

# Guidelines For Working With Bisexual Students On Campus

As we put aside the old myths and prejudice, we are coming to better understand the diversity in our community. One of the things we're realizing is that everyone doesn't fall neatly into the categories of "gay/lesbian" or "straight." Bisexual men and women are asserting their unique identities and their place in the struggle for understanding and basic rights for people of all sexual orientations.

Many of us work with bisexual students who are searching for identity and acceptance. They may or may not be finding the support they need in the services and student organizations on our campuses. The following guidelines address some of the needs of bisexual students in student organizations, campus activities programming, and residence halls. They are taken from "Not Just Perfect '6's': Bisexuality and Biphobia on Campus", a program presented by David Barnett and Mary McGhee and sponsored by the Standing Committee for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Awareness at the 1989 American College Personnel Association conference.

**inclusive language**--A few years ago many of us needed to educate our students and colleagues that the word "gay" wasn't necessarily understood to include lesbian women. Just as lesbians often didn't feel welcomed into the "Gay Student Association," bisexual students may not be sure that they're included under the banner of the "Lesbian and Gay Student Union." We need to use language that explicitly includes bisexual people in the names of our groups and organizations, in titles of programs, in nondiscrimination statements and policies, in brochures and publicity materials, and in our everyday speech.

**exploring norms**--Are students in a lesbian/gay/bisexual student group comfortable with talking about attractions and involvements with people of the other gender? What would happen if someone brought an other-gender date to a social event sponsored by the group? An advisor can help by encouraging the discussion of these often-unspoken norms and assumptions and helping students to explore their feelings and fears. Such a discussion can be a source of reassurance for students who may be feeling isolated in their bisexuality, as well as the beginning of a move toward a less dualistic world view for those who still see sexual orientation as a simplistic either/or proposition.

**programming**--A Queer Awareness Week program or other series of events should include at least one program dealing with the complexity and diversity of sexual orientation and identity in our community. Individual programs on sexual minority issues should make mention of how they relate to bisexual people.

**speakers bureaus**--A panel of individuals speaking on sexual minority lifestyles and issues should include someone talking from a bisexual perspective.

**AIDS programming**-- A brief look at the research on sexual behavior tells us that even with people who consider themselves primarily gay or lesbian, it isn't safe to assume that none of them will ever need to know about safer sexual practices with an other-sex partner. Educational materials and programs offered to any audience should discuss sex between same-gender and mixed-gender partners.

**staff trainings**--Most residence hall staffs, peer counselors, and other student helpers are trained about the needs and the special issues faced by lesbian and gay students. In these training sessions we should also address the needs of bisexual students, including the answers to commonly-asked questions about bisexuality, myths and stereotypes about bisexuality and bisexuals, issues that often come up when a student comes out as bisexual, and the resources available (books, organizations, support groups, etc.) that may be of assistance.