non-heterosexuals move through as we develop a firm sense of self-identity. Notable in the field are Vivian Cass and Richard Troiden, each working in the 1970s. They present similar models observing stages that lesbians and gay men move through as they develop a healthy sense of who they are. In the past 25 years others have researched and refined these models or proposed their own similar models, and most recently, Susan Meyer and Alan Schwitzer developed a model paralleling Cass' but recognizing that twenty-five years later there are more resources and support available for GLBT youth.

Common themes emerge from many of these models. Many of them describe the same stages in a different language. These stages are: identifying a difference within oneself, gaining information about this difference, exploring the reality of this difference as it exists outside of oneself, internalizing these explorations, and privileging these experiences. Some of these models go one step further to suggest that the integration of sexual orientation into ones fuller identity is a final task, and I would tend to agree with them.

The developmental tasks of identity and intimacy are more complicated for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students because of a persistent level of heterosexual bias in our culture. It's important to realize that GLBT students may need more support than their peers not because of who they are, but because of the culture that they live in.

Gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual students can be expected to have much the same kinds of study abroad experiences as their peers. However, for many of them, the role of outsider is one that they are already intimately familiar with before they even leave home. Because of this, many GLBT students may be better able to manage a transition into a new culture. Some students may find that there is an established GLBT culture to which they can plug into in their new host city, and may have an easier time integrating than their heterosexual peers.

GLBT students in early stages of identity development who study abroad can have a parallel experience to "getting away" to college for the first time. Studying in a place where no one knows you gives you a freedom of deciding if it is time to break from old expectations of family and friends. For some students, study abroad can be a time to experiment with coming out. Some students might make important first steps towards developing a positive GLBT identity while abroad. They might explore social

opportunities or do research that they would not consider doing at home. They might experiment with [romantic] relationships.

Upon returning home these students may actually experience a painful re-closeting, returning to a life that they had all but left behind with limited or no support for the important growth that they have experienced overseas. These students are perhaps most at risk, and you simply will not know who they are unless you have already established your office as a resource for GLBT students.

Students in later stages of coming out who have integrated a higher degree of acceptance may find themselves struggling with coming out again to a new host family or peers and should be advised appropriately. However, these students are also more likely to have thoroughly researched living arrangements or cultural expectations with sexual orientation diversity in mind. They are also the students who are likely to come to you ahead of time and ask about GLBT resources, and the ones who will not be shy about telling you about their experiences afterwards. Like their heterosexual peers reintegration issues for them may be more straightforward, revolving around returning to an environment that seems to have changed little, while they have grown immensely.

So what can we as professionals do to help lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students get the most out of their study abroad experience and support them as best we can upon their return?

A good first step is tuning into the very real difficulties for GLBT people. The American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, National Association of Social Workers, American Medical Association all agree that a non-heterosexual orientation is a normal variance in the human experience. Despite this, many GLBT folk get the message that their sexual orientation is just a choice and that they can change it like they can change their clothes. Therapies aimed at changing sexual orientation have been discredited but continue to do great harm to GLBT students.

There is a strong conservative cultural bias against gays and lesbians in the United States. We are still treated as second-class citizens; our relationships are not equally recognized, in no state are we allowed to marry and receive the legal privileges associated with heterosexual marriage. [Editor's note: with the exception of Vermont]. In many venues, such as the Boy Scouts of America, we can legally be discriminated against. If you don't believe me, just ask the Boy Scouts of America.

It is important to realize that the GLBT civil rights movement has made great progress in the last quarter of a century, but that in the United States we have a long way to go before GLBT people are accorded equal citizenship.

Why is this important? Because it is the [cultural] environment that GLBT students live in every day. It is important to realize that these environmental factors are the reason that GLBT youth are more at risk to be depressed and to consider suicide than their heterosexual peers. They are also three times more likely to suffer from alcohol or drug

addiction. These environmental factors, heterosexism and homophobia, are important reasons that GLBT youth in the United States have a more complicated series of developmental tasks to perform than their culturally endorsed peers. These environmental factors are the reason that GLBT students may need extra support when returning from studying abroad. It is not because they are different, but because they are second-class citizens in their own culture.

Trying to understand how gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students' experiences abroad might be different is an important part of helping them. We can do this by informing ourselves about the process of identity development for GLBT students. We can make some assumptions based on data they have provided about themselves. We can take into account the country in question and the perceived climate for GLBT students and we can make some assumptions. But in the end, we need to realize that GLBT students are all individuals with individual experiences, just like their heterosexual peers. It is crucial to be well informed about possible student experiences and equally important to realize that, in the end, all of our assumptions are just that.

It is also important to tune in to your own struggles with homophobia and heterosexism. If your level of internalized homophobia is such that you cannot sit in the same room with a GLBT student, then you should be referring that student for assistance elsewhere until you can. If you are not able to meet with a lesbian student without viewing her in the full complexity that you would view any other student then you should consider referring her to a colleague who can. If you cannot refrain from compulsively talking about your opposite-sex spouse while meeting with GLBT students, think about sending them to someone else for assistance. If your vision of the GLBT experience is limited to a bedroom issue, please take opportunities, like this panel today, to educate yourself. Gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual students do not come to your office to give you an opportunity to work through your issues, they come to your office for the same reasons that every other student does. Consider doing some of your own work around these issues, maybe invite a representative from a local GLBT group to come and speak to your staff. Tuning into your own issues about sexual orientation and gender identity are important components of being a good ally, but it would be a mistake to believe that your work stops there.

Concrete and visible actions to demonstrate that there is a safe zone within the study abroad office need to be taken to show students that they can get support there and that they would not be rejected because of their sexual orientation. Set obvious signs out in the office. For example, safe zone stickers, pamphlets targeted at gay and lesbian students, and travel resources of GLBT youth are a good start. Know that GLBT students are perhaps more likely to access resources electronically, so have lots of good information on your web page.

While GLBT students have need for many of the same types of information as their heterosexual peers, they often want specific information about some things like the perceived climate towards GLBT students in the country that they are studying in. They might like to know if there is a possibility of marrying someone of the same sex in the

country they are traveling to. Popular vacation spots for GLBT people are important to know about. If your office provides information on safer sex while abroad, GLBT students need to be included in this. Here is the hard part: Give all this info to everyone. Do not make people ask for it. The ones that really need it will not ask for it.

In the final analysis the most important thing that you can do to aid students either returning from study abroad or considering it for the first time, is to make your office known as a safe place on campus. You can do this by educating yourself on GLBT issues, being visible in your support for GLBT students, and being inclusive of issues particular to them.

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Lessons from a Rainbow Nation: A Look at South Africa

Bradley Rink, SECUSSA-South Africa

Post-Apartheid South Africa revealed a great deal about the true meaning of GLBT people's rights as human rights. The opportunities for students and educators to learn and benefit from South Africa's journey are many. Not only did the transition from a white-led government to one that consolidates the rights of all South Africans happen without a bloody exchange of authority—although many, including school children lost their lives in the struggle—but the first post-Apartheid government under Nelson Mandela was built upon a spirit of cooperation and respect for all, including South Africans who are their former white oppressors.

The term "rainbow nation" itself encompasses the idea that the fabric of South Africa is woven from many different—and differing—threads. Today a South African citizen may speak any number of eleven official languages, may come from a myriad of culture groups, may identify as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and yes, even heterosexual.

Many have credited the South African Constitution of 1996 for recognizing the rights of all of these members of society not as "gay rights," "Afrikaaner rights" or "Xhosa-speaking rights" but using the all-encompassing term: human rights. The Constitution is built upon three main pillars: dignity, equality, and human rights. Since 1996 the strength of those pillars has been constantly tested—with very favorable results not only for GLBT communities, but also for the South African society as a whole. In nearly every lawsuit, the rights of GLBT people have been tested against one small but extremely powerful clause. In the South African Constitution of 1996, article 9 (iii) declares that: "the state may not unfairly discriminate against anyone on the basis (...) of sexual orientation."

The clause's simplicity and understated tone defies the North American notion of complicated "legalese" yet carries an extremely powerful punch. That tiny clause has also paved the way for a number of landmark decisions. Consider these examples:

In 1998 a lesbian policewoman wins a case against the Minister of Safety and Security that secures rights for same-sex spousal dependency and benefits.

In 1999 the Constitutional Court finds section 28(2) of the Aliens Control Act of 1991 unconstitutional and makes it illegal to deport same sex foreign partners of South African citizens.

In 2001 the case of DeVos versus The Minister of Social Welfare, the rights of gay and lesbian couples to jointly be the parents of a minor adopted child are secured.

Other legal cases still await decision, such as the one that challenges the prohibition against same-sex marriage.

The struggle for human rights is never an easy one. While Constitutional rights may seem to come swiftly and provide a broad blanket of security to all people in the rainbow nation, cultural barriers still impede some, especially when it comes to the previously disadvantaged communities; people of African, "Coloured" (mixed race), and Asian-Indian descent. Part of the disconnect between the notion of rights for all people regardless of their identity comes with the idea that not all identities may have a place within certain cultural contexts. The GLBT community is often saturated with images of an "international" GLBT culture, making the assumption that all GLBT people have been given the same keys to get them out of the closet and into a full life of living "out and proud." Unfortunately, a popular media image of international GLBT culture tends to be that of a white, gay male who has sufficient resources to live a life filled with freedom

and without many boundaries. Does a South African of a Xhosa or Sotho cultural background have the same sense of a gay identity as an Afrikaaner? Does an English-speaking gay man from Cape Town have the same connections to a broader gay context as an Afrikaans-speaking woman from the rural Free-State? In both examples, this is most likely not the case.

Living in South Africa one sees examples of the clash between the unprecedented freedoms allowed by the Constitution and the slow pace of cultural change. In many instances when faced with the prospect of gay marriages or transgendered teachers, those outside of the GLBT communities might just shrug their shoulders and give their own linguistically-appropriate version of the South African saying: "jawellnofine...sure, whatever, live and let live!"

Recently, in January 2003, the GLBT community in South Africa gained worldwide media attention in the aftermath of the murder of nine sex-workers at Sizzlers, a male-to-male massage parlor in Sea Point, Cape Town in January 2003. Initially, the South African Lesbian and Gay Equality Project said they believed that the murders could be a hate crime. Some international observers were intrigued by the horror that took place at a gay establishment. While many would have immediately drawn connections of extreme homophobia between this terrible crime and the sexual identities of the male victims involved, tolerant attitudes prevailed both in the public at large and in the South African media. One elderly woman who lived near Sizzlers expressed her sadness as a result of the tragedy and noted that neither the work, nor the sexual identities of those killed mattered whatsoever.

What mattered was that those murdered were "good people who always greeted her and were friendly in every way [to her]." Fortunately, there has been no repeat of such slayings in South Africa. We can only hope that from tolerant and accepting laws come tolerant and accepting attitudes. And in many recent cases this is what can be experienced in South Africa. Many challenges still face the "new" South Africa, however. The AIDS pandemic is rapidly tearing away at much of the social and economic fabric of this young nation. Soaring prices for food and fuel threaten the livelihood of those already living on the edge of survival. And radical white-supremacist groups from within spread hate and intolerance against this rainbow nation.

In the face of all of these challenges, many South Africans seem to have an unlimited supply of hope and grace that is anchored in the 1996 constitution.

Resources for further GLBT information on South Africa

Legal Information: Lesbian & Gay Equality Project www.equality.org.za

Culture, Travel, Queer links: Q on-line www.q.co.za

HIV/AIDS Information: Triangle Project www.triangle.org.za

Rights for Everyone: Media, Religion, and Sexual Orientation in the Dominican Republic

María Filomena González, FLACSO- Dominican Republic

As in many countries that make up Latin America, the Catholic Church in the Dominican Republic has an overwhelming influence on society. Catholic concepts, ideas and dogmas produce a fundamental core of social beliefs professed by the Dominican people. The Catholic Church and the Dominican State have utilized each other to reinforce their positions of power in society. Because of this relationship, the conservative mentality of the traditional Catholic Church marks aspects of social life in a more evident way than in many other countries. The conservative position of certain sectors inside the Dominican government, due to an authoritarian past, has purported to deny basic rights to persons that belong to the GLBT community, rights that are recognized without any discussion when referring to persons who are considered “normal.” This attitude is also present also in the national media.

During the 2001 celebration of the Santo Domingo International Book Fair, a group of NGOs dedicated to promoting human rights and anti-discrimination strategies, set up an exposition stand called “The Pink Booth.” In this booth, NGOs that work for the rights of women, Haitian immigrants, black Dominican women, the handicapped and the GLBT community were present. The Commission in charge of the Book Fair decided to close the booth after a prominent local newspaper published an article entitled “Homosexual Promotion in the Book Fair.” The article asked the question “What would happen if your son, after arriving from the Book Fair, instead of educational materials, took brochures that discuss homosexual relations and lesbianism, without having passed any kind of official censor and using vulgar terms?” The booth displayed material about the rights of the GLBT community and about AIDS prevention. This material content was considered “pornographic” by the same newspaper.

The booth’s closing provoked heated polemics in which the right to free expression and tolerance in the media were debated. Renowned critics responded to this incident by supporting the freedom of expression and a tolerance toward the GLBT community. Since there was no proof of any “distribution of pornographic material to children,” the Book Fair Commission allowed the Pink Booth to be reopened with the agreement that “they would not give out pornography to children.”

The ensuing public discussion of this incident allowed groups that work with the GLBT community to explain their work in the newspapers and discuss GLBT rights in a public forum -- a new trend that had not happened before in Dominican media.

Some months later, the GLBT groups requested permission from the Dominican government for a gay and lesbian rights march. The government granted permission,

surprising many in the country, and this event was celebrated and reviewed by the national newspapers. This media opening towards the GLBT community does not indicate that old prejudices have disappeared, but it does suggest that a window of opportunity has been created. GLBT stereotypes are maintained in good part by the official attitudes of the Dominican Catholic Church.

In the summer of 2002, groups that support the recognition of the GLBT rights were denied permission to celebrate a gay pride march. In the last months, newspapers and radio and television programs have dedicated time to the issue of homosexuals and the role of the media. In the midst of arguments in favor and against, the polemic seems to endure, but the root of the debate is not so much if “homosexual characters” on television are suitable for children, but if gays should be permitted to work and be present in the media at all. In the Dominican Republic, no laws exist against “homosexuality” and the ones that referred to “acts against the good customs or the morale” have been eliminated. Hence, the GLBT community is not persecuted legally; however, depending on their social status, gays or lesbians may feel more or less perturbed since the more conservative segments of Dominican society frown upon any public display of their sexual preferences. There still remains a lot of work to be done to overcome these social prejudices and ideological obstacles.

The question for a study abroad advisor is: how, in this culture, can a GLBT student have a rich intercultural experience? Certainly, I do not assume to have the solution to all the problems that any student may encounter in the Dominican Republic. I only have some recommendations that are useful for heterosexual and homosexual students alike:

Try to blend, mingle with the local population trying to use the same type of clothing and fashions. To use fashions that have not yet been generalized among the Dominican youth will forestall integration and draw attention.

Be cautious when speaking of religious or sexual preference; these are delicate issues for the majority of Dominicans. These issues, especially sexuality, are best discussed with persons with whom you have trust. Do not feel the need to inform everyone in the Dominican Republic of your sexual preferences.

Have a great deal of care when striking up conversations and planning social activities with people you meet on the street. Many Dominican men think that it is easier to abuse gays or lesbians because they are assumed to be “weaker.”

Be very cautious about showing romantic affection in public. A heterosexual couple showing affection in public is frowned upon; if it is a same-sex couple who show public affection, there is no telling how Dominicans will react to this.

If you have an encounter in the street with the police or the military always speak in English because American citizens are regarded with a lot of respect.

Although many mentalities change very slowly, they do tend to change in the end. Ten or twenty years ago, nobody could have imagined that Dominican newspapers would publish articles stating that persons belonging to the GLBT community have the same rights as the rest.

Note: This is text from a panel presentation at the CIEE Conference on "Underrepresented Faces and Non-Traditional Places," Atlanta, GA, November 2002.

The Current State of Research on GLBT Students Studying Abroad

David Comp, University of Chicago

Perhaps surprisingly in 2003, there are very few articles and research projects regarding GLBT students and their experiences while studying abroad. The international education field is in need of more research specifically focusing on the experiences and outcomes of GLBT students studying abroad. It is imperative that research findings be made available to our colleagues and GLBT students. Authors must submit papers for publication. There are several avenues available to disseminate results for those papers that go unpublished. Authors can present their research at international education related conferences; post significant findings to relevant listservs such as SECUSS-L, IERES-L, UNDERREP-L and INTER-L; and distribute research summaries at NAFSA Rainbow SIG meetings and at the bi-annual SECUSSA Committee on Underrepresentation in Education Abroad meetings held during the national NAFSA and annual CIEE conferences.

In an attempt to organize all of the known articles on underrepresented students studying abroad, I have compiled and annotated a bibliography for the SECUSSA Committee on Underrepresentation in Education Abroad. The purpose of this bibliography is to provide students and education abroad administrators and researchers with a broad listing of research studies, position papers, conference presentations and news articles on underrepresentation in education abroad.

This bibliography contains a growing section on GLBT students and is available via the web at the following locations:

SECUSSA Committee on Underrepresentation in Education Abroad
www.secussa.nafsa.org/underrepresentation/

Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), Commitment to Diversity
website www.ciee.org/diversity.cfm

NAFSA's Rainbow SIG Website www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/

Notifications of current research, comments and GLBT article submissions are invited and encouraged and may be sent to David Comp at dcomp@uchicago.edu

The Pink Social and Academic Scene in Melbourne, Australia

Greg Slatcher, Monash University

There is much debate and rivalry as to which is really Australia's premier city: Melbourne or Sydney, and while Melbourne may not have the brash media attention-grabbing Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras, it has a large and active lesbian and gay community that flourishes amongst one of the most tolerant social attitudes in the world. This means that in Melbourne the "community" is relatively integrated across various sections of inner city suburbs with less of a clearly defined GLBT "ghetto" than many other cities of similar size.

GLBT Melbourne can be roughly divided into a north side and a south side – of Melbourne's Yarra River that is. South side life is focused around the suburbs of Prahran and bay side St. Kudla – it is all a little bit of upscale glamour and a great deal of fashion conscious individuals. The north side attracts the bohemian, the alternative, a bit of the leather crowd, university students, and it can also be called Melbourne's lesbian "heartland."

The most recent Australian population census (2001) painted a fairly pink picture of Melbourne, reporting that we have a higher proportion of same-sex couples than either Sydney or San Francisco (8.8 per cent of metro. Melbourne couples were same-sex, compared to Sydney with 5.9 per cent and San Francisco with 5.4 per cent.) The state of Victoria (of which Melbourne is the capital) has Australia's most progressive same-sex laws. The recently enacted Gay Relationships Bill puts Victoria ahead of all other Australian states in recognizing basic human rights of lesbians and gay men. The Act acknowledges lesbian and gay relationships as equal to that of de facto heterosexual couples in terms of property, superannuation, medical decision-making and stamp duty. (There are other issues relevant to GLBT people that are still pending, such as donor insemination, adoption and parenting rights, as well as Federal laws affecting relationship recognition, immigration and social security.)

Like all Australians, GLBT Melbourne embraces summer with our aptly named "Midsumma Festival," a three-week event where lesbians, gay men and their friends organize numerous activities that are inclusive and participatory for the entire community, and is less exclusive than its sister event of Mardi Gras in Sydney.

Melbourne, however, is more than sunshine and gay festivals: our elegant tree-lined boulevards and fine Victorian architecture are set against a backdrop of sweeping skyscrapers and challenging, innovative architectural styles. A perfect partner to this ambiance is art and culture and Melbourne is rich in both, from international stage performances and musicals to theatre in the Royal Botanic Gardens. Melbourne is the centre of Australian fashion, design, multimedia technology and the creative professions where new ideas are embraced and the old ones challenged.

Melbourne is also the intellectual hub of the nation, hosting eight major universities, and is arguably, the core of biotechnology in the southern hemisphere. This creative and innovative edge has led to a burgeoning renaissance in the GLBT and wider community - obvious around every corner and in every conversation. Within the academic community, Melbourne's Monash University's GLBT community, like that of Melbourne's, is in a privileged position which allows it a Queer Department, with both Female and Male Queer Officers (and, of course, a committee), and a Queer lounge for students and faculty alike.

The Queer Department hosts weekly Queer Social Collective meetings and Queer Action Collective meetings which themselves facilitate a range of political and social events, including a Queer Week on campus. We would be keen to host any SIG member, their partner, friends and students at Monash and show them our celebrated city, so let me know if you/they are coming our way: greg.slatcher@monint.monash.edu.au

Additional GLBT Resources for Melbourne

Midsumma Festival: www.midsumma.org.au

Monash University's Queer Department:
<http://msa.monash.edu.au/representation/queer.htm>

Melbourne Architecture and Style: www.labyrinth.net.au/~lerma/

Australia Data Census Used in Article:
www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/10/29/1035683411980.html