

Coming Out Day addresses homosexual issues

By Jennifer Cosgrove
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

As microcosms of society, university environments continue to reflect issues and opinions regarding homosexuality whether they are presented in a classroom, a campus bar, residence halls, off-campus living arrangements or student organizations.

The University's Campus Coming Out Day, in conjunction with the national Coming Out Day traditionally held each year on October 10, is an event designed to recognize the right to be proud as a homosexual and promote awareness about homosexuality to others.

Another purpose of the University's Campus Coming Out Day is to address homosexual topics that exist nationwide in campus settings, including homophobia, homosexual identities of students of color or different religious backgrounds, peer counseling and social outlets on campus for homosexual students.

On a local level, many gays, lesbians and bisexuals have different views about what the day should mean. Although no formal report has been made at the university to establish the number of gay students on campus, the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Alliance estimates that close to 300 students are openly homosexual.



Group backs Coming Out Day

By Jennifer Cosgrove
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The University of Oregon's Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Alliance will be sponsoring UO's Campus Coming Out Day today, scheduled to begin with a student rally at noon in the EMU courtyard.

Speakers at the rally will include the dean of students Jane DeGidio, director of the office of student advocacy Marlene Drescher, UO law professor Dom Vetri and Chris Cullinan from the department of human resources. An open microphone will be present for students to conduct a forum and a mock closet door will be set up before the event for participants to walk through.

After the rally, local gay and lesbian musicians and singers will be performing throughout the afternoon. Information tables and vendors will be located throughout the courtyard as part of the Coming Out Day event as well.

At 3 p.m., a student discussion panel will be held in the EMU's Ben Linder Room covering topics such as bisexuals and homosexuals coming out in diverse communities, job security, changes in the gay and lesbian community and

challenges that occur in both personal and intimate relationships when coming out.

"We would like to encourage to all students that our office serves as a reference center for anyone, regardless of their orientation," said deMille. "Regardless of whatever people's age, color, religious beliefs and other personality traits may be, we want anyone to feel comfortable to contact the LGBA and realize these should not be an issue at all."

Mai continued: "The LGBA is meant to be helpful for anything: open questions, paper topics, borrowing library books or just learning about the gay community and its members. We're an education center and a support service, not a political campaign office."

Mai also commented on how it is difficult to make homosexual students aware that the office has a list of contacts and resources for any questions or situations students have.

"Coming out, being gay or leading a homosexual lifestyle will always have lots of new dilemmas, personal experiences and present unexpected things to face, just like anything else in life," she said. "It's good to be aware that there are many programs, services and support systems offered here to contact in Eugene."

"A closet is not easily defined, let alone determined by what it means to be 'in' or 'out,'" said Traci, a bisexual sophomore who wished to remain anonymous. "Every gay and every straight person has a different answer to these questions. Being out of the closet to me means not having to think about it at all when you're in public or in private. Just be who you are."

One student, a 25-year-old gay male named Romeo, who said if you can be honest with yourself, tell your nearest and dearest,

stand up for what you believe in and respect yourself, then you can control being out of the closet in public, without officially having to come out."

"Coming out is a lifetime process," said senior Jodi Mai, co-director of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Alliance. "I don't think straight students can appreciate how much heterosexuality is enforced as the order of societal things we all engage in: holding a lover's hand, embracing, going out to social functions — even walking between classes

creates a message to those afraid or hesitant to come out that homosexuality isn't normal."

Many lesbian and gay students agreed that once someone has come out, explanations about why he or she is gay will never cease.

"Homosexuals and bisexuals still constantly justify their lifestyles," said Colin, a junior. "I find that even when I look at others out, I respect those who do not want to be all the way out, because it's hard to let go and not care about what other

people think about you," he said. "The day encourages that everyone is on a different level of being 'out' for their own personal reasons."

Other homosexual students frown on the idea of a campus coming out day, believing it to be an invasion of privacy.

"The event implies pressure situations because people expect you to be involved in supporting the gay community in any issue, which may be one you disagree with," Romeo said. "I think it's really disturbing that we even have to take a day," said Rachel Dueker, 21, a lesbian. "There's a lot of limits staying in the closet. We should realize it's not only one day to be proud of yourself to be out, it should be every day, until homophobia is completely abolished."

Troy Shields, also a senior, said that homosexual and bisexual students who come out also have different experiences in store if they are from another ethnic background or religion that does not openly support homosexuality.

While gay, lesbian and bisexual students at the university disagree on how to dismantle a homosexual closet that may exist for someone, most agree that there is no question that it should be broken down, despite any fears.

"There are so many supportive services here at UO and social outlets and even counseling for those remaining inside a closet, it's really important to reach out to those you may suspect are in denial or vice versa," said Mai.



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