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Title: Educating Our Youth in Queer Topics: Is UIUC Truly a Community Leader?

About the Author: I am a senior majoring in Sociology with a minor in Gender Women Studies and have worked with children of various age groups over the past six years. I was led to this idea of questioning queer programming in area middle and high schools because I was born and raised in this community and have knowledge of many faults with present programs in local high schools as well as a lack of programming in middle schools. As part of the UIUC community as a student as well as a permanent resident in the area, I am also intrigued at whether queer programs on campus believe that the education of youth is important and to what extent they go in promoting this education. I do not identify as queer and have not participated in any programs for queer persons or their allies, but I am part of a family that identifies and I have a child whose father identifies as queer and so I believe that it is important to understand what and how children are learning about queer topics, and if UIUC, as a community leader, is doing anything to promote knowledge, awareness, and the building of youth programs within the community and the school districts. I believe that my knowledge of the community and its schools, the types of youth in the area, and as a parent with a specific concern about what children are being taught in schools, especially those who are queer identified or in queer identified families, will allow me to investigate the link of UIUC queer programs and the Champaign community.

Keywords: Queer, LGBT, campus organizations, community, high school, students, alliances

Abstract: This research project is looking at the benefits of creating alliances between campus Queer organizations and local Champaign-Urbana high school Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA). I am looking to understand how can campus Queer organizations work with community school GSAs to provide education, resources, safe spaces, and role models to community youth, district teachers/administrators, and university students? I also

seek to discover whether the University of Illinois has a responsibility to share resources with the Champaign–Urbana community and its youth, and if the Queer organizations on campus have a responsibility towards promoting education to those outside their group. This research was performed through a series of interviews, two with GSA sponsors, two with campus Queer organization leaders, and two with UIUC faculty who have some connection to Queer organizations or youth. The findings so far have pointed to the University groups as being substantial assets to school GSAs in terms of the amount of resources they have and the immense diversity that makes up the different Queer groups on campus. Campus groups have been found to be able to provide education to school teachers, GSA sponsors, and school boards and administrators on how to create and implement Queer friendly curriculum and youth programs and provide safe spaces within schools for Queer identified and questioning youth. Campus groups are also able to provide youth with resources on how to come out, where to find safe spaces, events on campus and events within the general Queer community that they can participate in and possibly get their schools to also participate in, and they campus students and faculty can provide youth with an array of role models. Though the creation of alliances between campus and local schools is overall seen as a very positive, beneficial, and needed connection, it is only being done on a very small scale and is not inclusive of all Queer groups or schools. The next step for this research is for local GSAs and campus Queer groups to become more organized with one another to promote more youth outreach and activism.

Initial Exercises: 1. General Areas of Study

- Children’s experience with queer programs and topics inside and outside of school

- What age are children introduced to queer topics

- Who introduces these children to these topics and how are they introduced…through the curriculum, by accident

- Do children who participate in queer programming during

their adolescent years continue to participate in these programs in college

–Are college participants more or less likely to have participated during their adolescent years

–Do college students find the education of the young important or simply the education of campus

–Why don't middle schools have queer programming? Why do only 5 high schools in Champaign County have programs? Who creates these programs?

2. Rephrase into a broad topic

How do campus queer organizations promote youth education? Do youth organizations in the community have access to campus resources?

3. Narrow into more focused topic

–Is there a link between campus queer organizations and youth queer organizations in area high schools in terms of education, production of programs, or resources?

4. List 5 questions about topic

*Do campus queer organizations do anything to educate or promote queer learning in the youth of Champaign–Urbana or Champaign County?

*Have they ever tried to promote the inclusion of programs in schools, especially middle schools which there are none who currently have programs?

Has anyone from a campus organization ever spoken to a school youth organization?

Does participation or non–participation in a school youth organization affect the participation in campus organizations?

What constitutes “the promotion of education” in a campus queer organization and who is it directed towards?

Question: How do Queer organizations in the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign (UIUC) view the Queer education of youth in the Champaign–Urbana community and what steps do they take to work with school systems to produce knowledge? If they do not work with community schools, why is this youth education not viewed as important? [4-1-09]

How do Queer organizations on the University of Illinois campus and Queer organizations in Champaign–Urbana (UIUC) high schools view the formation of alliances with one another in fostering education and safe spaces? What steps are taken to form alliances and what things inhibit the creation of alliances? Does UIUC have a responsibility as a community leader to education the youth of the community? [4-8-09]

QUESTIONS [4-15-09]

I tried to refine my questions to fit what I have been discussing in different interviews as issues that come up when trying to create alliances between groups and particular benefits that alliances could have.

1. Do Queer organizations on the UIUC campus and those in Champaign–Urbana high schools form alliances with one another in order to promote and further youth education on Queer topics?
2. Can alliances be seen as essential to the creation of safe spaces in different school systems?
3. Should campus organizations utilize their diversity in group identification to target youth of those identities and what would be beneficial to targeting those youth?
4. How should campus organizations share their resources with community schools to expand or create Queer programming in curriculum and organizations?
5. Why are there no Queer organizations in local middle schools? In what ways could campus organizations help produce these groups or provide knowledge that this age

group can benefit from these groups?

6. Are there any issues that prevent campus organizations from contacting or participating in school organizations directly? How can we create alliances then, that are not direct but still beneficial and integral to fostering relationships, and would non-direct relationships still benefit organizations?

7. Does UIUC have a responsibility as a community leader to education the youth of the community?

Main Question [4-21-09]

How can campus Queer organizations work with community school Queer organizations to provide education, resources, safe spaces, and role models to community youth, district teachers/administrators, and university students? Does UIUC have a responsibility to the Champaign-Urbana community and its youth?

Plan: Initial Research Plan 4-1-09

I will be relying solely on interviews for my research in three groups: Campus Queer organizations, community high school Queer organizations, and possibly individuals who have participated in high school Queer organizations and are now on the UIUC campus. I have ten organizations total, Campus and high school, that I wish to contact but I am already running into some trouble contacting people because many campus websites are out of date and do not have the current contact information.

Campus Queer Organizations:

This group will be the initial organizations that I contact. Because many of them are targeted towards specific groups within the LGBT community, I feel they are the most important to contact because they may have more impact on community youth who may fit into one of these specific groups.

1. Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Resources

2. The Gender Group
3. La Casa Cultural Latina Allies
4. Asian American LGBT Allies
5. Among Women: A Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Discussion Group
6. Boxes and Walls

Community schools with Queer programs:

I want to conduct the school interviews first in order to see what Campus organizations they have contact with, if any, so that I can incorporate those particular organizations into my interview process.

1. Champaign Centennial high school
2. Champaign Central high school
3. Urbana high school
4. University Laboratory high school (Uni)

Initial Schedule

Week of March 30 th –April 3 rd	Tues 31 st : Contact schools Wed 1 st : Contact campus organizations Thurs 2 nd –Initial Research Plan Due Fri 3 rd : Complete 2–3 interviews—schools?
Week of April 6 th –10 th	Tues 7 th – NO CLASS available until 11:30am Complete 2 interviews—schools? Thurs 9 th –Data Gathering Exercise #7 Due Fri 10 th : Easter Friday
Week of April 13 th –17 th	Tues 14 th –Conference Application Due

	<p>Thurs 16th–Revised Research Question and Research Plan Due</p> <p>Fri 17th–complete 2–3 interviews—organizations?</p> <p>Sat 18th/Sun 19th–complete 2–3 interviews—students?</p>
Week of April 20 th –24 th	<p>Monday 20th–Complete 2–3 interviews—organizations?</p> <p>Thurs 23rd–All Research Data Due</p>
Week of April 27 th –May 1 st	<p>Tues 28th–Research Presentation (Practice)</p> <p>Thurs 30th–Conference</p>
Week of May 4 th –8 th	<p>Tues 5th–Excerise #10 Summary and Consent Forms Due</p>
Week of May 11 th –13 th	<p>Wed 13th–Final Project Due 4:30pm</p>

Second Research Plan 4–15–09

METHOD

I am relying solely on interviews for my research into two groups: Campus Queer organizations and community high school Queer organizations. I set out initially with a list of ten campus groups I wanted to contact and four local high school groups, though I knew contacting all of these would never be possible, but I wanted to try and get a diverse set of interviews with a range of different organizations. I have had trouble getting a response from some organizations and schools, as well as initially contacting some because many phone numbers, email addresses, and group sponsors are out of date in campus LGBT and school directories.

Campus Queer Organizations that I have contacted so far

1. Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Resources–Interview

3. La Casa Cultural Latina Allies–Interview
4. Asian American LGBT Allies –no interview
5. Professor in GWS/EDU–Interview
6. (Retired) LGBT Director –Interview

Community schools with Queer programs that I have contacted so far

1. Urbana High School–Interview
2. Centennial High School–in progress of setting up an interview

Schedule

Week of March 30 th –April 3 rd	<p>Tues 31st: Contact schools</p> <p>Wed 1st: Contact campus organizations</p> <p>Made contact with Asian allies, no interview yet</p> <p>Thurs 2nd–Initial Research Plan Due</p> <p>Fri 3rd: Interview at Urbana high school 9am</p> <p>Interview with LGBT office 11am</p>
Week of April 6 th –10 th	<p>Tues 7th–NO CLASS</p> <p>Wed 8th– interview with Prof. in GWS 4pm</p> <p>Thurs 9th–Data Gathering Exercise #7 Due</p> <p>Try to contact Centennial High School</p> <p>Fri 10th: Easter Friday</p>
Week of April 13 th –17 th	<p>Tues 14th–Conference Application Due</p> <p>Wed 15th–Made contact with Centennial</p>

	GSA—talking about doing an interview but may have to be through e-mail Thurs 16 th —Revised Research Question and Research Plan Due Interview at La Casa 9:30am
Week of April 20 th –24 th	Wed 22 nd —Finish transcribing data Thurs 23 rd —All Research Data Due
Week of April 27 th –May 1 st	Tues 28 th —Research Presentation (Practice) Thurs 30 th — Conference
Week of May 4 th –8 th	Tues 5 th —Excerise #10 Summary and Consent Forms Due
Week of May 11 th –13 th	Wed 13 th —Final Project Due 4:30pm

Data: LGBT office interview—2 person interview

Friday April 3^d 11am

[A1] There are no sustained connection like I would like [inaudible] it's really hard for us to do everything that needs to be done here [inaudible] some of the events that we've had here there has been some high school involvement. Uni, their GSA takes part in that. Day of Silence is coming up [inaudible], I know that there are some things taking place, Illinois Safe Schools. I know one of our students a couple of years ago did some work with schools... [inaudible] I mean is that enough? Absolutely not. I would love, and I know others have expressed interests, about going into community schools and volunteering [inaudible], I wish the relationship could be more. The former director was involved with working with schools

[Q] –I had talked with a GSA sponsor, and he had mentioned that they did the Chalk the Quad, do you ever try to send schools information about things that are going

around that they can participate in?

[A1] I know I need to, I'll be honest, most of the schools, I'm still trying to figure things out, schools have contacted me asking for information, but again that's something that I'd need to take time to research, do they have listserves, some do sign up for our newsletter.

-So schools do show an interest in trying to make a connection with the university?

[A2] Depending, depending on the event, like if it's something big like National Coming Out Day, they'll contact us to check what we're doing and how they can be involved...[inaudible]

-You do have a connection going which is what I was looking for, do you find it's beneficial to the education of the community youth, and the student youth here as well, having a connection with one another?

[A2] Oh yeah of course. Sometimes, for example, we'll get calls from kids, high school age, wanting to know what events they can get involved in...[inaudible—concern over youth interacting with college students at college events]...we tell them how to get in contact with the high school GSA which probably have more events...[inaudible]

[A1] I know it's defiantly on my priority list [inaudible]

Notes on interview

-This was a short interview, most of which was inaudible when I tried to transcribe it from the recording due to an inadequate recording device on my laptop. The two people I talked with though did express an interest in the idea of forming connections with community schools and youth, and recognized it as an important step that the office and campus should participate in.

Interview with Sponsor of a Gay–Striaight Alliance (GSA)

Friday May 3rd, 9–9:30am

Q– What is your position in this group?

A– *Sponsor of the GSA.*

–Are you only a sponsor, or do you facilitate discussions and activities, ect?

It's part of what being a sponsor is, I also teach how to run a meeting, how to organize, how to stay on track

–What types of topics are discussed in the group? Are there any activities that the students participate in or special days that are celebrated, such as National Coming Out Day?

Fundraising, individual, regional, and local activities, the social justice community at Urbana, as individuals safe schools alliance of all local regional high schools in to prevent bullying and provide atmosphere of tolerance, what it's like being out in high school, discrimination issues in general, this is a safe spot for kids to come

–Does your school's program have any relationship to the University of Illinois or LGTB organizations on the UIUC campus?

We participated in Chalk the sidewalk event they had last fall, we're in contact with the safe schools alliance, there's no official relationship with the University

–Have you ever thought of or attempted to create an alliance?

Comes up during things like chalk the quad, we have a facebook page, we hear about things through email, but how do you make it official, I'm not sure you can institutionalize it

–Do you believe such an alliance would benefit either the high school program or the campus programs?

Oh yeah, it's helpful to get to know each other, we get together each year with centennial for a pizza night

-Do you think there would be any negative influences of creating an alliance either to the high school students or the university students?

No

-Are there any school restrictions that make it hard to create an alliance?

No, members of GSA are on a listserve, this school, Urbana, in particular has been very supportive in administration and faculty, there is tremendous resistance at some schools, Mahomet-Seymour for instance, in certain areas. Like they tell you it goes against school policy to have an organization

[pause for him to talk to another faculty member on a student's progress]

-Do your group's students know what types of campus organizations exist?

Probably not

-Do you educate the high school students about available university programs and the diversity available in these programs?

Oh I talk about when I get an email about an event. I share that with the president and she decides if she wants to tell everyone else., this Sat they're going to normal for a conference

-Do you know of any current students who plan to join a campus organization or past students who have joined?

No idea

-Do the present students express any desires to connect themselves with campus organizations through the high school program?

I definitely think they're interested in forming an organization, their clearly engaged when opportunities

arise

-Could you give me an estimate on the demographics of your organization in regards to race, sexual identity, and gender?

Diverse. Very diverse., Male female, black white, Asian

-Are any students out?

Some, I don't think its easy for anyone in the high school atmosphere

-Do these demographics show any significant change with each new school year?

Sure

-Do the same students join the organization each year?

This year we had double the number of kids, hit spring though and meetings get thin, in meetings some kids do a lot, some do nothing, some just drop in, this year we've been successful in membership and participation,

-If yes, do you think its personal reasons or such things as sports and time conflicts that cause students to leave the group?

Demand on time, 4 years ago when the GSA started we had four kids and when the two girls who started it left to play soccer that was the end of the club,, kids who are involved in this, this is just one of many things for them

-Do you believe that associating the high school organization with a campus organization in any way would affect the demographics of your group, positive or negative?

No

Notes :

-The interviewee didn't show much interest in the project

as a whole other than what benefits I hoped to gain from the research; nodded in agreement when I described the benefits as possibly furthering the education efforts of youth in understand LGBT issues

-when prompted with the consent form, he looked skeptical then said he didn't care about it, crumpled up and threw away own copy

-Very outright, didn't beat around any questions, was able to answer straight forward without any pauses or delays

-We were interrupted at one point by another faculty member, the interviewee asked if we were done yet in a way that felt he wanted the interview to get done soon, talked to the man for a few minutes then finished answering questions

-Overall he was very helpful and insightful on the relationship of high schools and campus but he didn't seem to place much importance on creating specific alliances

-Things I noticed about my surroundings: before going into the classroom the class was discussing a person's rights when being arrested and detained, there was a large Malcom X poster on the wall, and there were individual student made posters going along the top of two walls and they were all depicting the September 11th attacks. I felt the posters were made at a time of anger and mistrust and I felt that they were somewhat threatening, but could not really pinpoint why.

Interview with a GSA sponsor

Monday April 20th 4pm

[Q] -What I'm looking at are the Queer organizations on campus and the ones in the highschools in the community and if they ever try to connect or make alliances between each other on any kind of levels and if that can benefit both types of students as well, as I go with the project, as well as the faculty and administration in the schools, how can they learn from campus organizations. That's pretty

much the gist of what I'm looking at.

[A] *Okay*

-So my first question is then does your group do any work with campus organizations?

Um...mimially. The Queer group at Allen Hall a couple of years ago did a little outreach thing with high schools where they prepared Day of Silence materials for us to help facilitate that, they had a little pizza party, but we really don't do much with campus. I get the LGBT newsletter, and make announcements if something seems important, but we really have no formal.

-If you could, would you want to make a stronger connection?

Absolutley

-Something else that's come up are the problems that would arise with the kids this age connecting with the kids in college, do you think that would be a main problem?

Well I think it's just like any concern that when working with public school kids, minors, that there just has to be a good screening process, make sure that expectations are clear, and that someone is overseeing the students, I know we talked about some things, middle schools have the same issues come up...[inaudible] certainly some sort of mentor program, a buddy program.

-Do students here know of the groups on campus?

I think peripherally, I don't think that there are too many that are probably too many who are you know on the listserv or anything like that. We don't get too many kids who talk about going to campus events. We have as a GSA gone to the Rainbow coffee house and tried to make a few outreach things. I have actually been dissapointed with the community, especially with U of I, and it's kind of an over arching thing, I don't think they come into the schools enough.

-That's what I'm trying get, raise awareness of that, they are a community leader, and in my belief they should do more. Another thing that has come up is the diversity of those groups, they have groups for every race, groups for certain genders, for transgender; how diverse would you say your group is?

Not terribly, overall it's a pretty middle to upper class White, it definitely doesn't reflect the numbers we are seeing in this school, we only have maybe one or two African Americans, I don't think in recent years we have any from the Latino/a community. So you know it's a pretty White group.

-Do you know, like for La Casa for instance, if they were to make a connection do you think that there be more students here...

Potentially, you know we're just working, starting a Latino group, and they went to the conference on campus. So I think that there could be some definite wading over in that. Allows are group the opportunity to think about diversity, how as a majority White group what message maybe that sends to minorities in our building...Now we do have groups within the group there is a fair level of diversity in the sense that we have people with physical handicaps, and that's been a really interesting thing.

-I don't think that's come up at all, that's really interesting. I don't think they have a group on campus for that, they probably should have a group on campus, that would be something they could look into. You've talked about participating in the Day of Silence, have you participated in anything like Chalk the Quad?

We haven't, no I think that's pretty much the only official thing. We have sometimes Day of Silence gone over as an informal group to the rally afterwards.

-How long has the group been going?

This is the fifth year.

-What about any negative things, we've talked about high

schoolers...

Yeah, obviously you wanna be careful that they're not taking them drinking, be clear about expectations, have someone on both ends that could monitor that. I think the meeting place is one of concern, you wanna make sure it's one, where our students who don't have transportation, that it's closer to this end of town. College kids just say you can take the bus, but it's harder for kids. So I would say a meeting place is of importance.

-What about parents, how would they react?

I would think that you would need to, that's a really good point, get consent for that, the majority of the kids that are in our group, they're parents are aware they are participating. So for the majority that would not be a problem, however there certainly are kids who find refuge here where home is not a safe environment...just looking at having things in small groups so it's not one-on-one. As a teacher you have to be concerned about setting yourself up for situations that could be...[inaudible] maybe small groups.

-Is there any school restrictions, that would make it hard to make an alliance iwht the campus, other than monitoring who comes in?

Well anyone who's like a volunteer in the district has to go through a screening process, do a background check, things like that. So I would say looking at district policy, making sure that that's followed.

-Also, I've been talking a lot about there's no groups in any junior highs or elementary schools, do you think if maybe the campus could talk to those schools, it would be beneficial to those schools to start developing their own programs?

Potentially, I know that they're definatly in the works at Jefferson and Franklin, where I've had faculty contact me and say 'how do you start a GSA', it seems to be faculty initiative on that. So you know any resources they can have. If we had someone from campus that could be a

good resource person. Sometimes I feel all too often that I'm the district spokesperson in some ways. I taught a class for district teachers so I kinda put myself out there. So I get someone from Jefferson say 'hey I'm trying to start a GSA what advice do you have', but if they had other people to that they could pull from, maybe a project could be getting together and putting material together, GLISEN has a great website.

–What about the Champaign administration, because Urbana, I'm not sure, but they claim that their administration is really like helpful I guess, is Champaign the same?

I think specifically with regards to LGBT issues, I'm going to be a little careful here, I wouldn't say that they're supportive but I think they recognize the legal implications.

–After talking with C_____, she let me know your process you went through, and she let me know about Jefferson and the principal there did not want a group, and the administration is really essential to...

Have you talked to our principal here?

–I really wanted to...

Just to give you a heads up...(implies not very supportive)

–I think that's about it...Can you think of anything you want to add?

I think that just even when some of the LGBT centers do their programming, and I know obviously their focus must be on campus and the students, but I don't think it would be a stretch to create programming to do an outreach things, maybe having in a speaker that would appeal, offering panel discussions, just come into the schools. It's also great PR for the university! A kid goes to campus a couple times, feels good about going, and thinks hey U or I's not so bad, though I'm dying to get out of Champaign.

–I know isn't that the case! Well a lot of students I've

talked to on campus don't even realize the organizations on campus exist until sophomore or junior year, and we had one here so I automatically assumed that they had one there. So I think if we could get more programs in schools more kids would know about them.

Notes on Interview

-Very welcoming environment, students were working at different locations in the room. Interviewee was very welcoming, seemed to care about the community and the safety and well being of community youth and the students within the GSA

Interview with Queer-School researcher, member of GWS/EDU

Wednesday April 8th 4pm

[Q] -First of all is there anything you want to know about it?

[A] I'm just curious what your project is.

-Well I'm looking at Queer organizations on campus and how if there's any alliances made with organizations in schools, because um like I'm from Champaign and everyone is led to believe that the U of I is a community leader

Uh huh

-So I wonder if organizations here try to take up that and educate youth on Queer topics, and if maybe that would benefit both programs

Well I think it's a great idea, um, the last time I was in the high schools was about two years ago and there had been one panel from, what was the group, I can't remember even what group it was on campus that sent people over to the Gay-Straight Alliance at Uni High for a panel, and the students really seemed to enjoy it. That was nice. I think a year before that I tried to get the office of LGBT concerns, which is what it was called at the time, to donate some of

their t-shirts for the day of silence, or something else, fine by me, but they didn't see their mission as connecting outside the University, so they didn't that year and then next year they did without being asked. So I think that was the start of some relationship. And on the day of Silence kids from Uni have traditionally come over here for the closing rally, but because that their day of Silence is really pretty much organized, or it had been, for the last few years, the gay straight alliance is pretty organized over there. Not sure what this year is like. They've been very school oriented, very focused on getting allies together, and the school hadn't really been thinking of getting organized with the university. The only other fun fact I can think of is now, this must be four years ago, the first time the gay straight alliance in Uni sponsored its own dance, the out Queer kids at Uni didn't really want to go to the dance and went to a drag show at the university so there's like cross pollination at social events, but as far as I know, and my information at this point is dated, there is no official background.

–It didn't seem after talking with P___ he had mentioned that once in a while he would get emails about events here and then they might participate, it would be up to the kids, but he didn't believe that there could be any official alliance, do you think...

Probably not with Urbana because it's not connected to the University, with Uni it could be because it is the university. I think the complication with a lot of the kids in the gay straight alliance, and this isn't all the gay kids in the school, and not all the kids in the GSA are gay, but anyway, parents don't necessarily know they're in the group to start with so when you start bringing more adults in who aren't actually in the school I think for some of the people who are not totally sure how safe the kids are to start with, that that might get complicated. I honestly don't know what the answer is. You can't just go into a school. You have to sign and you have to be invited and those are security reasons. But I think if probably other groups at the U of I were interested in making contact, I wouldn't be surprised if the GSAs wouldn't be happy to have them and arrange for them to go to the school. But I haven't been to

the groups here on campus in a number of years because I've been busy, but they didn't seem interested in youth, they seemed interested in themselves, which is good because it's a great opportunity for them to organize and meet and all of that. So, it would be a good idea. Are you thinking that the outcome of this project would be to try to begin something like this?

-I wish I could, I'm actually graduating this year and I would love to actually work in an organization but I don't see any organizations in the community where you could find a job. There's plenty you could volunteer with. If I could I would love to get something going, get the ball rolling.

Have you thought about, now I don't say this because I think Queer kids need counseling, but school counselors sort of fulfill a function of social organizing in schools a lot and providing support, and in fact one of the GSA organizers over at Centennial is a school counselor, and I think the school counselor at Uni is very supportive of the GSA although since she's come to Uni I haven't been going so I'm not sure what the relationship is. Um, but that might be a profession to go into, to think down the road, I also have an undergrad student who is doing research on gay-straight alliances and he is going into school counseling to do advocacy for youth that way. Now, it's not my field, it's not the field I would choose, but it's an interesting idea to try to rethink what is it that counselors do. They don't just help people through crisis, they help kids try to figure out how to organize, how to envision their lives, how to change their school climate, I mean certainly teachers do that as well, but because they're outside the disciplinary structure they're also able to do special programs during the day. Centennial used to have a Queer friendly lunch, I don't think it ever went that far, but it at least there was something during the lunch period for kids to go to if they felt like it.

-I went to Centennial and it was during when I was there that it started and I remember not really ever hearing anything about it, there would be posters or something, but

I feel like...

What year was that?

-I graduated in 2005

Oh okay, I would have been in that school probably the same time

-I remember G____ I think, did she start it?

Yeah

-And she still does it now. And I remember nobody in the group was out, not officially out, they were all allies, and I feel like maybe if there had been more, like maybe students from here, would bring more like maybe kids would feel more safe coming out knowing there were more people out there.

This, is for me, one of the questions when I do research in high schools is trying to think about the concept of out, because to me there were kids who were fairly out and kids who would talk about how they arranged dates. But when looking at how their peers responded to them it didn't always look like the allies recognized the gay people. Now there were two pretty out there guys, and I don't mean flamboyant, but they were clearly expressing their dedication to musical theater and Queer culture in very stereotypical ways and I would think it would be hard for me to believe that they were not recognized as Queer and a number of equally stereotypically student athlete women who I think would be hard for the allies to not understand as Queer. But then you wonder did they get S____, I mean I think she was fairly obvious, I mean how many more pictures of Madonna do you need [laughing]. And um so you think it would be obvious, but I actually do occasionally find the allies to be oddly oblivious. The other think I would say though with this situation at Uni where the Queer kids went to the drag show, I went to the dance and the girls that they thought were straight came out to me, so I also think that there's some confusion about, not confusion I shouldn't say that I don't think it was confusion, there's different definitions about what it means

and to be out and participating in Queer culture at the university is different then trying to make something at the school where maybe you're not going to live. So one group of girls there, and another felt comfortable somewhere else.

-I feel with the diversity available here, we have so many different groups, centered towards only gay men or only trans people, like those groups specifically should be trying to reach out to youth like them to show them that there is a place for them, even if they don't go to U of I maybe they'll go onto college where they can start their own group or something like that. And that's where I'm really wanting to get at, what is the view of youth like when I talk to students here a lot of them don't even realize that there are organizations until Sophomore or junior year, I didn't, I was a transfer student, I didn't realize until last semester how many organizations there were, I knew that there was probably some, but I would think that coming to school and not realizing and then joining a group, would make you wonder what could have been done.

I think that's an excellent point and you would think there would be that kind of backward looking stuff, but there are some people who have written about the kind of shame some gay people have about their youth and the trepidation that gay people have about being around young people because of the stereotypes of the predators and such, and I wonder if that complicates what kids think about on campus here, but I also wonder if getting involved in LGBT, Queer whatever groups here means that some people might have come to thinking about their identity in a way that would make a group a reasonable thing for them to do fairly late. So their not so much as thinking back as they're trying to remake themselves at the university. I don't know if that's what they would say, I don't know if it's a more complicated problem of lack of nostalgia in youth in not wanting to go back there as some people have written about, or whether it is that they wouldn't be able to go into schools because I think also that people who have recently come out of schools have also come out of fairly hostile schools and may think all schools are hostile. I don't think the schools around here

are necessarily, utterly and overwhelming supportive as environments even though generally the administrators have been, at least now again this has been three years ago, fairly fine with having me come in and do research but I wouldn't say, I mean I did walk through the school hallways to get a sense of the school community and it wasn't festive, there were, I think kids were faintly hostile, even when there was food involved. At one point the Gay-Straight Alliance at centennial were selling donuts and everybody seemed really cheerful about that, and another point they had an ice cream social, and a whole bunch of kids I think from either the football or basketball came in, got their ice cream, and then went twenty feet away and started making homophobic comments! And I just thought that that's just rude, don't get the ice cream you little...anyway, but you do, you point to something that would be important for groups at the university to think about, which is what could we do, could we start a Listen chapter? Which would be kinda nice, you know the Uni high is at least attached to Glisten, and I think that centennial gets information from them but I don't know how much attachment they have. But that's a nice thing that we could have a Glisten chapter, we've talked about it for years but...

-I'm also worried about the allies, like we had talked about earlier, I had never gotten to join a group because I had softball and I worked and I mean the time conflicts. I wish I had because now in my life now I'm in an actual Queer family with my son and his father, his father identifies as gay, and so I wonder about when he goes to school, what support will be there, I mean it's going to be a long ways away, but even for kids now, what support do those kids have? Do they feel that the group helps them?

What I, I've found a number of things from talking to a whole bunch of people who were both in gay straight alliances in high school and not. And the group that aren't say they wouldn't join a club in school anyway, I mean it's almost like your point, I'd rather play softball then go to a meeting at this point in my day, so I don't know why I would join the group. And I guess I have a lot of sympathy for that. And there's another group that says they wouldn't

join because their not sure whose in it, they'd like to be out to their friends but not necessarily out to people they don't know. And there's another group that says I didn't need to be there I just needed to know that they were there. The fact that there was a group even though they weren't involved, gave what woman said the sense that someone had my back, if I needed someone to have my back. I think that's a nice way to think about how the groups might function beyond whatever projects they do or don't do, they do have the kind of function of reminding other students that there are gay students at their school, even if those gay students aren't always inclined to go. We had one schedule conflict where the band club met at the same time as the Gay-Straight Alliance met, which it could just been as well as the Opera club and the softball team, everyone who was Queer went to do the Queer thing, and left the researcher there with her tape recorder thinking well probably not a good plan. Why, have you been able to talk to people on campus to find out why they don't do this?

-I talked to the LGBT center and they expressed an interest in doing it, they told me that the past director actually traveled to schools, I haven't talked to him yet, they said that he had actually traveled to schools and did work with schools but now that he was gone they didn't anymore but they had an interest in doing it. I think the people were fairly new to the office and trying to get a feel for what was going on. I have a meeting next week with La Casa, she expressed an interest in the project but she told me, and also the Asian Allies, they both told me that they do not do work with schools but that they would talk to me about it, to me that shows that they have an interest in it, but they do not do work they just center around here, which I can see why.

It's hard to get into schools to, which I think if you run into someone who has done work in schools try to find out, if they can explain the process because it's not all that easy, and there's certain time of year in which you can make an application to go into a school, this is at least for research because I'm in college of Ed, and they really I would say discourage us from approaching schools outside that

official channel.

-Because when I talked to a school GSA sponsor, I asked him if there were any school restrictions and he said no. At least [that school] in his mind the faculty and staff were he said really supportive, and the school environment was really supportive. He couldn't think of any restrictions, then he told me about Mahomet-Seymour, which has I believe a GSA now, had a lot of problems in creating one, the school told them it was against the rules of something?

Yes...and there was one fellow all by himself at a certain point, I think this was two years ago, trying to put together a gay-straight alliance.

-Do they have one now do you know?

Yeah, I think they do, at least they did. I don't know if he's still there, he's the one who started it. He started coming to OutZone, which is a community center, or at least was a community center, I think the funding for that dried up, because he couldn't get support at school to meet. Somebody helped him to make the school understand that they couldn't prohibit it.

-I remember talking to the LGBT office that sometimes kids call to try and find out how to start an organization, so I think that could be something else the campus organizations could do, in providing support in starting one, they wouldn't have to have a constant influence year after year, but show the faculty that this is what needs to be done.

Yeah, yeah, S___ started the Gay-Straight Alliance for a project in one of my classes, she wanted to for years, she had approached the principal, it didn't work out, she had a switch in administrators and it worked out. I missed the first meeting, but I went to the second and the principal who was really dealing with parental and local pastor disapproval and I was able to explain the law to her, and we were able to explain to the central office that some of the restrictions that they put on the group were illegal, and we put together a proposal to change those restrictions

and the kids put the proposal through, and it was just awesome! So it was a really, it's not that hard but it's absolutely true that if there's somebody who knows how to do to have an outsider come into the principal and say that she's not my boss, and say well that's actually illegal.

–Yeah, well I think that's the big thing, is that a lot of students are fearful of their parents and faculty are fearful of the principal, was it Dr. W_____?

Yeah, she was great, very thoughtful and kind, brilliant. She went to the first gay–straight alliance meeting and she was very moved by how many kids were interested.

–I think that's a big part of it to, not advertising but I remember posters being up, but none of the teachers mentioned it, I think it was in the morning announcements, but I think if more people had expressed interest, I think more people would have done it.

I don't know, if it's as big as it was back then, I suspect that it is because every year they do a really good job selling t–shirts and sweatshirts. One year they did baby t–shirts and that was really adorable, I bought one, I'm not a baby but I thought what's better than a little baby wearing a t–shirt that says gay–straight alliance. Totally cool, so I think a lot of people, faculty are now really interested in the t–shirts and stuff and so that gets it out there more.

–I just feel like, organizations have some sort of responsibility to the community that they're part of.

But they don't necessarily feel a part of the community.

–And also there is a big separation between Champaign–Urbana and campus, I mean I'm a townie and we don't come to campus unless we have a reason

I think you're right though, I completely agree with what you are saying and I think that this is something that the resource center should take up but it's a good thing to have discussions about. For instance get students who are at college together talking about what it was like in high school and having them think what can I do to help

somebody else's high school. Having said that my high school experience was this bad, or good, what could I bring to a local high school?

–Really, I got into contact with a few groups, but I really want to get in contact with the diverse groups because those are already minority people, minority students in the schools, and if they're seeing for instance all the White children in the group and not someone of themselves, maybe that inhibits them from joining

Well that's certainly the case, I think what a lot of the younger people say, so far in my research, is that they're not necessarily inclined to join White dominated groups but they do have very supportive friendship networks that function in the same way that the Gay–Straight Alliance functions and so that kind of goes back to the point that just in general kids who don't join the Gay–Straight Alliance, and though that is a glaringly obvious point, people rely on their friends, but if they rely on their friends for support they can't go back and be friends to somebody. They may be finding their support in social ways that have nothing to do with an extra-curricular group, so that might one of those splits where what seems like a gesture of support might not even reach the kids that you're thinking of. Or only reaches only a small percentage, or reaches a particular population, or reaches allies as opposed to reaching LGBT Queer kids.

–I don't think we had any, at least one year it was all allies, and I remember thinking that was funny. It's a group for allies, but it's also not a group for allies, and I know that there was at least a couple kids in my class who were out, and my best friend I was the only one who knew for two years in high school, and maybe it would have been better for him, but then he also would have never joined a group. So there are just so many barriers

Yeah, and as you start to talk to people, you'll start to see, even ask them what do they think they could do at a high school, what would they have wanted different at their high school, because you might find that things just aren't the same. One might have wanted, I hung out in the art wing

during high school and that's where it turned out uh yeah surprisingly we were all Queer, we just didn't happen to mention it, and we all thought there was something odd about each other, and we were all dating people so we could have been a little more, this was many years ago, we barely had cars, so would it have helped at that point to have someone come in and say you all seem to be remarkable Queer, I don't know because we were also all a bunch of weird loners working on our own projects and different media, so maybe we wouldn't of talked about it, maybe this was exactly the way we wanted to be.

-I understand I've changed completely since high school

It's hard to do research across ages, because first of all time marches on and the categories I might have identified myself with twenty-two years ago, may not be exactly, their probably remarkable consistent, but the categories that have meanings for kids are different, and I think that's really the sense of vocabulary, slang, cultural productions, those are all changing fairly quickly, it may be funny sometimes for college kids to go back and be treated like Grandma

-Oh, all the organizations here are with high schools, what do you think about junior highs?

I've been to junior high GSAs, not here...

-Do they work?

The one I went too seemed to be working pretty well.

-Because I feel like that, elementary schools might be too young because they're all in their own little world, but junior high, eighth grade, three girls came out and they had a little love triangle, and so..

Is this Jefferson?

-Yeah that was Jefferson

Because the principal at Jefferson was adamant that there

would be no Gay–Straight Alliance

–It was a woman...

I don't remember who it was, but there was some homophobic...

–Dr. Stack, I think it was Dr. Stack

There was some bullying, and I think it was her, maybe it was someone else, wouldn't let a researcher come in do some research on the bullying

–That's interesting because we had, I can't remember, one of top 100 schools in Illinois that year or something, and I find it interesting that if it was such a great school, nobody knew about her not wanting those programs, and I remember in eighth grade there was a teacher who was obviously Queer, I didn't have her so I don't know if she told students or not, but it was obvious to me anyways, and it's interesting that we would of had a teacher yet nobody would of wanted to start an organization. And the three girls that I knew, it was obvious, they let everyone know and they weren't trying to hide it. We also had a boy also, who was friends with all of them, I don't know if he came out that year or not, but we obviously had students who weren't hiding anything.

I know from talking to school administrators, this is now ten years ago, my friend and I would do this project like well how do you handle homophobia and how do you handle the presence of LGBT kids in their schools, and their first response was always, we don't have homophobia because we don't have any gay kids, but then you talk for a half hour and they'd say oh well there's so and so, and he's clearly a big fag, and anything that comes his way is his fault. But it took, they were still able to say there were no gay kids and tell stories about the gay kids they knew. So then you start to ask yourself, so what's the big disconnect here, you're allowed two or three, they don't count, or you're not thinking they're important, or their experiences are not important

-Or they'll change their mind

Although the way they described these particular kids, they almost uniformly described them as flamboyant, so you go like, am I in the 1950s, are you serious!

-I just feel like more influence from outside sources would help, and on the campus so many people...

Well also changing teacher education and having the teachers step up and be supportive would be a very good thing, I mean S___ is great, she really does a lot, BV, Uni is great, he's done a lot for Queer kids and allies over the years, and for him there's been pressure as well, so having the other teachers be supportive would be nice

-The Uni website for the group, they even express an interest with getting in contact with the LGBT office, I don't know, I haven't had a chance to talk to him, I've had trouble getting in contact with schools and getting a response.

And that is hard, probably because most of the official requests for research go through particular channels so if you try to go through another way it doesn't always work, sometimes it works for me through word of mouth, but in retrospect realize that there was actually a district protocol for requesting research access that I hadn't followed, and when you realize that you're like well I was invited what do I do? And one principal up in the Chicago suburbs said come anytime, do any research you want, and I don't think it works like that but all right

-Yeah at (school), the guy said come on in I'll help you out and I've emailed other teachers and haven't gotten a response...I really wanna know what kids are being taught.

Well good luck, that's easy. It's both easy and probably much more complicated, but that would be an interesting project. Get into schools and see what, if anything, is being taught, because my sense is, officially, nothing, but unofficially some stuff.

Yeah, in my experience I don't think it ever came up, until I

came here and that was only in GWS classes

One of the other teachers, who was in the same class as S_____ which was on sexuality and ED, was an art teacher friend, who put together a unit on sexuality and art and I don't know if she ever got to teach it, but that year S_____ put together, as an independent study, an in-service training for teachers and she's done that for a number of years, and done just an amazingly great job and she helped me last year to do a anti-homophobia workshop at Uni, so she's really, I think, the key person around here for being active and stuff

Interview at La Casa

Thursday April 16th 9:30am

-So I'm doing my project on Queer organizations on campus and those in the high schools in the local community and if they create alliances or make any kind of connections and what benefits the groups, especially the high school groups, get by doing that.

Okay

Does the organization here doing any of that?
[respondents shakes head] No? I don't think any organizations actually do it.

No, I think it's such a good idea though because when I think about high school kids really questioning. I think about Latino kids are so isolated anyway in this town, but we never thought of doing anything like that, that's too bad. You're giving me ideas.

Well that's what I'm trying to do, I'm trying to get everyone aware. Especially my main focus, I haven't been able to get in contact with as many as I wanted to, but with the diverse groups. There's the Asian allies, the Latino Latina allies, and there's some groups for just lesbians, some for just gay men...

Right, right, there's a group called, it comes and goes, Queer, Colors of Pride, Colors of Pride, and I know MP has

been working with that, do you know her?

No

You know, she's gonna be here at noon I bet, she just won a student leadership award, she's a senior, and she's white but she's really trying, she also runs the Green Street Hug-In...

Yeah, I just heard about that yesterday.

She's, so that's a real student based group. When it's operative we work with that, but it's not always operative, it really is dependent on the leadership. We struggle, I won't lie, we struggle with outreaching to Latino, LGBT Latino, because there's a, I would say, a homophobia within the Latino community, it's not as well articulated as it is in the African-American community, it's there, but I was talking to L_____ about this yesterday, I think it's there but it's also mitigated by this huge extensive family network, so it seems like everybody knows someone in their family who is gay. Some people talk about, some people don't and so it becomes harder to express that really that sort of pretty hostile homophobia that I've heard, and I'm not astrosizing the African-American community, but I think because of the church structures and how they operate within the community it's easier to say these fairly homophobic statements publicly. People go like, why is this okay? So we do, we struggle, and to think, honestly I never thought of outreach to high schools in that way. What do you think that would look like?

I don't know, I've only talked to one, I've only been able to talk to one school, and he didn't think it would, an institutionalized alliance, didn't think it would ever work.

What about a Gay-Straight?

Well they do have a Gay-Straight Alliance. Centennial, Central, Urbana, and Mahomet-Seymour are the only schools in Champaign County that have alliances.

Oh okay .

And I also found that talking to other people, no elementary schools have ever even contemplated the idea, and no junior highs around here have, but other places have.

That's too bad because junior high is I think where all that questioning really starts.

Yeah, and I think kids nowadays could see, especially minority kids, could see somebody like them thriving, then maybe it would help them get through high school, and that's why I'm trying to make, bring awareness to the groups around here, maybe they can do something with the community.

Yeah, yeah, I would be really interesting on working on something like that. It's even funny here, you know, I've been working here about nine years, too long, but we did not have any kind of LGBT presence here at all until we had a student who, we have a lot of undergrad students working here, we had a student working here and she had been at a party the night before, the weekend before, whatever, and she was talking to this guy who was really openly gay and he was like you know, I've gotten, and they were talking about racism, I've gotten so much more shit from the Latino community for being gay than from the White community about being Latino. So, she was a very activist kind of student, she's coming here tomorrow night to be in the Courtyard Café, she's a hip-hop artist now, I would highly recommend you go. Anyway, she was like that's stupid and she was like let's hire this guy. So we hired him and he was great because the minute we hired him it was like this breath of fresh air in La Casa and people who had never came here, or who only came here to be in different organizations but were never out here were coming here all of sudden, and all of sudden we were doing gay programming, and we developed this sort of ally training because we had, two students, we ended up with students on staff, one who identified as bisexual and the other one was pretty openly gay but nobody believed it. It was such a bizarre, people kept thinking he was just going through a phase. But anyway that's when we started to the ally training, and now we do the ally training, for our staff it's mandatory, and we have about ten undergraduate

students. And we also try to circulate through the Greek system because the Latino Greek system is made up of like, some ridiculous number like fourteen, maybe twelve or fourteen societies and fraternities, some are multi-cultural, some are Latina Latino, but as you can imagine they're very tiny. A big organization, a big greek organization would be twenty people, yeah so you know, we try to filter those people through to because a lot of time, I think what happens, students who are looking for some sort of unconditional support, support that you expect will do that before coming out, will join like the greek. So just having that presence here we don't have anyone openly LGBT here, working here now, which is, is a problem for us frankly. But just for the Latino community in general, five or six years ago who was openly gay, he does Latino studies, also Queer studies, and also just a really nice guy and the university ended up hiring him, and he has just been instrumental in people who never thought they'd come out in coming out. He's just, he's like, I guess my point is if we could get somebody like that known in the high schools I really, literally it takes one person to do that.

[Secretary comes in with phone message.]

Well I'm also concerned with teaching teachers in the schools, and educating them on the topics, like what you're doing with the allies, and also implementing that in the schools, cause I know teachers at Urbana are really welcoming but I've gotten the feeling that Champaign isn't, and it's really weird because it's like one big area.

Yeah, but they're two different school districts. It's really messed up. And I wonder if Uni High does anything?

Uni, yes, Uni does have a group.

Does it train its teachers? That would be, to me, a natural starting place.

I think it does, because I talked to somebody yesterday, and I wanna say he said Uni trains their teachers but I don't think any other schools do.

You know you could do something along the lines of,

teachers have to take these workshops you know, and um I used to work for Latin America studies and we did these one day workshops for teachers got what they needed for their accreditation. I wonder if they could do something like that? Through the counseling center, cause its, the LGBT staff training, which is about half a day, and our training is kind of based off that but much more culturally specific. We took that model and basically put in Latina cultural elements, but I wonder if they could do something like that?

I was wondering, I was talking to a retired director of LGBT

C____! C____ used to be a teacher

He was talking about a lot of stigmas on the LGBT community and how they might not be able to have direct contact with kids in the high schools..

That's true

And especially the age difference isn't that big so relationships could start, so even if they couldn't have contact with the kids, the organizations around here could work with teachers and spread the word that way.

Right, right. Have you talked to LM, she's the new director of LGBT? I could see, this may not help you project right now, but I could really see working with her over the summer, particularly with the other cultural houses, because we're pretty much, I would say the house with the most difficult is the Black house, I shouldn't have said that, but they also, there's a couple of staff members over there that are really positive and supportive and I could see us having a little committee and seeing what we could do in terms of outreach to teachers. I mean there are so few Latino teachers in the school system, it's so, it's so not right here, the Latino community here is very new, probably ten years, twelve, fifteen years old, but really it's just exploded in say the last ten or twelve years. And small towns move slowly and there are very few Latino teachers in the community and many of them are really from Latin American rather than saying growing up Latino in the US,

the population here is undocumented, I would say probably 50% of the population here does not have papers and so that makes it hard, makes it more tricky. But we've been reaching out to them, two of our fraternities that do have or have had openly gay members and have been really impacted by this faculty member I was talking about, they already have scholarships, they have scholarships for local kids who are undocumented. And so they do some of this outreach to the community and that might be something to get them to work on as well. And then I think that our societies, it like in this community, I would say that self identified lesbians are far less willing to come out than gay men, and I don't know why that is but there is a lot of cultural fear around lesbianism and people just do not think it exists and it's just amazing, you know I'm like what about this girl who was working with us last year? Oh no she's not lesbian she's too pretty, you know people say stuff like that and it's crazy, but I do know a graduate student that, who should be here next year, and she would help out, she went here undergrad. Are you going to be here this summer? [Interview on project ended and we begin to talk about other projects]

Interview with faculty/LGBT member

April 15th 7:15 pm

Well I guess let's get started, I've actually interviewed two people at the LGBT office and they actually directed me to you, because I'm doing my project on Queer organizations here and those in the community and if they do any alliances themselves or any connections, and the benefits that would arise from that. So they told me you had done work with schools?

Little bits, not really lots actually, um, and it was all pretty informal though I was doing it professionally, but we tried to be supportive of Uni students and their needs, I mean their actually part of the university, but they have a more supportive atmosphere in general I think. In terms of having at least one out teacher, a student group, a GSA, and not getting hassled all the time by faculty. With the high schools I can remember one time that I went and actually

talked to a group of students at Central High at the request of the drama teacher because they were doing the Learmy project, and she wanted her cast to get some background information about the state of life for LGBT people. And that was really fun, just that they were able to do that play, though since then I've learned that it's the most performed play in this country for high schools, which is cool!

I don't think I've ever heard of it

Oh, the Learmy project, it's a very simple play, there's maybe an MTV movie about it. It's a play in very simple terms brings to light the reactions of the people of the city of Learmy after Matthew Sheppard was killed. During the trial of the two guys that murdered him. It's very interesting, this New York theatre group, the Tatonic theater troupe, the whole troupe went to Learmy and spent weeks there interviewing the townspeople after it was all over, and then they built the trial, the play from the comments of people reactions. It's a very simple set, just some chairs and stuff and people tend to play more than one role, and it shows the wide variety of reactions from people in the bars to religious leaders to Mathew Sheppards mother and father.

That's an interesting topic. I never would have thought of doing a play like that.

They do very interesting stuff, overall and it dealt with things like Fred Phelps coming to the funeral with church members with signs that say 'Mathew's burning in hell' and Mathew's friends, he was in theater, surrounded him dressed as Angels. So I talked to them and we always tried to be supportive on things like 'Day of Silence', if they needed ribbons and stuff, and I encouraged some of our students to interact with them, professionally as resources

I heard from a GSA sponsor that they often come to the events here, especially on 'Day of Silence'.

Yeah, yeah, there always welcome. We've had a number of students from different high schools speak at the rally, they show up and we say sure, talk. So it's always been really

*informal, I've tried to offer a little bit of advice to the Mahomet-Seymour kids who were trying to start a GSA and the principal was like no you can't do that. One of the things that I suggested was that if you keep getting stonewalled just go to the ACLU and they did, and they marched in on the principal and said if you don't let us have this club or shut down all clubs we're gonna go to the ACLU, we've gone to the ACLU and have them talk to you. And he said you're blackmailing me, and um no we're gonna go to the ACLU if you don't give us our rights. And now they have a GSA. Another place that I talked, is Planned Parenthood locally at a teen group, it's called TAG, I never remember what it stands for exactly, but it's a group of high school students from the communities locally, paid by PFLAG, to do safe sex stuff and inform students about the dangers involved in sex but in a positive way and not a absence only way. I know they've gone into the high schools, and I talked to them a couple of different times, a couple of different years, about what the issues were, but it was really Planned Parenthood rather than the high schools. And years and years ago, in the beginning of the office, a combined psychology and sociology class at Urbana High brought in a panel, and I still remember because it was one of the first things I did...there were five or six of us up on stage, and what I remembered was this interested audience of about 100 people out in the auditorium in Urbana, and sitting there watching as people talked and I remember noticing especially, a couple jocks, probably football players sitting in the audience laughing, until one of the grad students said that he'd come out in high school, had been a member of the football team, and they were like *gasp* it might be some of us. And then they started paying attention.*

Probably in case they needed to know.

I always thought it would be unique to do more, of course Centennial, and Central, and Urbana have GSAs, but there are so many risks, partly because I had been a high school teacher before coming to the University, so I knew what could happen. And there are so many risks in even getting our students involved, because if you're a high school

senior and you fall in love with a sophomore, it can lead to trouble for the sophomore, for the college student, so I thought you gotta be careful, you gotta really make sure our students understand the risks to them as they get involved. But we tried to help them out, tried to make sure they knew about our website so they could come to things, but it was really informal, and I always wished we had done some more.

Since you were a high school teacher did that influence your wanting to connect to them more?

Well, since I've retired, I lived before I came here, in 1987 I was a teacher in the Rockford public schools for twenty years, and the last four of those I was teaching high school, I had taught middle school, I had taught elementary school, I had taught high school...you know and I was totally closeted, I was completely afraid. There weren't any legal protections and I had heard a story about a couple, a principal and a teacher were partners and were forced to leave. But it made me feel like it was important how high school kids, and since I started to read, since GLSEN has started doing its biannual nationwide surveys of teenagers, high school students. And it asks students pretty frankly about their experiences in high school and so you get these stories, and they've done it three or four times so you can see some change for the better, but not enough. There are still tons of high school kids who are harassed verbally and teachers don't do anything about it, and administrators don't do anything about it, sometimes. Mostly because it's not part of teacher training programs very often, and we did do some of that in the college of education, but it's one of the things I had wished I spent more time on. The statistics there that say you know high school teenagers that are LGBT are 5 times more likely than straight teenagers to attempt or complete suicide. They're more likely to have alcohol and drug abuse problems than straight teenagers. They're more likely to skip school or not finish school. They're less likely to think about going to college, and it's because the schools don't take them seriously, they don't take the problems seriously and do something about them. Now that's changing, a couple of organizations like GLSEN and the ACLU provide

change, and just the changes in student attitudes, you know there's so much media now, like HGTV often has same-sex couples and whatever TV show their on, they're treated like normal couples. A year or so ago Barbara Walters did a wonderful special where she interviewed four or five kids, the oldest was 14 but most of them were 9 and under, who already knew they were transsexual and were willing to talk about it. And she talked to parents about their fears. But it was so obvious from her talking to the kids that though they might not have had the words to talk about it, the terminology, a little boy who had a twin sister who was like 7, had known long before that that he wanted to toys his sister got, not the toys that he got. Fortunately they all had very supportive parents, but you could tell it was hard for the parents, some of them really didn't want it to be like that.

NOTES

I was unable to finish transcribing this interview due to time constraints, but hope to come back and finish it later

The interviewee was extremely knowledgeable about LGBT issues, very open and forthcoming with new and different ideas

Discuss: Please see the attached document "Educating Our Youth" for my complete analysis and discussion of the research

EUI Links: 4-1-09

– Masters, Erin and Aaron Beyers. "Are appearances deceiving? How the U of I promotes community-based learning programs". Dec 2006

– Benham, Greg. "Minority Times Two": A look at life for an LGBT student of Asian descent on campus." Feb 2008

– Author unknown. "GLBT Discrimination at ISU." Mar 2008

– Krippner, Kayla. "Revolution Evolution: The purpose of PRIDE at Illinois State University and How that Purpose has Evolved." Mar 2008.

Reflect: I really enjoyed the interviews that I did and being able to

talk with a variety of people, all of which had their own opinions, experiences, and insights into the ideas of my project. Transcribing the interviews was a bit tedious but being able to go back over everything that I discussed with people was great because so many different ideas were passed around that I needed that chance to go back over them and figure out what was essential to my research. The on-line template is great and really easy to use and the IRB requirements were easy to follow. I had a bit of trouble in the beginning making sure that the IRB approval would allow me to interview high school faculty but in the end everything worked out and the EUI people were very helpful and understanding my project and the importance of doing interviews with those faculty. I am definitely archiving this project and I hope it will be able to expand and grow into something that actually takes shape in the community.

Recommendations: My research has brought up a number of recommendations that would benefit the creation of campus/school alliances:

1. Adding school GSAs to the campus LGBT resource listserve so that the sponsors and students can learn about events that they may be able to attend or news related to the general and local Queer community.
2. Inviting school GSA sponsors and members to interact with campus organization members during events such as 'National Coming Out Day' or 'Day of Silence', as well as during group meetings and everyday settings.
3. Providing the Champaign and Urbana school districts with information on the need to form inclusive curriculums, the need for and how to form GSAs in elementary and junior high schools, and creating workshops for school faculty and administrators in which campus groups can facilitate education initiatives
4. providing education to parents of Queer children as well as Queer parents within the community to help them better understand their children.