Statement on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

The University community of students, faculty and staff can be seen as a microcosm of the Commonwealth. As a state university, our population represents the rich diversity of the population of Massachusetts. It also shares the Commonwealth’s complex task of creating an environment where people of different backgrounds and interests can interact in safe and humane ways. As an educational institution, the University is ideally suited to the task of making life in a diverse community a positive, educational experience. In order to accomplish this, the University must remain responsive and sensitive to the needs of all its members.

As gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people become more visible nationally and in the Commonwealth, more concern is manifested by legislators, taxpayers and parents of students. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have always been a part of the University community, just as they have always played a part of every aspect of national life as legislators, taxpayers and parents of students, as well as University faculty, staff and students. The issue for the University is not that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals are becoming part of the community, but rather that they may choose to become a much more visible and vocal part. Residential Life has long held and continues to hold the position that basic rights must and will be extended to all members of the community. Acting upon this position involves eradicating certain misconceptions as well as espousing certain assertions.

First, Residential Life asserts that a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity/expression should not be a criterion in employment decisions.

Second, Residential Life further asserts that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and staff are entitled to an environment which is non-oppressive. Harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression is not acceptable and will be addressed through appropriate administrative action as well as educational programming.

Third, role modeling and professional competence are not affected by sexual orientation or gender identity/expression any more than they are by any other personal characteristic such as race, sex, or disability. The chance for students to get to know gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender staff, faculty, and students can be an important part of the educational process.

Fourth, the University community and those who are concerned with its welfare must not confuse demands for human rights with proselytizing and sexual aggression. The University has a responsibility when members of the community ask to participate fully and openly in the life of the community.

Fifth, Residential Life requests that the recognition of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals as complete human beings not be equated with advocacy that everyone should be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. The confusion of these two very different ideas often leads to an unnecessary defensiveness on the part of some heterosexuals and nontransgender individuals.

Residential Life’s support of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and staff reflects the belief that the University must accept and integrate the Commonwealth’s diverse population into its educational community in ways that are responsible both to the University and to the Commonwealth.