Tufts takes a leading role in the discussion of gay issues

University host to first annual statewide conference

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Tufts helped to bring Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) issues into the public eye by hosting the first annual statewide conference on LGB issues this past Saturday.

The conference, sponsored by The Governor's Commission on Safe Colleges Program for Gay and Lesbian Students was held in Barnum Hall.

Attended by students and representatives from an estimated 25 colleges and universities around the state, the conference focused on the safety issues for LGB college students.

The conference was entitled “Sound Mind, Sound Body, Sound Off: Making Colleges Safe for LGB students,” and will be held at Tufts annually from now on.

The University and the Tufts Transgendered Lesbian Gay Bisexual Collective (TTLGBC) received a $65,000 grant for each of the next five years from the Mass. Department of Public Health allowing Tufts to hold and organize the event each year.

Shou Minh Tan, the TTLGBC cultural representative to the Tufts Community Union (TCU) Senate, attended the event.

“It was a very necessary conference,” Tan said, “but we need more student involvement.

“At Tufts we’re very fortunate. The student body and the administration are very supportive,” Tan continued. “On all levels, Tufts is very much ahead of other schools.”

Tan said that students at other schools spoke of being harassed on campus, which he felt was very disturbing. He said this is unlike the environment here.

“At Tufts, I think students feel very safe,” he said.

Arthur Lipkin, Coordinator of the Safe Colleges Program and an instructor at Harvard Graduate School of Education, helped to organize the conference with Tufts’ Dean of Students Bobbie Knable and Judith Brown, Director of the Tufts LGB Resource Center.

Lipkin complimented Tufts on its positive environment. “Tufts and UMass- Amherst both have very active TTLGBC student centers, and model in a number of areas,” Lipkin said.

The conference is the centerpiece of a three-part, month-long program sponsored by the Governor’s office and is intended to increase awareness of LGB campus safety issues.

The first part of the program consisted of a public hearing on Friday, held at the Mass. Department of Public Health in Boston.

The third segment of the program will consist of four regional workshops held on different campuses across the state. The Boston area workshop will be hosted by Harvard on April 24.

The Governor was represented at the conference by David LaFontaine, Chair of the Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, who was on hand to welcome the participants.

The conference, which spanned the entire day, consisted of three panel discussions on topics such as curricular reform, the truths of gay and lesbian history, and formulating a clearly stated and enforced harassment policy.

“We took testimony from about 20 kids from all over the state,” Lipkin said. “There isn’t a feeling of safety and comfort on college campuses right now.

“The goal is to present a vision for campus change and to outline strategies for change,” Lipkin said.

“I hope for change in every campus, refining some of the wonderful campus environments at places like Tufts, or for some other schools, who are just beginning to make progress.”

The conference is part of a greater, national program for the month of April, known nationally as “Gaypril.”

To usher in Gaypril, Tufts hosted lesbian singer Catie Curtis Saturday night. The Boston Gay men’s choir will be performing on campus tonight.