Tufts to host LGB conference

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Daily Editorial Board

The Massachusetts Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth has chosen Tufts as the location for its first annual conference dealing with safety for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) students on college campuses. The “Sound Mind, Sound Body, Sound Off,” conference, scheduled for Sat., Mar. 28, will take place from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The conference is part of a larger, five-year program intended to create a safer environment for LGB college students. The program, sponsored by Tufts LGB Resource Center Director Judith Brown, Tufts Health Service Director Michelle Bowdler, and Harvard Professors Arthur Lipkin and Catherine Roberts, will receive a yearly government grant of $65,000 for each of the next five years, and will hold a conference of this size annually, according to Brown, who serves as project advisor.

“They found $65,000, wherever they found it, and they decided to put it towards creating safe campuses for LGB students,” Brown said. “For the past couple of years, they’ve had the money to put into higher education, but they’ve given it to consultants. This is the first time they are working directly with higher education institutions,” she continued.

The Mar. 28 conference is the centerpiece of a three-part, month-long program to increase awareness of LGB campus safety issues, beginning on Mar. 27 with a public hearing to be held at the Mass. Dept. of Public Health in central Boston. Professor Lipkin reported that representatives from many media and government organizations will be in attendance, including possibly the acting governor. “He himself may be attending... it’s an election year, so he may have difficulty attending himself, but I have no doubt that someone representing him will be there,” Lipkin said.

The third segment of the program will consist of four regional workshops held on different campuses across the state. The workshop closest to the Tufts area will be held at Harvard University on April 24.

The actual Tufts conference will consist of three panels, the first on the role of health services and counseling, the second on campus safety, and the third on the incorporation of gay issues in college curricula. A number of speakers will be featured, including police officers, guidance counselors, students, and faculty from institutions across the state.

In addition, Tufts will be hosting lesbian singer Catie Curtis on the evening of the conference, and on Mar. 30, the Boston Gay men’s choir will be performing on campus to usher in “Gaypril” at Tufts.

Brown explained that the conference is open, and relevant to, anyone who deals with LGB students on campus in any manner. “It’s safety for colleges in general that we’re dealing with here; people who work in residential life offices need to hear this, as do people working in health services... it’s just a way to figure out how to be a little more sensitive,” she said.

Tufts’ involvement in LGB safety issues will not end with this conference. Tufts will be the linchpin in the future of exploring campus safety issues, according to Lipkin. “My understanding is, as far as Tufts is concerned, that one of the reasons Tufts is involved in this program is for the opportunity to hold a major conference at Tufts every year... Tufts won the grant, and Tufts is really heading up the work for the next five years,” Lipkin said.

Lipkin summed up the goals of the five-year program by saying, “It’s a long term effort to sensitize and inform the college community in Massachusetts to the particular needs of GLBT [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered] students and their allies, and to bring about changes that will make college safe and enjoyable for GLBT students,” Lipkin said.