

# More Evidence . . .

## of the Homosexual Agenda at the University of Notre Dame.

- Special Rights for Homosexuals Campaign April '08
- Spirit of Inclusion Statement

*“Yes, its focus is on homosexuality, but it also focuses on what happens when any group is marginalized. “*

*–Heather Rakoczy, Director of the ND Gender Relations Center*

- Testimony of Homosexual Students:

*“To be a homosexual on this campus allows me to do what Christians do.”*

*Craig F. gay ND sophomore*

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*“I met a guy who ended up challenging . . . my beliefs . . . and opened my heart to the possibility that these attractions I had to other men had some value . . . That ended up shifting my whole view on things . . . I resolved to follow my conscience, and what it kept telling me was that you don't know if same-sex activity is going to be helpful in leading two people to God, but what you do know is something is not right about what the Church is teaching.”*

*Brad M. gay ND senior*

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- 24 April 2008 edition of Scholastic, Notre Dame's Student Magazine
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# Notre Dame: Ally or Enemy?

Students reflect on what it means to be gay at Notre Dame

Courtney Ball

Only one of the gay students interviewed for this story said that he would still choose to attend Notre Dame after experiencing what students say can be an unwelcoming atmosphere. This is not surprising, as Notre Dame was recently ranked fourth in the category "Alternative Lifestyles Not an Alternative" by the Princeton Review. The ranking is an improvement from five years ago when Notre Dame held the top position. Despite significant strides made by student organizations, however, Notre Dame is still struggling to balance its Catholic identity with openness to all students.

Though some say that there is no open hostility on campus, many gay students say they feel that the culture is apathetic. They say it seems as though there is an unspoken agreement that as long as gay students are not too vocal about their identity, they are accepted into the Notre Dame community. Eddie Velazquez, a gay sophomore and future co-chair of the CORE Council, says, "There really are gay people on campus, even if we like to pretend that there aren't."

The lack of any student-run GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning) organization on campus demonstrates Velazquez's point. Though both AllianceND and OU'Treach ND have



applied for official university recognition, they have been denied approval. As a result, the groups cannot officially organize events on campus or advertise their existence.

Brian Coughlin, assistant vice president of Student Activities, cites the following excerpt from letters sent to "United in Diversity" prospective club leaders in 2004 and 2005: "It remains the perspective of the Student Activities Office that the dual goals of supporting gay and lesbian students and educating the larger campus community can best be accomplished through the structures already in place. Continued collaboration between administrators, pastoral ministers and students is essential."

Many students say, however, that they feel the refusal to officially recognize a Notre Dame gay-straight alliance is an injustice that is indicative of the apathetic culture of the university.

### Making Progress

Heather Rakoczy, director of the Gender Relations Center, says she was disturbed by Notre Dame's ranking in 2003 as the top university in the "Alternative Lifestyles Not an Alternative" category. She says that Notre Dame is taking steps to improve the atmosphere on campus. "I think there has been progress made. Back in the late '80s and early '90s there would never have been a 'Stand Against Hate' week. There would not have been very much, if any, conversation on this issue," she says. Senior Brad Matton, a gay member of CORE Council, also disagrees with the ranking. "We are not the worst university in the country, we are just the worst top-ranked university. It is not as bad as people might think," Matton says.

While the university still fails to officially recognize any student-run gay and lesbian groups, they have supported many initiatives in recent years. The Standing Committee for Gay and Lesbian needs, now the CORE Council, was created in 1996 under the leadership of Sister Sue Bruno as an advisory group for the Vice President of Student Affairs. Sister M.L. Gude took over the program in 1998 and helped to expand the committee to include heterosexual "allies." "I lived on campus for 22 years and saw several generations go through the school. The climate changed drastically," Gude says.

Today, CORE Council serves not only the administration in identifying the needs of gay and lesbian students, but it also educates the student body and provides a supportive community for gay students. Council programs include Coffee and

Conversation at the Coleman-Morse Center, where students meet to discuss issues and learn about resources available for GLBTQ students, and office hours in the Green Room in LaFortune to answer questions. CORE Council hosts network sessions where resident assistants are educated on psychological and theological aspects of sexual orientation. All incoming freshman are required to attend the CORE Council Community presentations to inform them of Catholic teachings on homosexuality and to encourage them to help foster an atmosphere of acceptance on campus.

Stand Against Hate week is another important indicator of Notre Dame's refusal to tolerate discrimination. This week-long event is designed to remind students that they are called to honor the dignity of all human beings. To help promote awareness, the Spirit of Inclusion statement is passed out to students, and they are asked to sign a pledge against intolerance. "Yes, its focus is on homosexuality, but it also focuses on what happens when any group is marginalized. It is a reminder of hate crimes and how terrible they are," Rakoczy says.

Students agree that progress has been made in recent years. Senior Mike McCann, a member of Progressive Student Alliance (PSA), says, "This place has definitely changed in the last decade ... There wasn't the Spirit of Inclusion. This place is definitely different, which makes me more optimistic that people can be accepting."

Some students, however, still feel that more needs to be done before Notre Dame can truly become an accepting campus. Students express worry that the university's progress has become stagnant because of its struggle to balance a Catholic identity with openness to all students.

### A Closed Door?

Craig Ford, a gay sophomore, says he thinks that the administration is not always open to dialogue. "It would almost be a no-win situation to discuss it with the administration ... That is because of the impression that the Church has closed the door on the issue," Ford says.

The official Catholic stance on homosexuality is that sexuality is a gift from God which is reserved for marriage and is intended to be both unitive and procreative. Because homosexual unions can not produce children, homosexual acts are considered disordered. Rakoczy says, "For heterosexual people there is a way out in marriage. For

## COVER STORY

### TIMELINE of GAY RECOGNITION at NOTRE DAME

# 1970

Students unofficially form the Gay Society, and the Progressive Student Alliance is recognized by the university.

# 1986

Gays and Lesbians of Notre-Dame and Saint Mary's (GLND/SMC) is the first gay group to apply and be rejected for official recognition.

# 1991

ND's World Peace Action Group holds Notre Dame's first gay rights demonstration.

# 1995

GLND/SMC is expelled from campus.

# 1996

The Standings Committee for Gay and Lesbian Needs (later CORE Council) is created.

# 1998

GLTreach ND replaces GLND/SMC and is also rejected for official university recognition. The initiation of a discrimination clause movement occurs and fails.

# 2004

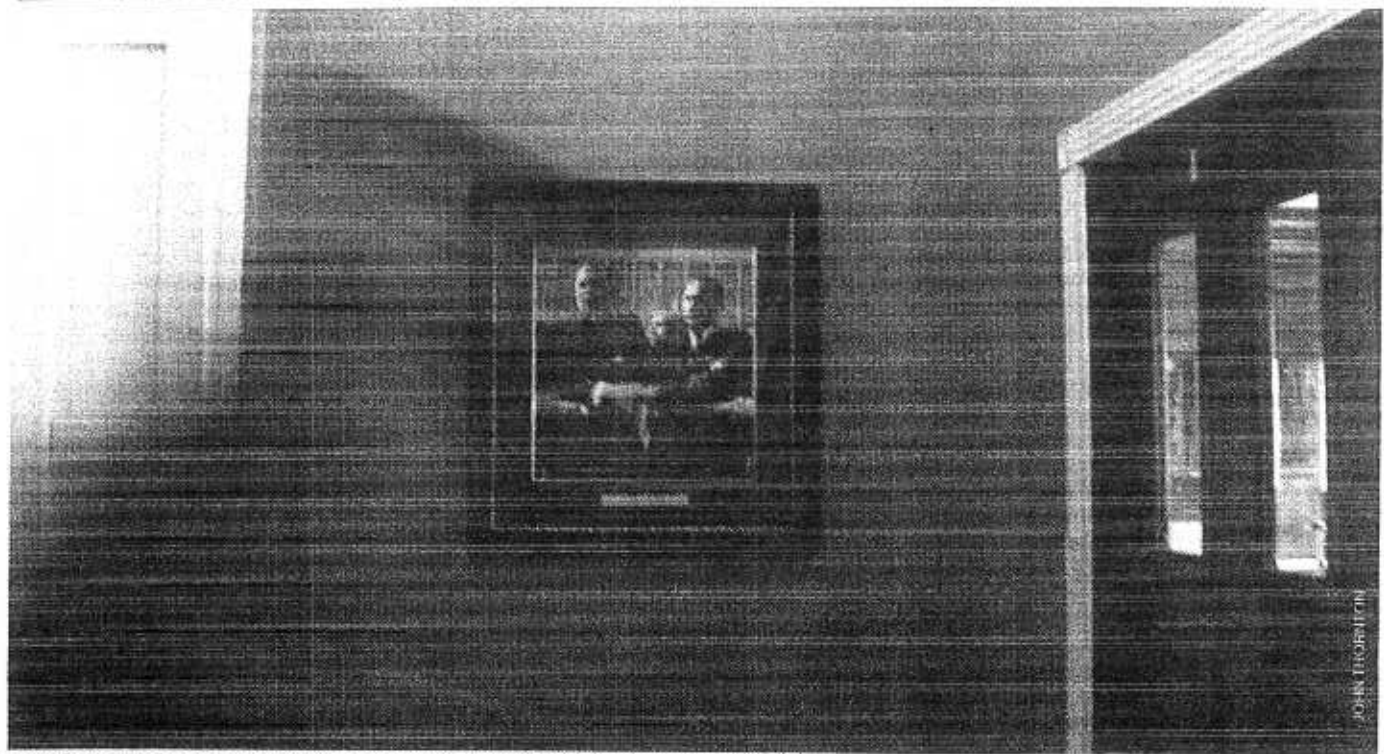
Student Activities Office rejects the application for an official gay-straight alliance and as a result Alliance ND is formed and "Gay? Fine By Me?" T-shirts introduced.

# 2007

Stand Against Hate week is introduced on campus.

# 2008

Student Government and PSA are again working to amend the non-discrimination clause.



**LIVING IN THE SHADOWS** Do the needs of gay students at Notre Dame go unnoticed?

a homosexual person that is never possible, so they are called to chaste friendship which translates to lifelong celibacy." She emphasizes that a homosexual act is no worse than any heterosexual one committed outside of marriage.

How does Church teaching affect the attitude toward gay students on campus? "It's very possible to feel as a homosexual at Notre Dame that you are accepted as a person with unacceptable ideas," Ford says. "It's a very interesting dynamic to experience here. To the extent that one defines himself by his ideas, that determines the extent he is offended. I think the gay person at Notre Dame has to be a strong person. He has to be willing to value himself as a person who is distinct from his ideas, willing to engage a culture which is opposed to his own and emerge from that with a personal strength and integrity that allows him to still think he is a good person."

For many gay students, this often translates to uncomfortable situations. Velazquez says, "We don't have an atmosphere that is conducive to being an 'out' person. They are good enough with the balance to create an atmosphere which isn't really hostile, but at the same time, it doesn't really support them either."

## Finding A Balance

Several gay students on campus identify themselves as devout Catholics. "We have several members of the [CORE] Council who make a point to live their lives according to Church teaching and doctrine," Velazquez says. "They try to find that balance, and I definitely know people who have made it work."

Father Richard Warner, Director of Campus Ministry, says he respects the faith of all members of the Church equally. "I think there are many gay students for whom the Church and their religion is very important, and they are very good Catholics, just like the other students around here. Their relationship with the Church is just as important to them as anyone else," Warner says.

Senior Brad Mattan (see sidebar) and Sade Murphy, a bisexual junior, are members of an unrecognized gay Emmaus group on campus. Murphy thinks the spiritual resource is an important source of support in her religious struggles. She says, "Approaching God, especially when you are homosexual or bisexual, can be such a scary thing. No one should have to try to figure out alone how to be in a relationship with God and gay at the same time because those are tough questions."

Murphy was confirmed as a Catholic earlier this month and feels that it is an important part of her identity. "When you go up and take the Eucharist, you are becoming more one with God and becoming one with this great community of believers too. If we could embrace that part of Catholicism which says 'love,' I think other things would fall into place, and it wouldn't be a question of what the Church teaches, but more of a question of what God would really have me do," Murphy says.

Ford also describes himself as very religious and says he is devoted to the theological study of homosexuality. He says he believes that Notre Dame gives him a unique challenge and opportunity in his faith. "To follow Christ despite all of the hatred and the ill will, to still love through all of those negative feelings is what Christianity is all about," Ford says. "To be a homosexual on this campus allows me to do what Christians are called to do."

## Gay? Fine By Me

Since the debut of the "Gay? Fine by Me" shirts on Notre Dame's campus in March of 2004, on designated dates each semester, students can show solidarity with the GLBTQ community by collectively

## PERSPECTIVE: Gay Life at ND

AS TOLD TO COURTNEY BALL  
BY SENIOR PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY MAJOR  
BRAD MATTAN

acknowledging and welcoming gay students on campus. Though the groups of students do not necessarily form a solid sea of orange, hundreds and sometimes thousands of students wear the bright orange shirts each year in support of GLBTQ students. While most gay students appreciate the message and proudly wear the shirts in solidarity with the campus, they acknowledge that it can also create a tense atmosphere. "Unfortunately, there are people who are adamant against the shirts, and it causes a lot of opposition on campus," Velazquez says.

Perhaps the most controversial instance of this occurred this past fall when two juniors staged a protest outside of LaFortune Student Center, wearing shirts which read, "Gay? Go to Hell." The individuals responsible for the demonstration did not respond to *Scholastic's* request for an interview. Velazquez says, "I think they were in poor taste, but I really hope that in the future instead of resorting to insulting T-shirts we can find a happy medium where they can come to us and tell us that 'this is our logic, and this is what we think.' I cannot expect everyone to be OK with homosexuality, but it is something we can work towards." The Facebook group "Wrath of God? Fine by Me," with over 60 members, is another example of open hostility in reaction to the "Gay? Fine by Me" shirts.

Murphy says she thinks it is unfortunate that the shirts seem to be a necessary statement. "I don't think there is anything wrong with the shirts themselves. The fact that we need something like that may be a problem," she says. "It should go without saying that you are OK with the way other people are. I don't think the attitude on this campus should be such that we have to purposefully take note of other people being gay and say 'Oh, we are OK with it.'"

The consensus among gay students and supporters, however, seems to be that anything that promotes awareness is a positive thing overall. They say they believe that the most important thing in continuing to achieve progress is an open dialogue among students, faculty and the administration. "As long as it maintains [dialogue], I think there is some hope," Murphy says.

### The Notre Dame Experience

Despite what some gay students say is a history of intolerance at the university, GLTBQ students continue to apply and enroll at Notre Dame and utilize the unique opportunities and experiences the university offers them.

"I really believe that there is no place else where you can get a great education but at the same time be forced to really take a stand on what you believe in. Notre Dame is a great place to do that," Murphy says. "It is a special and spiritual place. It has that going for it too. When things get tough, sometimes you just need to go to the Grotto. It's nice to have a priest living down the hall from you. You can't get that anywhere else. There is definitely something special about Notre Dame. Even though it can be really hard, it is still one of the best places you can be."

Mattan agrees that Notre Dame offers him a unique chance to reconcile his religious beliefs and sexuality. But it has not been an easy path. "It's hard. This place wears you down," Mattan says. "I am ready to graduate because you just become bitter with it." +

*"I identify as Catholic, a practicing Catholic. It has characterized my life. My identity as a gay man has rubbed against my identity as a Catholic. At one time, I had been trying to live a chaste and celibate life. I had been trying to change my sexual orientation since junior year of high school. To accomplish this, I had been attending a group that is part of Exodus International, where they advised me to develop a regular prayer life and to try to reclaim my supposedly crucial deficiency in masculinity in order to, by the grace of God, be restored to heterosexuality. By the time I came here, I had shifted to being celibate rather than changing myself. I became depressed and unhappy even though I wasn't doing anything wrong, yet I had this profound sense of lack of fulfillment. Shortly after that, I met a guy who ended up challenging a lot of my beliefs in a personal way, and opened my heart to the possibility that these attractions I had to other men had some value. I didn't feel I could say it was wrong. That ended up shifting my whole view on things. What does this mean for my faith? I thought I needed to leave the Church for a while. I visited some friends who were studying abroad in Rome, and I was able to go on a tour under Saint Peter's Basilica. When we got to that place directly under the altar of the Basilica, I said my own prayers asking Saint Peter to help me figure this out. It was one of the most intense spiritual moments in my life. When I was leaving, I had this profound feeling of remorse for wanting to leave the Church, because there is more to it than rules and systems of beliefs; it is made of people. I couldn't leave it, it wouldn't be right. I knew if I intended to stay with the Church, I was obligated to figure out what about it was wrong. I am not a theology major so this was kind of a foolish endeavor on my part, but I did a lot of research and read several important books on Catholic sexual morality. The attitude that I took that I was going to fix everything was unhealthy. All I was trying to do was justify what I already felt was right, which is not a good way to go about morality. I resolved to follow my conscience, and what it kept telling me was that you don't know if same-sex activity is going to be helpful in leading two people to God, but what you do know is something is not right about what the Church is teaching. There is some value in these attractions that you have. I was created this way. What do I do? Live as good a Christian life as I can, receiving the Sacraments and doing service. I keep questioning my beliefs. I live in a creative tension; I don't know where it is going to end. I am taking seriously what the Church says and what my experience says. I hope one day I can integrate them better."*