

Resolution To Implement a Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Living-Learning Unit
(Revised)

- WHEREAS** Cornell University and the Student Assembly is committed to creating and maintaining an atmosphere of diversity on this campus; and
- WHEREAS** Cornell University and the Student Assembly acknowledge, through their commitment to multiculturalism, the needs and contributions made by all students; and
- WHEREAS** Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual students, despite the University's commitment to multiculturalism, still feel unempowered, disenfranchised, unprotected from bodily harm, and disconnected from their cultural heritage due to a lack of administrative support; and
- WHEREAS** it is essential for Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual students to connect with their peers, their heritage, and their community in order to facilitate the development of a strong sense of personal and cultural identity; and
- WHEREAS** visibility of Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual people is essential to their efforts to dispel myths, shatter stereotypes, and engender a greater feeling of mutual respect and understanding in society at large;
- WHEREAS** there has been ample time for the Student Assembly and the campus community to consider this proposal since its initial introduction;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT:

The Cornell University Student Assembly once again wishes to implement a Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Living-Learning Unit and endorses the following revised proposal by the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Committee for University Residence Space:

Introduction

On the Cornell University campus there currently exists an environment lacking in support for the full expression of one's identity and culture. Negative stereotypes and lack of understanding have led to a society that is intolerant of alternatives to exclusively heterosexual expressions of love and attachment. Recent years have seen a greater awareness of and respect for non-heterosexual alternatives to emotional and sexual expressions, but prejudice against Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual people continues in a society that is slow to change. The Cornell campus community, being but a microcosm of the greater society, has also been slow in changing its attitudes towards and showing greater respect for the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual minority.

We the members of the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Committee for University Residence Space recognize that a way to directly address the needs of the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual minority is through the implementation of a Living-Learning Unit dealing with Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual awareness and concerns. It is our hope that this proposal will aid in the University's

efforts to increase awareness of and respect for diversity through a student's experience with campus residential life.

Mission Statement

We desire to create a positive self- and community-identity during a student's experience living in Cornell's residence halls by engendering peer support and by implementing proactive and interactive awareness programming. We wish to create a safe environment where ALL students, regardless of sexual orientation, may explore cultural diversity within a Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual framework.

Our Mission and the University

We see our mission as an integral component of Cornell's overall mission. We want to join in the University's effort to create and maintain an atmosphere of diversity and a sense of respect towards all people regardless of their race, sex,, religion, political affiliation, handicap, or sexual orientation.

Furthermore, such a living space would allow for an improvement in the quality of life of a population which is often made to feel unempowered, disenfranchised, unprotected from bodily harm, and disconnected from their cultural heritage due to a current lack of administrative support. Such a lack of support has led to disrespect on the part of students towards the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual minority and has led to the belief that Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual students can be harassed, oppressed, and made invisible with impunity.

The creation of the Living-Learning Unit will send a clear message by the University to the effect that Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual people are a legitimate minority worthy of respect. It will serve as a place where Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual students and their heterosexual supporters can come together, become empowered, and learn about their cultural heritage. It will serve as a focal point for the enactment of proactive and interactive programs that will strive to reach out to the entire campus community in order to increase cultural awareness and engender a greater feeling of mutuality and respect.

Mission Implementation

We will implement our mission by:

- a) Creating an environment that celebrates diversity and culture within the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual community;
- b) Creating a safe and supportive setting where issues of sexual orientation can be addressed;
- c) Empowering the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual community with a sense of pride, power, and connection to their cultural and historical heritage;
- d) Acknowledging the multicultural diversity of the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual community by celebrating the contributions made by Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual People of Color.
- e) Making this Unit accessible to ALL students, regardless of sexual orientation, in order to create a positive atmosphere of dialogue and exchange between the Gay and non-Gay

- communities--such interaction would aid in dissolving barriers, shattering stereotypes, and increasing awareness, communication, and understanding;
- f) Instituting programs and workshops within the Unit (and open to the entire campus community) that address issues within the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual community, including but not limited to such topics as internalized homophobia, bi-phobia, coming out, religious observance, AIDS/HIV awareness, sexism, and racism.
 - g) Instituting programs and workshops addressing issues within the Unit (and open to the entire campus community) that affect all students, including but not limited to such topics as sexism, racism, AIDS/HIV awareness, homophobia, heterosexism, homonegativism, ableism, and violence against Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals;
 - h) Initiating proactive programs and workshops that will take place within other Residence Halls upon RA, RHD, or Residence Life/Campus Life invitation that will address the myriad of issues associated with sexual orientation--such programs will increase interaction between Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual and heterosexual students, which will in turn increase understanding and respect.

Structure of the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Living-Learning Unit

In the Fall of 1994 students will occupy one wing of one floor in Clara Dickson Hall (approximately 60 single spaces). The Living-Learning Unit will be a floor where ALL who want to increase respect for and understanding of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual people can participate. The existence of the floor in a large residence hall like Dickson will ensure direct interaction with a large number of residents who will be able to benefit from the cultural exchange that such a floor will generate.

The governing system for the Living-Learning Unit will consist of two Resident Advisors, a Resident Programming Board, and a direct relationship with Dickson's Residence Hall Director.

Primary recruiting for floor participation will happen through advertisement in Residence Life/Campus Life publications. Floor residents and the Resident Programming Board will also apply direct effort towards recruiting potential residents. This procedure is similar to that used in some other program houses currently in existence. We do not anticipate any problems in filling the floor, since a large number of students have expressed interest. In the unlikely event that the number of rooms available exceed the number of potential residents, we wish to be very clear that no student should be placed randomly or against their will on the floor; such placement would be detrimental to the philosophical mission of the floor as well as to the student(s) in question. If recruitment for the floor continues to be a problem for three consecutive academic years, the Department of Residence Life/Campus Life (in cooperation with the Student Assembly) will have the option of canceling the program.

Funding for the Resident Programming Board will be provided by a \$30 programming fee from residents and, if needed, additional supplemental funding through the Department of Residence Life/Campus Life. We do not foresee the need for additional supplemental funding, however, since we feel that the fee collected from students will more than adequately cover the expenses of programming.

Who do we see involved?

We understand the importance of involving members of all areas of the Cornell community, including faculty, staff, and students in the implementation of the Living-Learning Unit. It is our intent to maximize such involvement and interaction to the best of our ability.

We also recognize the need to work with the Department of Residence Life/Campus Life on finding a suitable space on campus for the Living-Learning Unit, and will not necessarily limit ourselves to Clara Dickson Hall. The reason for our choice of Dickson is twofold: first, the existence of singles eliminates the objection, raised by some members of community, that allowing the program on a floor with doubles would allow same-sex couples to live together, which heterosexual couples are unable to do; second, it will increase the success of our recruitment efforts because singles will provide an additional incentive for upperclassmen to participate in the program. In considering an alternative site for the program, we ask that the Department of Residence Life/Campus Life keep these criteria in mind.

We also see members of the Cornell community participating in the successful implementation of the Living-Learning Unit by active participation in programs, interaction with students, and possible participation in a faculty fellows program.

Conclusion

We know our proposal reflects a realistic goal and need. We see ourselves as members of a continuing movement towards greater cultural diversity and understanding at Cornell. We hope this proposal demonstrates our commitment, which is also reflected by widespread interest in the Living-Learning Unit by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and other communities.

Joseph L. Barrios '93
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual At-Large, Student Assembly
Officer, Cornell Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Coalition
President, Men Supporting Men

Amy Garman '94
Member, Lesbian/Bisexual/Questioning Women (LBQ)
Member, Queer Education Committee, Cornell Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Coalition

Michael Gorman '95
Vice-President, Class of 1995
Member, Freshman Experience Committee
Treasurer, Cornell Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Coalition
Peer Counselor, Cornell Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Coalition

Carla Roland '94
Co-chair, Gays, Bisexuals, and Lesbians of Color (GBLOC)
Programming Advisor, Class of 1925 Hall (JAM)
Cornell Tradition Fellow, 1991-1993

James C. Sorrentino '94
President, Shire Cooperative
Peer Counselor, Cornell Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Coalition
Cornell Tradition Fellow, 1990-1993

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT:

the Student Assembly respectfully requests that the Cornell administration and the Department of Residence Life/Campus Life implement this program in time for the fall of 1994 in cooperation with the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Committee for University Residence Space, the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Coalition, and other interested individuals and organizations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT:

the Student Assembly adopts the following as a statement of purpose in defense of the creation of a Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Living-Learning Unit:

Over the last several weeks, much campus and Assembly debate has ensued over whether or not the Living-Learning Unit should exist. Objections have been raised by President Rhodes and by other members of the campus community which merit a response.

First, the Student Assembly recognizes the societal invisibility imposed upon Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual people, and that such invisibility makes it particularly difficult for these people to empower themselves and connect with others. To say that such things as an active student group and a seat on the Assembly provide sufficient empowerment for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual people is misleading and inaccurate. Such icons are but a means to cultural empowerment, not an end in themselves; it is through these political outlets that Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual students can work towards self-empowerment and a more tolerant society, but having these outlets alone does not in itself ensure empowerment and equality. Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual people will not be sufficiently empowered until they achieve full status as citizens of this country, are entitled to all the rights and privileges that other people take for granted, and are free to pursue their happiness and self-fulfillment in any way they see fit without fear of reprisal or discrimination. Cornell University, being a part of the greater society, has a responsibility to provide for the cultural enrichment and empowerment of all students. By attaining their self-empowerment and a greater knowledge of their culture and history through such visible programs as the Living-Learning Unit, Gay Cornellians will be better able to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to take their quest for equality and recognition to all levels of society.

Second, the Student Assembly deems it insufficient for the University to respond to such blatant incidents of homophobia as last October's chalkings with disclaimers about the University's inability to control such incidents (although we recognize the futility of any attempts to control the actions of anonymous perpetrators). It is, we believe, the University's responsibility to make every effort to ensure that such despicable expressions are minimized in the future--not by policing the sidewalks, but by instituting programs that will increase awareness of and respect towards Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual people. Awareness and education is the only way to combat the ignorance that breeds hatred. The Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Living-Learning Unit would go a long way towards combatting ignorance, and it would provide the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual community with the recognition they deserve as a legitimate minority worthy of respect.

Third, the Student Assembly wishes to reaffirm its belief that the Living-Learning Unit would create a safe and supportive setting. Although it is possible that the formation of the Unit might create a target for antagonism, it is also equally possible that the Unit's creation might lessen such incidents because it would send a clear message to the effect that Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual students are supported by a University that will be intolerant of antagonistic incidents. Additionally, it is one thing for potential antagonists to harass an individual, and it is another thing for those antagonists to harass an entire floor. Institutional support from without and peer support from within may very well cause potential harassers to think twice before antagonizing.

We should not, however, be impeded in our efforts to create a more tolerant living and learning environment by the threat of harassment or intimidation. Minorities seeking their civil rights have always been subjected to the possibility of antagonism, and Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual students are well used to that possibility in every aspect of their lives. We feel that the University should take the initiative in providing programs to combat the prejudices that engender acts of antagonism rather than fail to do anything with the hopes of protecting Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual people. Such protectionism accomplishes nothing except to perpetuate the invisibility of and intolerance towards Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual people.

Fourth, the issue of the feasibility of the program houses in general has been raised, as well as the fear that segregation results from the implementation of such programs as the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Living-Learning Unit. Although it is true that reasonable people can differ sharply on these issues, the Student Assembly fears the possibility of a double standard being applied to the proposed Living-Learning Unit in particular. Cornell University currently has made no move to dismantle other minority program houses, presumably because it understands and appreciates the value of empowerment and cultural enrichment that participants in the program enjoy. Why, then, is the specter of segregation being brought up at this time? Taking a few members of the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual minority to live in the Unit out of a much larger pool of Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual people (who would still live throughout the entire campus community) does not seem to lend credence to any claim of significant segregation. The facts that the floor would be open to all people regardless of their sexual orientation and that one of the main goals of the program is to proactively reach out to the greater campus community argue even more strongly against claims of segregation. But the main issue here is that the University should deal equitably with all of its minorities and program houses, by either allowing or eliminating all of them. To single out the proposed Living-Learning Unit while failing to take concrete steps regarding other program houses is discriminatory and unfair.

Fifth, the Student Assembly disagrees with President Rhodes' assertion that establishing the Living-Learning Unit will promote a particular lifestyle. Since the term "lifestyle" implies a choice, such a statement is inconsistent with scientific fact regarding the inevitable nature of sexual orientation. Being Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual, like being Heterosexual, is an innate (or at least an unchosen) trait and is not subject to alteration; it is as unreasonable to say that Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual people live a "Gay lifestyle" as it is to say that heterosexuals live a "straight lifestyle." However, if it is to be insisted that being Gay equates to a lifestyle (and therefore by parallel that being heterosexual is also a lifestyle), then the University must find itself in the undesirable position of having to explain why it promotes certain lifestyles while refusing to acknowledge others. After all, Cornell promotes the "heterosexual lifestyle" by

supporting the Family Housing Units and by allowing partners of married students access to facilities and health benefits. Once again, the University must beware of applying a double standard to an often marginalized minority.

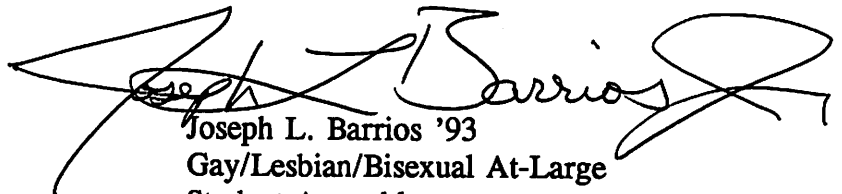
Sixth, the Student Assembly considers the personnel and financial consequences of the proposal to be reasonable. The resolution calls for two RA's, which is standard for any residence hall floor. Programming both for members of the Unit and for the campus at large will be planned by a volunteer resident programming board. A fee charged to residents will ensure adequate resources for programming activities, with small supplemental funding (in the unlikely even that it becomes necessary) from the Department of Residence Life/Campus Life. Administrators from the Department of Residence Life/Campus Life have agreed that extra University expenditure will be minimal, if it is necessary at all.

The Student Assembly believes that interest from the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual community (along with their Heterosexual supporters) will be widespread enough to ensure that all rooms are filled. As stated in the resolution, the Department of Residence Life/Campus Life, upon consultation with the Student Assembly, has the option of dissolving the Living-Learning Unit in the unlikely event that membership becomes problematical.

Further, the Student Assembly does not foresee any difficulty in filling Dickson as a result of the creation of the Unit. Clara Dickson Hall has a very high continued occupancy rate (this year saw approximately 50% of residents seeking rooms for next year). Dickson is a very popular residence hall due to the fact the vast majority of its rooms are single, and this popularity (combined with the fact that rooms on campus in general are in high demand) makes it very unlikely that students will flee the residence hall *en masse*. Nevertheless it will undoubtedly be true that some students will refuse to live there due to their personal views about the Living-Learning Unit and its residents. Although the attitudes of these students would be regrettable, the Student Assembly does not believe that the intolerance and fear expressed by some students should direct campus policy on progressive social issues. Fear and intolerance are what the residents of the Living-Learning Unit are hoping to combat in the first place, and the benefits that will accrue to other Dickson residents and members of the campus community will far outweigh the costs incurred because of the intolerance expressed by a few.

It is the hope of the Student Assembly that the above points will serve to clarify our position regarding this matter, both to President Rhodes and to the entire student body.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph L. Barrios". The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Joseph L. Barrios '93
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual At-Large
Student Assembly
March 11, 1993