

UVM to Sponsor LGBT Aging Conference in April



Grad student Jen Mamary and Prof. Fiona Patterson will coordinate April's elder conference.

Professor Fiona Patterson, DSW, ACSW, of UVM's Department of Social Work, and graduate student Jennifer Mamary are heading up an effort to bring together social workers and social work students with members of the LGBTQ communities who are dealing with aging. The conference is planned for April 30, 2004.

According to a press release, the purpose is to "add knowledge and sensitivity to the relationship between LGBT elders and members of the human services profession."

The impetus for the conference is that there is the opportunity for a multitude of misunderstandings between social workers and LGBT elders. "The needs of LGBT elders are misunderstood when these individuals enter hospitals and other care facilities," was one example cited. The conference is co-sponsored by UVM's Department of Social Work and RU12? Community Center will be partially funded by a grant from the Hartford Foundation and the Council on Social Work Education "to infuse aging into its curriculum."

According to the conference planners – including students in the Department of Social Work, Vermont queer elders, and a representative from the R.U.1.2? – the event will include a keynote speaker and other professionals with experience in this field, yet to be named as of press time.

For additional information contact Professor Fiona Patterson at 802-656-9657, or email fpatters@uvm.edu, or watch for a more detailed information in the April issue of *Out in the Mountains*. ▼

Harassment Bill Passes House

H.113, the proposed law defining racial and gender harassment in schools and outlining the steps schools must take to respond, was passed by the Vermont House without amendment, with only nine representatives voting against.

Passage of the bill was supported by R.U.1.2? and Equality Vermont to deal with the racial harassment students of color experience in overwhelmingly white Vermont schools, and because the bill also covers harassment based on gender and sexual orientation. The bill was introduced by Rep. Mark Larsen (D-Burlington), who works at Spectrum Youth Services when not in the legislature.

Rep. Bill Lippert (D-Hinesburg), a member of the House

Judiciary Committee, helped include students' families in the bill, recognizing that a student might be harassed because his or her parents are of different races or are gay or lesbian.

House Judiciary Chairwoman Peg Florey (R-Pittsford), who initially opposed the bill as unnecessary, presented the bill on the floor of the House, recalling how she had been harassed in childhood because her father was the school janitor.

The bill was expected at press time to be assigned to the Senate Education Committee, led by Senator Jim Condos (D-Chittenden). For the bill to become law, the committee must vote the bill out with a positive recommendation, and the Senate as a whole

must pass it with a simple majority vote. Another committee may ask to look at the bill before the floor vote. If any changes are recommended or made, the bill then goes to a conference committee including members of the House and Senate, where the final version is hammered out.

If there are no changes, the Senate could vote by a simple majority to "concur" with the House's action and language, and send the bill to the governor.

As passed by the House, the bill defines racial harassment as "conduct directed at the characteristics of a student's or a student's family member's actual or perceived race or color, and includes the use of epithets, stereotypes, racial slurs, comments, insults,

derogatory remarks, gestures, threats, graffiti, display, or circulation of written or visual material, and taunts on manner of speech and negative references to racial customs."

Other forms of harassment include "conduct directed at the characteristics of a student's or a student's family member's actual or perceived creed, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, or disability."

R.U.1.2? Executive Director Christopher Kaufman said, "We're glad that an alliance between queer and anti-racist organizations has worked together to pass a bill that protects students. We're thrilled that Vermonters called in to support the bill, and glad to have been a part of a strong

grassroots effort."

Kaufman noted, however, that the bill "did not go as far as it should." The bill leaves it up to individual districts to determine what anti-racist or anti-harassment training teachers would receive. "There are few opportunities for teachers to get consistent anti-racism training," he said.

"The bill remains reactionary – its provisions come into effect after an incident has happened. There is no provision for preventing incidents," Kaufman said. Training often is put on the back burner in the legislature because any training requirement that doesn't come with the means to pay for it "comes down as another unfunded mandate," he added.

"We'll be back in the legislature next session to help take the next step," Kaufman declared. ▼