

Rainbow SIG Newsletter

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Survey of International Student Advisors

Editor's Note: Nadine and Takashi Kato have been conducting survey research of GLB international students and of International Student Advisors. The following is a summary of a survey of ISAs conducted during summer 1997.

Complete article on the completed survey results available at http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/prof/97_survey.html.

by Nadine Kato

Gay, lesbian and bisexual international students studying in the United States face any number of issues or problems which are unique to their combined status as both international students and gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) students. Although international student advisors (ISAs) tend to be a primary resource for international students, most GLB international students do not consider approaching the ISA for help with GLB issues. Indeed, many international student advisors may not even realize that some of their students are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. For the ISAs who do, many do not have a sense of what the particular issues for GLB international students might be, nor how to make themselves visible resource options for these students.

INTRODUCTION

In order to get a general sense of ISA attitudes towards gay, lesbian and bisexual students, I conducted a survey. The survey consisted of nine multiple choice and short answer questions regarding demographics, ISAs' experience with GLB international students, ISAs' attitudes towards homosexuality and ISAs' impression of what the biggest problems are for GLB international students in the U.S.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was distributed exclusively over INTER-L, NAFSA: Association of International Educators' electronic professional network, which has over 2500 subscribers. The subject heading included the Council of Advisors to Foreign Students and Scholars (CAFSS) acronym, which limits the number of INTER-L subscribers that read the mail to those specifically interested in working with international students.

An informational letter about the research project was included with the survey, to provide readers with a context and to give meaning to their participation. A request for help in spreading the word to potential student survey participants was also included in the letter.

Thirty-three surveys were submitted by email within one week of when I sent the survey. Ten surveys were printed out and submitted by mail.

DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 43 international student advisors from 20 states across the nation responded to the survey. Eight respondents were from California, five from Pennsylvania, and one to three each were from states representing all regions of the U.S. Respondants are from a fairly equal number of small (<5000), medium (5000-20,000) and large (>20,000) schools. Fifteen respondents are from schools with less than 200 international students, ten each are from schools with 200-500 and 500-1000 international students, five are from schools with 1000, and three are from schools with more than 3000.

ISA EXPERIENCE WITH GLB INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Of the 43 ISAs, 23 (53%) of them have never had an international student come to them specifically to discuss issues related to GLB identity, and 19 (44%) have never had the topic come up even in casual conversations. Eight (18%) say that in their career they have had one to three students specifically bring up GLB issues, six (13%) have one to three per year bring up the topic, and five (11%) have one to three per semester. None say that GLB issues are specifically brought up more than one to three times per semester.

Thirteen (30%) say that students' GLB identity has come up in casual conversations, but not as the focus of a discussion, one to three times in their career, eight (18%) say one to three times per year, and one each says it comes up one to three times per semester and per month. None have had it come up more than three times per month.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISORS' ATTITUDES

As for ISA attitudes towards homosexuality, 28 (65%) feel it is natural and healthy, and are very comfortable with the subject. Nine (20%) are learning to be more comfortable with the subject, and seven (16%) feel it is okay for other people, but not for themselves. Two feel that homosexuality is abnormal behavior, and one feels that it is a sin.

All of the respondents know or are acquainted with at least one person who is gay, lesbian or bisexual, although one has never discussed the topic of homosexuality with anyone. Four (9%) respondents identify themselves as GLB, and three mention that they have GLB family members. Twenty-nine (67%) feel that being GLB is about one's identity, and 17 (39%) feel it is about having same-sex relationships. Most of the 17 who checked **same-sex relationship** also checked **identity.** Nineteen (44%) ISAs feel that people can choose their sexual orientation, but no one felt that being GLB is usually a phase that eventually passes. Eighteen (41%) have participated in GLB rights activities and/or Pride Parades.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISORS' IMPRESSION OF PROBLEMS FACED

Respondants were asked to rank how greatly they thought GLB international students in the United States would be affected by seven potential problems. Nine ISAs rank **not knowing who to talk to about GLB issues** as the number one problem, and eight rank **isolation from other students from the same country** as number one. Five feel that **racism** is the biggest problem. Eleven ISAs rank **fear of returning to a less GLB-friendly home country** as number two.

No ISAs feel that **racism within the GLB community** is the number one problem, and in fact, most rate racism within the GLB community as fifth, sixth or seventh on the scale of seven. Only one person, a self-identified GLB, rates **racism within the GLB community** as the second biggest problem.* A fairly even number of respondents feel that **staying in the U.S. to remain with a long-term partner** is the largest problem as feel that it is not a problem at all. Nine respondents have declined ranking the problems because they feel they have no basis for judgement. Respondants also add the following ideas for potential problems faced by international GLB students in the U.S.: finances, culture, language, isolation from other students from any country, reducing selves to sexual identity stereotypes, and not knowing where to meet GLBs in the U.S.

NAFSA Announces SIG Web Site

Kathleen Sideli

Editor's Note: Announcement appeared in NAFSA News 2.25, July 3, 1997.

NAFSA's Lesbigan Special Interest Group has just launched a Web site in response to requests for resources to assist gay, lesbian or bisexual international students and

study abroad students. The advising resources available include a bibliography, Internet links, student orientation material, health information, recommendations about where and how to include issues of sexual orientation and suggestions for ESL programs. The Web site also makes available the minutes from the SIG's annual meetings, articles from all its newsletters and membership instructions for NAFSAs who wish to join the SIG. The group also welcomes feedback and would be happy to incorporate any other relevant materials which international educators would like to contribute to the web site: <http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/>

On behalf of the SIG, I extend my appreciation to those who contributed to the creation of our web site: Pat Bryan, Lisa Carscadden, Susan Carty, Sue Hodes, Stephen Johnson, Nadine and Takayashi Kato, Scott King, Louis Meucci, Anthony C. Ogden, Christopher Renner, Richard Sansone, Daniel Soto, L. Jay Tomlin and My Yarabinec.

With thanks, Kathleen Sideli

It's Time to Play GLB Jeopardy

Scott King

Discussing sexual orientation issues with a student group is always difficult. Keeping participants open to a very touchy and controversial subject, while creating an atmosphere where information is shared can be a challenge. For the past two years, I have been asked to do a training session on gay, lesbian and bisexual concerns for the residence hall staff at Old Dominion. The way I have been successful in getting students to open up, listen, and respond has been by developing a jeopardy game with GLB categories.

I have used a combination of serious and lighthearted categories. The game is played much like the games you see on television. However, to allow a large number of participants, we had 3 teams of 4 players each, and this past year designated the teams with the name of a famous gay or lesbian individual. The categories used for the games have been: Famous Gay Men & Lesbians; The Numbers Game (statistics on GLB people); AIDS (not solely a GLB issue, of course, and the answers emphasized that fact); The Gay and Lesbian World (international facts); The Real Meaning of Slang Terms (defusing language a bit); Symbols; Dates in GLB History; Facts & Figures; Coming Out; Potpourri (it's jeopardy--we have to have this category!)

Both years the students who participated were enthusiastic participants--even the men who often tend to shy away from any discussion of sexual orientation. The topics used in the game were discussed later, and encouraged a great deal of insightful conversation.

If you don't have Web access, contact me at (757)683-4756 or Skimg@odu.edu and I'll be glad to share the information.

Study Abroad Student Perspective

Matt Pitts, Senior at Indiana University majoring in German and Political Science

Ripping open the envelope and pulling out the single thin piece of paper, I knew my life was going to change quite dramatically in the next few seconds. I slowly opened the letter, and read the first word. Congratulations. I had been accepted. My first thought was, "Well, now I have to make a decision."

Contrary to many people, my discovery of being accepted to an Indiana University overseas program was not met with immediate joy, but with uncertainty and reservation. Here I had the opportunity to spend a year overseas studying in a German university in Hamburg, Germany's second largest (and most beautiful) city, and yet I was hesitating. I tried to figure out why I wasn't jumping up and down screaming, as I knew some of my counterparts did. Sure there was money, and credits, and graduating on time, and that kind of thing running through my head, but it turns out that those external factors were not what was holding me back. Internal ones were.

See, the thing is I'm gay. Now one may be wondering what that has to do with studying overseas for a year. There is no easy answer for that, but the quick answer is everything and nothing. Being gay did not affect my ability to speak German or my academic prowess, but it has quite a big effect on who I am. I knew that I would be going to live in a foreign country in a different culture, and that I would be spending quite a lot of intense time with about 20 other Americans, most of whom I did not know. How would my sexual orientation fit into all of that? I also knew that I would be leaving my sphere of family and friends who knew I was gay – my sphere of comfort. I know from just everyday living that coming out is a constant process, but this was like starting over almost from scratch.

So the first thing I decided to do was research. I wanted to find out as much as I could about the GLBT community in Germany. I found I was very lucky when it came to gathering that information. The best resource was the Overseas Study office itself. It contained the information pertaining to the GLBT community on almost every (if not all) the programs. This information was presented in a number of formats. One was student evaluations asking specific questions concerning sexual orientation issues. Many newsletters that were made by students to be passed on to the following year's students also contained information about clubs, community centers, publications, and other resources that were available to GLBT students in each country. There were also other brochures and pamphlets available on GLBT issues in general.

All of this information did a great deal to ease my mind. I had a pretty fair idea of the level of tolerance that existed in Hamburg, what was available to me as a gay student, and just the simple fact that the information was there, made me feel like this was something that would not be an issue for me or anyone else on the program.

I was extremely lucky, too, in the support that I got from the friends that I made in the group. And not only the students, but the resident director was very kind and sympathetic to what I was going through. That, coupled with the information I gathered before I went, helped to ease my transition into a foreign culture. Not that it was all easy either. There were nights, one in particular, where I broke down crying because I felt so alone. Though I had made great friends with the other Americans, and though they all knew I was gay, I still felt very alone. The realization that if I wanted to go to a gay club or cafe, I would have to go alone, was so alienating. Not that my straight friends could not or would not come with me (they at times did), but it just wasn't the same. But armed with the information that I had gained, it did not take me long to find my niche and my support group. So what could have been a trying and difficult year, turned out actually to be one of the most affirming and liberating experiences that I will probably ever have. I owe that in part to the wonderful friends that I made, but I owe a great deal to the resources that were made available to me before and during my year abroad.

Vancouver SIG Activities '97

Peter Voeller

NAFSA's Lesbian SIG enjoyed a homey conference at the Nelson House, a gay-owned bed and breakfast a brisk 15 minute walk from the convention site. The week started off with a Tuesday evening reception at the house, hosted by the SIG, with over 30 members in attendance. We advertised in the conference daily bulletin and put an announcement on the bulletin board. The SIG business meeting was on Wednesday and over 80 members were in attendance at that meeting. A group of us went out for dinner and martinis at Delilah's restaurant and we arranged another evening reception on Thursday, which drew another 20 members, most of whom did not make the first reception. The general feeling was that it was good for people to meet earlier in the week and it was definitely a plus to have an off-site, homey location in which to socialize. The SIG leadership of Kathleen Sideli, Peter Voeller and Susan Carty were the hosts and organizers of the receptions and meetings. Peter took on the role of 'cruise director' for many members new to the organization so they could get to know the ropes and get their neophyte conference feet wet.

We had some conference exposure in two sessions, one on sexual orientation done by Kathleen Sideli and Susan Carty (attended by over 150 NAFSAns) and one on exploring personal prejudices chaired by Peter and featuring three SIG members on the panel (this was attended by over 60 people even though it was in the last time slot on the last day!)

All in all, we felt it was a very successful and supportive conference for those involved in our special interest group. We hope to do the same in Washington D.C. next year. If anyone out there knows of a good off-site home base that we could use, a bed and breakfast or a European-style hotel, please let Peter or Kathleen know if you'd be willing to set it up.

Washington, D.C. Conference '98

Steve Johnson

Washington, D.C., the site of our next -- and NAFSA's 50th Anniversary -- national conference, is a city with a large and active GLBT community. The planning for the conference is getting into high gear now that over 100 NAFSANS have met (last weekend) for the annual Fall Leadership Meetings, where much of the framework for the upcoming conference is put into place. The conference hotel is one Metro stop (or a 20-minute walk) from Dupont Circle, which is home to many gay-oriented shops, bars and restaurants, so we will be close to a part of town that many of us feel is as friendly and fun a locale as one is likely to find anywhere in the world. One of our local SIG members has indicated interest in hosting an event at his home, and I know we will have no trouble identifying additional venues for an evening or two on the town -- although the events that are planned for the conference-as-a-whole will certainly appeal as well. There's really a lot to see and do in Washington! A number of Lesbigan SIG members are involved with the conference planning, and we hope to have some special announcements for you closer to the conference dates. I hope you can join us for a great conference and 50th Anniversary celebration next May!

SIG Challenge: Reentry Advice for GLB International Students?

Peggy Pusch

I recently conducted workshops and spoke at the SIETAR Japan meeting in Tokyo. At the close of the meeting a young man came to me and asked for ideas on how to deal with foreign students who have come out while abroad and are now returning home. Needless to say, Japan is not an easy place for gays and lesbians although there is a very strong and fairly hidden lesbigan society there. He is aware of the Lesbigan SIG and is on the Rainbow list. He knows of all the international organizations that I know about to provide any information that he did not already possess. Perhaps he really needs advice from those who have dealt with this challenge in other equally unwelcoming societies.

Last week I received an email from a man in Finland who is coming to the NAFSA meetings next May and wanted to know if I planned to do a session there on gays going home or into new cultures --their experiences and the resources they used. We need to deal with this issue more, both at the practical and psycho-logical level, for those who are entering other cultures on study abroad and are returning home after a stay in the U.S.

Reflection

Peter Voeller

Editor's Note: The following reflection was in response to an incident which occurred on Peter Voeller's home campus. A student asked an instructor if Peter was gay. The evasive response by the instructor triggered a wide ranging discussion and debate on how such inquiries might be handled.

It's ironic that all this debate was going on while I was at the national NAFSA: Association of International Educators conference in Vancouver, considering one of the sessions I attended was entitled "Best of Region VI: Taboo Topics: Sex and Sexual Orientation --Incorporating Discussion Into Student Orientation Programs" from Indiana University. One of the presenters, Kathleen Sideli, introduced the topic by clarifying that the session was not going to be about sex (that was just to get people's attention :) but about the inclusion of such topics as sexual orientation into the orientation and curriculum. Imagine my surprise upon returning and finding that some of my colleagues felt these topics were "totally inappropriate behavior."

All of us have heard the argument that America has no culture. Most of us have lived or traveled in another country whose culture we did not totally understand. To say that issues of sexual orientation are not a part of current American culture, not to mention the idea of having a culture of its own, would be to deny the press that it's been getting ever since Clinton proposed a relaxation of the 'gays in the military' restrictions.

I have been asked directly if I'm gay by students from Japan, Thailand, Spain and Kuwait, most of whom were gay themselves and looking for support. (It's why I have a gay flag in my office, to show those in the know that it's a safe topic of discussion.) If a student comes up to you with a topic such as the TOEFL requirement for the University of Oklahoma or the local mosque hours, you would without hesitation refer him/her to the proper source, if you did not have the information yourself. Living in the present day USA where topics of sexual orientation are prevalent in the media, the odds of a student coming up and asking about it greatly increase. Recently, I saw a former student at a lecture series sponsored by the UW Alumni Association on sexual orientation. He was taking it as credit for his degree in architecture. What confusion are we creating when a student hears, "That's not an appropriate topic of discussion?" Tell that to Oprah and Diane Sawyer of 20/20.

I have a tape of international students, some our former ESL students, talking about their experiences being gay in the US, one hearing his ESL teacher use the word 'fairy' and after that, no longer feeling safe with that teacher. (This was done for a session entitled "Advising gay and lesbian international students.")

I've always heard issues of sexual orientation, "Our student advisor is gay." were not a source of discussion or thing to deal with in this open environment of the ESL Program. Professionally, these discussions of what I see as my 'status' are painful, but informative. Thanks for listening.

97-98 SIG Steering Committee

Kathleen Sideli

The following individuals have volunteered to serve on a Steering Committee to provide leadership for the SIG: Marie Cox, Bill Gaskill, Kim Killingsworth, Bo Keppel, Frank Ploener, Justin Shelton, and My Yarabinec.

Sexual Orientation Lecture Notes

Peter Voeller

The following is a brief summary of notes taken during a series of lectures on sexual orientation given by Lois McDermott, PhD, from the Department of Psychology at the University of Washington.

Her working definition of sexual orientation is mate selection based on the sex, gender and sexual roles of partners. It pertains to loving attachment, erotic fantasy, sexual behavior, a sense of self, social roles, lifestyle and legal status. This terminology pertains to humans only.

Evolution of thinking on the subject: Ranges from modes of dichotomy of heterosexual and homosexual to the Kinsey continuum covering a range from exclusively homosexual to exclusively heterosexual, with most people falling in a bell curve in between, to the orthogonal vectors model (ranking same sex with cross sex, high to low, with four fields: Heterosexual, asexual, bisexual, and homosexual, to the current model of the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, which talks of heterosexualities, homosexualities, bisexualities, based on past, present and 'ideal' experience with seven factors. It's like a slalom race down a ski slope with moguls based on various factors, with the final possible orientations based on which of these factors were encountered on the way down.

The search for a cause (sexual attraction to same sex, erotic fantasy about own gender, emotional attachment to own gender, sense of self as gay, lesbian, sexual behavior with same sex partner, social role as a 'gay or lesbian', a lifestyle), common assumptions about sexual behavior (that species are dichotomous, male/female, that anatomical sex is fixed or determined by genetics, that sexual behavior = reproductive behavior, that females gestate and rear young, and that males are necessary for sexual reproduction), natural variants (more than two sexes, fluidity, determined by environment, sexual behavior as social behavior, males gestating and rearing young and sexual reproduction by one sex) were discussed.

Subsequent lectures covered the biological basis of sexual orientation:

interpretation of brain differences LeVay 1991; the sociobiology of sexual orientation; is same sex behavior a 'natural' biological variant?; and genetics and genetic expression.

Finally, the cultural aspects of sexual orientation were explored. In the final lecture, the lecturer completed the formal perfection of her clear unfolding of notions of sexual orientation and gender by sharing a number of non-American perspectives on both. These cross-cultural views were gleaned from anthropological data reflecting 200 odd cultures. In around 60% of these cultures sexual minorities are fully accepted and integrated and may even perform vital social roles. Examples include the irreplaceable role of a Greek soldier's male lover during battle (in curious contrast to the presumptions of the Pentagon today), or the role of shaman played by the Two Spirits of some native American tribes. Comparable roles, as in blessing business dealings, new buildings, and newborns, are played by the Hijras in India and by the Acault in Myanmar.

She also noted how so-called gay behavior is accepted or even expected in some cultures. Examples include, again, the Greeks, as well as the Japanese Samurai, and between boys in European boarding schools. Azande women in South African, meanwhile, commonly take a young girl into their household for sex and emotional support while their husbands are away for long periods.

If she had not by now already knocked out from under our feet the premises upon which to rest any lingering claims that common American views on matters of gender and sexual orientation are TRUTH, she noted that a majority of western armies accept gay people serving, and she displayed a state by state map showing the swath of the so-called anti-sodomy laws in the US. She concluded the lecture by turning American right-wing rhetoric upside down, speaking of a "heterosexual agenda" against gay people.

General thoughts taken away from the lecture:

The idea of sexualities and the fluidity of human sexual experience, shown by her figure of a total of as many as 400 homosexualities, heterosexualities, and bisexualities. This theory has unfolded in order to capture not only the well-established and clear-cut distinctions like gay and straight, but also newer distinctions, like transsexuality and

transvestism, in order to distinguish more of the variety within the broader rubric of sexual orientation.

How strong and limited our assumptions are of what is 'natural'.

The more we learn about an area, the more aspects it takes on, making it much more complicated and involved than we ever expected at first.

Thanks to Joe T. Terteling, Seattle, for contributing to this summary.

SIG Makes National News ??

Kathleen Sideli

Several SIG members have recently been interviewed by a writer working on an article for The Chronicle of Higher Education. We've been led to believe that an informed article -- particularly highlighting the activities of the Lesbian SIG in relation to resources for study abroad students -- may appear in the near future. Keep your eyes open!

Predeparture Orientation for GLB Students

My Yarabinec

In 1995, with the encouragement of the California State University system's central study abroad office, San Francisco State University began to add special interest group sessions to the northern California regional pre-departure study abroad orientation programs. Gay, lesbian and bi-sexual students were amongst the populations whose concerns we hoped to address. Now, three years later, our experience has shown that these sessions have definitely served a variety of purposes, including the following:

1) To validate this group and their concerns:

One of our goals was to acknowledge that GLB students, although not always visible or easily identifiable, are a part of our clientele population. Their needs deserve to be acknowledged in the same way as the majority heterosexual population. It is not something shameful or that needs to be hidden, and belongs openly on the agenda.

2) To reinforce the GLB student and confirm that they are not alone:

Many of our GLB students are able to identify themselves to each other for the first time at this session. They discover people with similar interests and concerns, apprehensions and questions. We have since discovered that these initial connections can often develop into supportive friendships - men and women at the same study abroad site, students who later choose to room together, and students visiting each other in neighboring countries when traveling. To further illustrate this, we have noticed that every year a number of GLB students are careful and discreet about entering the room where the GLB session is being held, but open and natural when leaving the room at the end. They come to the session singly, but leave together in groups. Conversations continue, voices are enthusiastic and many of them linger to continue the contact a little longer. It is apparent that they are already reinforced and empowered by their exposure to each other.

3) To provide role models for their future:

Our panelists include alumni of the study abroad programs and international exchange students. This provides an opportunity for the about-to-depart students to see that others can, and have, integrated their minority sexual orientation successfully into the study abroad experience.

4) To sensitize students to some of the larger issues and concerns when acting on their GLB identities abroad:

Our goal is to have our students be aware of some of the questions which can be posed about the differences between their future host country and the familiar circumstances of the U.S. Local customs are diverse, and attitudes about sexuality (as well as, even, legality) vary from country to country, and from social class to social class. Facile assumptions should be avoided (including that every country is more restrictive than the U.S., and that everyone wants to be liberated according to the American ideal).

5) To direct the students to various sources to answer their questions and to stimulate further thought:

Again, the goal is not to answer every specific question, but, rather, to direct the students to the materials which we have accumulated and other resources which are available. Many of these books and articles are listed in the [bibliography](#) on the Lesbian SIG World Wide Web page, including our own publication THE GAY AND LESBIAN LEGAL GUIDE FOR OVERSEAS TRAVEL.

In conclusion, the strong attendance and the appreciative and positive comments which we have received, both directly or on evaluation forms, has confirmed to our campus that GLB concerns have a definite place in study abroad pre-departure orientation programs.

Note: Discussion topics and questions used by presenters and panelists at San Francisco State University for this orientation session were printed in the last edition of this SIG publication and can be found at the SIG's web site:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/>

NAFSA Regional Meetings

Susan Carty

NAFSA regional conferences will be held around the country over the next two months. Should you attend any sessions of relevance or potential interest to the Lesbigan SIG's mission, please send me a note describing the session and its significance: Susan Carty, International Programs, Franklin Hall 311, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47408; phone 812-855-7557; fax 812-855-6452; E-mail scarty@indiana.edu

1997 NAFSA Regional Conferences Sites and Dates

I	Yakima, WA	Oct 22-25
II	Tucson, AZ	Oct 15-18
III	Lafayette, LA	Nov 10-12
IV	Minneapolis, MN	Oct 29-Nov 1
V	Madison, WI	Nov 13-15
VI	Columbus, OH	Nov 2-4
VII	Orlando, FL	Oct 25-28
VIII	Baltimore, MD	Nov 13-15
X	Kiamesha Lake, NY	Nov 16-19
XI	Providence, RI	Oct 22-24
XII	Monterey Hyatt, CA	Dec 8-10

More information about the regional meetings can be found on [NAFSA's web site](#).

Safe Zone

Kathleen Sideli

College campuses around the country are encouraging administrative units and academic offices to declare themselves 'Safe Zones'. This is done by embracing the statement (below) and by displaying a Safe Zone sticker in a prominent location in the office. You can check out one campus's program and see a sample of the sticker at Indiana University's Safe Zone web site: <http://www.indiana.edu/~out/safezone/>

THE SAFE ZONE STATEMENT

This zone is declared safe!

Regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, and ability, you will be treated and respected as a human being. Ignorance, bigotry, and harassment will not be tolerated.