

# Lambda Coalition continues on path to recognition

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Editor

*Ed. Note: Because of the sensitive nature of this story the names of University of Richmond students interviewed have been changed.*

During the weekend David Braverman, assistant dean of Richmond College and faculty advisor to the Lambda Coalition, received about six prank phone calls.

Most were made by drunken callers and all made jokes about the idea of a support group for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and supporters of their rights. Braverman estimated about 10 people were involved because each caller seemed to have an audience.

"It was just like immature drunk kids making prank calls," Braverman said. "I was disappointed, but I would estimate that only about 10 people were involved. So out of a population of about 3,500 students on campus we have 10 13-year-olds out there.

"In perspective it is really not

that bad, but one negative experience can tend to color your perception. But I have had enough positive feedback from faculty and administrators to more than offset that."

One positive thing for the group is that the Lambda Coalition banner has remained up in the Tyler Haynes Commons for an entire week. Also, the group has received two letters of support from students in the "supporters of their rights category."

## Initial University Approval

Yesterday the Richmond College Student Affairs Committee, made up of administrators, faculty and students, voted to recommend that the faculty of arts and sciences recognize the support group as an official campus organization at its meeting Feb. 20.

Of the calls Braverman said he received over the weekend, half were from women, and many asked questions about why the group was needed.

"One woman asked, 'Why do we need a homosexual support group? There's no heterosexual

## Coming out of hiding Homosexuals at UR

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support group,'" Braverman said. "I wish she had left her name and number on my answering machine so that I could tell her to start a heterosexual support group if she feels that we need one. I would be more than happy to be an advisor to that group, too.

"One of the most important things any college student has to come to terms with is his or her sexual identity. Dealing with sexuality is not easy and generally we do a lousy job about talking about it in this country."

One of the best parts about the Lambda Coalition is the support that it provides its members, Braverman said. "They are so thrilled to have a group," he said, "and to have the opportunity to come together and talk in a place where they are not outcasts and where they feel they are normal."

Students who feel alienated

socially often have difficulty performing in many areas, Braverman said. "To know that they had the support of the University and each other made them feel good."

Braverman said he is a believer in the group process and that he wanted to make it clear that the Lambda Coalition is a support group and not a dating service.

As long as there is a need for such a group it should be there, he said.

"Many of the students who called made comments like, 'Didn't they know this was a conservative campus when the came?' and 'If they don't like it here why don't they just leave,'" Braverman said. "But most students don't pay much attention to the political environment of the campus when they choose a school and why should they have to leave just because that one part of their lives makes them feel uncomfortable."

It is difficult for students to grow in an environment where they are living in a state of fear or denial, Braverman said.

"Some choose to repress feelings about their true sexual orientation," he said. "And many don't begin to really examine those feelings until they are away from home and without family pressure. ...

"The goal of a liberal arts education is to explore yourself and your ideas—not just your sexual identity—and to grow with the experience of that education."

Joseph, a senior and member of the Lambda Coalition, said, "College is supposed to be a place where you challenge your ideas. But it seems like people here are afraid to have their own ideas when college is the best chance to get away from home and experience new ideas. That's not happening enough here. It's almost a sheltered little campus out on the West End of the city. It's just not real."

## Homosexuals in the Military

But the issues of homosexuality are real and they go far beyond this sheltered campus.

With the war in the Persian Gulf

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ation Desert Storm is receiving little attention: homosexuals. A story in the Jan. 24 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* reported that gay veterans groups and gay-rights attorneys claim the military has relaxed its ban on homosexuals in recent weeks because of the war, but still plans to throw them out after the fighting is over.

Although the Pentagon insists that no change in policy has occurred, at least 14 gay and lesbian reservists across the country were cleared by their unit commanders to serve in the Persian Gulf after stating their sexual orientation, the lawyers and gay veterans said.

But these reservists, who informed their commanders that they are gay and want to serve in the Gulf, also were told that discharge proceedings will be begun against them after they return from the war, the lawyers said. About half of the reservists have been sent to the Persian Gulf, the lawyers said.

If the military is allowing gay to serve in the war, those who return may be able to raise strong legal challenges to the military's longstanding policy of excluding them, lawyers said.

Joseph said, "Basically what those soldiers will be receiving is a dishonorable discharge. If I'm good enough to lay down my life for this country, they [the military] should recognize my rights."

## Department of Defense Policy

The Department of Defense Policy states in part:

"Homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The pres-

ence of such members adversely affects the ability of the Armed Forces to maintain discipline, good order, and morale; to foster mutual trust and confidence among the members; to ensure the integrity of the system of rank and command; to facilitate assignment and worldwide deployment of members who frequently must live and work under close conditions affording minimal privacy; to recruit and retain members of the military service; to maintain the public acceptability of military service; and, in certain circumstances, to prevent breaches of security."

## Psychologists' Response

The American Psychological Association, which attempts to offer the best understanding of available empirical evidence relative to the presumptions in the Department of Defense directive, presented the following conclusions in the January 1991 issue of *The APA Monitor*:

- Sexual orientation does not affect a person's ability to contribute to society and has never been shown to negatively affect performance in the military, or to contribute to any of the factors cited in the Department of Defense directive.

- The discrimination articulated in the directive is substantially based on erroneous stereotypes and prejudices.

- The directive stigmatizes homosexual members of the services and encourages them to conceal their homosexuality, which psychological research indicates is detrimental to their mental and physical health.

- The government should not penalize a class of citizens solely because others are prejudiced against them. Prejudice against lesbians and gay men in the military is likely to be reduced by encouraging contact between homosexuals and heterosexuals, as indicated by widely accepted psychological research on prejudice reduction.

A motion passed at the Sept. 6, 1990, meeting of the University of Richmond arts and sciences faculty asking that a committee investigate to see if students' rights were being violated by the Defense Department's policy of excluding homosexuals from military service. The motion made reference to the belief that the University "endorses equal treatment of all persons without regard to gender, race, religion, or sexual preference."

## UR's Anti-discrimination Policy

One of the first points made in the Dec. 6, 1990, report made by the Department of Defense Committee was that there is no specific written University policy stating that it does not discriminate against homosexuals. The academic catalogue states the following: "The University does not discriminate on the basis of sex, religion, age, handicap, race, color or national origin."

Sexual orientation was not considered when this was written some years ago, the committee was told. At its Dec. 6 meeting the faculty of arts and sciences passed a motion requesting that the anti-discrimination statement be expanded to include sexual orientation with the understanding

*'Dealing with sexuality is not easy and generally we do a lousy job about talking about it in this country.'*

—David Braverman

that it was a recommendation needing further approval of the E. Claiborne Robins School of Business, the T.C. Williams School of Law, the University Administration and the Board of Trustees before implementation.

The business school faculty was scheduled to discuss the recommendation at its meeting yesterday.

The committee also found no evidence that the University discriminates against homosexuals in personnel policies or in student, recruitment, financial aid or housing.

## University ROTC Program

The ROTC program at the University currently has 127 students enrolled. Of those, 36 are contracted or enlisted in the Army Reserves. Those latter students are required to sign a statement disclaiming any homosexual conduct or tendencies.

"As freshmen some students may have signed [that statement]," Joseph said, "but as they work through their feelings in the next couple of years they may realize that they are homosexual. For most students the coming out process doesn't take place until the junior or senior year.

"But the most disheartening thing is that officers who have admitted their sexual orientation were discharged and billed for the college loans paid by the U.S. military."

The University Department of Defense Committee found no case in which a University student was dropped from ROTC for being homosexual. Also, it found no case in which a student who professed homosex-

had tried to become a contracted ROTC cadet. Michael, a sophomore, said, "We [the Lambda Coalition] had nothing to do with the University's decision to review this issue. We don't want to see ROTC kicked off campus because that would be as unfair to students who rely on those scholarships for their education as it is for the ROTC to discriminate against homosexuals. We would just like to see the Department of Defense change its policy."

Lt. Col. Walter Sullivan told The Collegian in September that the Department of Defense changes its policy through congressional and departmental reviews.

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