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Proposal for the Provost and Dean Submitted by the GLBT Issues Committee

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Proposal for the Provost and Dean
Submitted by the GLBT Issues Committee
September 22, 2008

NB: This document presents first a condensed version of this proposal that succinctly sums up issues the GLBT Issues Committee has discussed as well as a second version that spells out more fully the rationale for some of our commitments.

Condensed Version

special The GLBT Issues Committee is requesting that it be transformed from an ad hoc to a permanent ~~standing~~ committee entrusted to advise the Dean and the administration, the faculty and its committees, Student Life and its offices, FUSAB, AFS and other student groups, and, when appropriate, the Board of Trustees on matters relevant to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons and their representation within the University. There are several justifications for such a committee:

- **First, and perhaps most important, this committee might serve as a sounding board for anyone concerned to represent GLBT persons and their issues in a public forum at Furman.**
 - At present, there is no formal group who can advise anyone about the ways particular issues have been historically shaped around GLBT people, and so, often, many of our public discussions of these people and their concerns replicate the homophobia and hostility that they are, ostensibly, trying to overcome.
 - The committee's role in these matters would be advisory and not censorious. The committee would serve as a resource for knowledge and not as a mechanism for punitive action or censorship.
- **Second, the recent outside evaluator's report for Furman's Women's and Gender Studies Concentration (authored by Drucilla K. Barker of the University of South Carolina) made two suggestions: that we provide more courses in sexuality and queer theory AND that we create a new office in student affairs staffed by a person with experience in GLBT issues.**
 - Dr. Barker wrote in her report for WGS that "Sexuality is a major concern in any serious gender studies program today." It is as well, we believe, a major concern for the university at large, one that needs to be addressed by people knowledgeable in the issues raised by this new field of inquiry.
 - In the academy today sexuality has come to be understood—like gender, race, religion, class, and any other number of identity markers—as a foundational epistemological category of analysis, and yet very little in our present curriculum or administrative structure suggests that we have realized this fact.

- The provision of a standing committee on GLBT concerns would help address Barker's suggestions by serving as a resource for faculty in developing new courses (see below) and by taking the lead in helping create a new office of GLBT affairs.
- **Third, this committee could serve as a resource for faculty members who are putting together new courses addressing issues of sexuality at Furman.**
 - The committee could advise, again, on the historical representation of GLBT people and the kinds of responses that have been made in scholarship and politics to older, outdated ways of thinking about these issues.
 - Again, the committee's role would not be to censor but to advise. Still, we believe that at some point the administration needs to provide public guidance on such problems, at least to the extent that it currently does to insure that representations of race, gender, religious or ethnic difference in our learning spaces are fair and respectful.
- **Other considerations include the facts that**
 - Furman currently has no specific structure to understand or deal with complaints of harassment or discrimination suffered by GLBT students, faculty, and staff.
 - Furman's non-discrimination policy (832.1) excludes gender and sexual orientation from its protections.
 - GLBT students can be expected to have less understanding of their own place in the social scheme than other students whose identities make them stand out from the majority at Furman.
 - The university as a whole understands less about the specific contributions of GLBT people to American culture than about those of any other minority group.
 - It is still considered socially acceptable to speak out against GLBT people as if their sexual differences were the result of deliberate moral aberration—an idea that has been almost universally discredited by sociological, anthropological, psychological, and biological sciences, among other fields.
- **In short, Furman is very much in need of a committee—and ultimately a resource person—knowledgeable about the state of GLBT studies today, a group of people entrusted to help the university make a transition from imagining GLBT people as problems, social deviants, and religious misfits to seeing them as they are: capable, well-adjusted members of society contributing significantly to the advance of knowledge, morality, and social justice in a multicultural America.**

Proposal for the Provost and Dean
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September 22, 2008

Expanded Version

The GLBT Issues Committee is requesting that it be transformed from an ad hoc to a permanent standing committee entrusted to advise the Dean and the administration, the faculty and its committees, Student Life and its offices, FUSAB, AFS and other student groups, and, when appropriate, the Board of Trustees on matters relevant to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons and their representation within the University. There are several justifications for such a committee:

- **First, and perhaps most important, this committee might serve as a sounding board for anyone concerned to represent GLBT persons and their issues in a public forum at Furman.**
 - Because in the past speakers and entertainment groups that would be seen as routine contributors to the cultural life of a university elsewhere have been greeted at Furman with a large degree of public hostility, it seems requisite for Student Life, the administration, the faculty (including the CLP committee) and students themselves to consider how they are representing GLBT issues and the consequences of those representations.
 - A permanent GLBT Issues Committee could help any of these groups think through the consequences of the activities and events they are proposing with the intention of helping lessen GLBT students, faculty, and staff being subjected to intended or unintended hostility.
- In responding to proposed activities and events, the Committee would provide suggestions for ensuring that an appropriate context and the best available scholarship are given consideration.
- At present, there is no formal group who can advise anyone about the ways particular issues have been historically shaped around GLBT people, and so, often, many of our public discussions of these people and their concerns replicate the homophobia and hostility that they are, ostensibly, trying to overcome.
- The existence of a permanent committee composed of a number of university members who are knowledgeable about GLBT people and the history of their concerns could provide an important resource for the community at large as it attempts to adjudicate the role particular subjects play in those lives and histories.

- The committee's role in these matters would be advisory and not censorious. The committee would serve as a resource for knowledge and not as a mechanism for punitive action or censorship.
 - Nevertheless, we anticipate that the administration, faculty, and university departments will be able to use the knowledge provided by this committee to implement specific institutional changes in our present handling of GLBT issues and people.
- **Second, the recent outside evaluator's report for Furman's Women's and Gender Studies Concentration (authored by Drucilla K. Barker of the University of South Carolina) made two suggestions: one that we provide more courses in sexuality and queer theory AND that we create a new office in student affairs staffed by a person with experience in GLBT issues.**
 - It is our belief that creating a permanent committee to deal with GLBT issues will open a door to solving the first of these problems but, more important, that such a committee ought be entrusted (and empowered financially and morally) with putting into motion the necessary actions to create an officer for GLBT issues at Furman.
 - Dr. Barker wrote in her report for WGS that "Sexuality is a major concern in any serious gender studies program today." It is also, we believe, a major concern for the university at large, one that needs to be addressed by people knowledgeable in the issues raised by this new field of inquiry.
 - In the academy today sexuality has come to be understood—like gender, race, religion, class, and any other number of identity markers—as a foundational epistemological category of analysis, and yet very little in our present curriculum or administrative structure suggests that we have realized this fact.
 - In fact, Furman has developed a bi-partite curricular experience of GLBT concerns that replicates the marginalization of GLBT people in society at large: the CLP and other extra-curricular programs are filled with discussion of GLBT issues (much of it often lacking in expertise of any sort) while our classrooms remain almost totally silent on these issues.
 - In our opinion, this situation is irresponsible at best, and a permanent GLBT Issues committee would seek, with the support of the Administration, to address it.
 - The provision of a standing committee on GLBT concerns would help address Barker's suggestions by serving as a resource for faculty in developing new courses (see below) and by taking the lead in helping create a new office of GLBT affairs.

- **Third, this committee could serve as a resource for faculty members who are putting together new courses addressing issues of sexuality at Furman.**

- Although, as Dr. Barker notes, there are very few courses in sexuality and queer theory at Furman at present, it does not behoove us to create new courses that replicate factual and ideological problems in the representation of sexuality or GLBT people.

- (Recently, for example, one of our colleagues put together a new course on sexuality that lumped homosexuality along with prostitution, drug abuse, and domestic violence in its course description. Because this colleague is someone whose course and professional behavior otherwise exhibit tolerance for GLBT people, we take it as evidence that even supporters may need to have resources to help them address GLBT issues in accordance with modern scholarship.)

- We take it as axiomatic that the university can no longer afford to make these kinds of errors.

- A permanent committee might serve as a resource for people putting together new courses. The committee could advise, again, on the historical representation of GLBT people and the kinds of responses that have been made in scholarship and politics in response to older, outdated ways of thinking about these issues.
- Again, the committee's role would not be to censor but to advise. Still, we believe that at some point the administration needs to provide public guidance on such problems, at least to the extent that it currently does to insure that representations of race, gender, religious or ethnic difference in our learning spaces are fair and respectful.

- **Other considerations include the facts that**

- Furman currently has no specific structure to understand or deal with complaints of harassment or discrimination suffered by GLBT students, faculty, and staff.
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has been almost universally discredited by sociological, anthropological, psychological, and biological sciences among other fields.

- **In short, Furman is very much in need of a committee—and ultimately a resource person—knowledgeable about the state of GLBT studies today, a group of people entrusted to help the university make a transition from imagining GLBT people as problems, social deviants, and religious misfits to seeing them as they are: capable, well-adjusted members of society contributing significantly to the advance of knowledge, morality, and social justice in a multicultural America.**

Submitted by the GLBT Issues Committee: Idella Glenn (Chair), Vincent Hausmann, Jean Horney, Scott Johnson, Jane Love, Nick Radel, Roger Sneed, Evan Bohnenblust, Danielle Fisher, Chelsea Feustel, Travis Sago