Task Force examines Tufts’ gay, lesbian, and bisexual resources

by JESSICA ROSENTHAL

Academic Vice President Melvin Bernstein sent an open letter to the Tufts community asking for responses to recommendations made by the Task Force on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual issues, a committee whose goal is to "provide a campus community in which all members enjoy full access to Tufts' resources with regard to sexual orientation.

The Task Force, co-chaired by History professor Howard Solomon and senior associate dean Marilyn Glater, was created by Bernstein in the spring of 1992 to identify areas that may need attention and forward recommendations to him by the spring of 1993.

This past fall, Solomon, Glater, and Bernstein met with President John DiBiagio and Provost Sol Gittiner to discuss the recommendations made by the Task Force. Bernstein is now asking the Tufts community to analyze the recommendations and make suggestions so that the administration can "prioritize the list of recommendations in the broader context of the university's mission and resources."

Bernstein said that he has asked for input because "it's a complex issue. There's really a broad consensus on the goals of equal access and equal opportunity."

Separate from the Task Force, about 40 members of the faculty and staff have formed the Faculty-Staff Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Caucus, chaired by Jonathan Strong of the English department, also to "study the situation on the Medford campus about sexual orientation issues," according to Strong. This group, which meets at least once a month, is "eager to get discussion going" about the Task Force's report and recommendations. Strong said.

Strong added that his group is planning to hold open meetings for discussion of the report. Strong said that he hopes for two meetings to discuss sexual orientation issues at Tufts -- one geared toward faculty and staff and one aimed at students. He also said that he wants "an open discussion to see what people want to do and what can be done" about the issues.

Bernstein said that he also wants discussion of the issue. "There are issues here which are more related to faculty and staff, there are student-related issues, there are issues which combine these two."

Now is really an opportunity to talk through them," he said.

Copies of the recommendations by the Task Force have been sent to faculty and staff members, as well as to the TCU Senate. Additionally, copies of the full report are available in the academic departments, Wessell Library, and Bernstein's office.

Bernstein said that he wants "to get people made aware of what went on with the committee to provide those recommendations for those people" and "to be able to see TASKFORCE page 17"

Report calls for diversity of sexual orientation

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to get access to the report [for those] who have particular interest to go beyond that."

After gaining input from the Tufts community, Bernstein said that he wants to "get back to the committee and other interested parties and say 'we've heard back from the community, now what are the next steps?' He said that he then wants to "evaluate what we can do or decide how to balance needs with other needs within the institution." Bernstein described this evaluation of needs as "an ongoing process."

However, Strong, the faculty/staff caucus, said that the "administration is very careful. They have been polite and helpful, but they haven't let us know as to what they're willing to do."

Strong stressed that the Task Force report is not final, but just the first public version of recommendations. "It is not final until discussion occurs," he said. Strong added that the faculty/staff group wants to put pressure on the administration to make some headway in terms of issues of sexual orientation.

Bernstein admitted that "there are many, many recommendations. One of the challenges we'll face is to identify which ones are possible, doable within the Tufts community, and how these are interpreted, and what the needs are for different constituencies." However, he said that he does see this as "an interactive process."

According to the Task Force report, the goal of the Task Force is to make Tufts a university which "welcomes and values sexual identity diversity, because such diversity is a reality of humanity and because valuing and welcoming it improves the quality and effectiveness of all our work, lives, and relationships."

The report states that in order to accomplish this goal, the university must "shift basic assumptions, promises, and beliefs in all areas of the institution. Heterosexual assumptions (must be) replaced by assumptions of diverse sexualities and relationships."

The report states that over half of the graduating seniors in 1988, 1990, 1991, and 1992 identified "sexual harassment, homophobia, and harassment because of sexual orientation as serious problems at Tufts."

The Task Force developed a list of 32 recommendations in various areas to achieve their goals. In general, the recommendations call for an anti-discrimination policy to be developed for all parts of the university, education dealing with human sexuality and diversity, employment opportunities to invite gay, lesbians, and bisexuals to apply for faculty and staff positions, and publications that reflect the presence of these groups at Tufts.

The report also states that the current part-time position of Director of the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Resource Center is "inadequate to meet the needs" of the university. Additionally, it states that the Counseling Center should make it known that gay or lesbian-identified members are on staff.

In the category of teaching, the Task Force recommends that the "experience of human sexual diversity...be integrated into all relevant areas of undergraduate and graduate curricula." Additionally, it states that the development of courses and curricula for gay and lesbian studies should be encouraged. The Task Force also recommends that Bernstein appoint a committee to explore the development of a minor or certificate program in gay, lesbian, and bisexual studies.

In terms of students, the report states that "the diversity among gay, lesbian, and bisexual people must be recognized. All students, irrespective of sexual orientation, must have full access to campus resources. Furthermore, it states that a committee should consider including various housing options for gay, lesbian, and bisexual-sensitive students, such as individual rooms, floors, sections of dorms, and a separate gay house."

Regarding benefits, the report states that the university should provide all benefits to employees regardless of sexual orientation. Also, it states that Tufts adopt a definition of domestic partnership that is nondiscriminatory toward same-sex couples.

Finally, the report calls for the development of a year-long campus colloquium on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues for the 1994-1995 academic year.

Strong, of the faculty/staff committee, said that he "agrees in general with the report as the Task Force spelled it out."

The members of the Task Force are Peggy Barrett, Harvey Bedan, Joseph DeBold, Marilyn Glater, Gary Goldstein, Larry Hunt, Alan Lobowski, Kathleen McCune, Molly Mead, Nancy Milburn, Bruce Reitman, Sharon Schwartzberg, Howard Solomon, Donna Walker, And Heather Wohl.