ABSTRACT

The historical development of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) organizations at UNT reveals how local dynamics worked in relation to national and regional politics. Case studies such as this one test and correct generalizations in national surveys of GLBT history as well as contributing to UNT’s institutional historical record. Analysis of archived materials and oral histories document that community members and students founded the first gay and lesbian group in the wake of gay liberation. Students and faculty institutionalized GLBT issues at UNT relative to emphases within GLBT activism, administrative commitments to diversity and constitutional rights, and the degree Americans accepted different sexual orientations. Faculty members created a “Studies of Sexuality” program based on their right to academic freedom despite feeling homophobia affected their working relations. UNT grew to have one of the largest, most active gay-straight alliances in the area along with a GLBT Studies minor.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The primary sources for our data came from the Texas Gay Task Force Collection, which Dr. Edra Bogle donated to the Texas Woman’s University Women’s Collection. This collection contains a mixture of documents ranging from newsletters by campus groups such as GLAD and GAUNT, relevant, local newspaper clippings from the NT Daily, the Denton Record-Chronicle, and the Dallas Times Herald, pamphlets, and advertisements that pertained to material handed out at events in the Denton area. Additionally, we have conducted a formal oral history interview with Dr. Bogle about her experiences as a founding member of GAUNT and with GLBT issues in the region more generally. We did an informal oral history interview with Dr. Marilyn Morris about her experiences with the “Studies of Sexuality” minor and GLBT issues during her time at UNT.

DISCUSSION


Why might the receptions to GLAD and Courage have been so different? What role did being out and proud play? Could the AIDS epidemic that hit in the 1980s have been contributing factor?

In 1988, the NT Daily published this first cartoon in 1988 after Courage’s initial meeting, and it is indicative of GLBT students’ different responses to the homophobia they met. GLAD had received little trouble between 1979 and 1985. Members allowed their names to be printed in the press whenever they communicated with the media. In 1988, students passed through protesters on the UNT campus to attend the first meeting of Courage. Although supporters swelled their second meeting to about 100 attendees, Courage sought to protect member’s identities. This led a NT Daily editorial to award the group’s name “best oxymoron.”

GLBT issues at UNT delayed officially recognizing the DGA, and the Regents used the incident to mandate all UNT campus groups restrict memberships to students. GLAD’s and GAUNT’s meetings and events in the late 70s and early 80s met with only a small amount of trouble, none of which was from administration or faculty. In Dr. Bogle’s time teaching at UNT, she received only two incidences of homophobic harassment. Her department took seriously the one threat of physical harm. Dr. Bogle attributes the little harassment she and GLAD officers received to the fact that they were out. Editorials in the NT Daily looked on the group favorably. Courage, which protected members’ anonymity and did not have public out officers was treated less seriously. In contrast, GLBT students at other universities struggled in the 1970s through 1980s against campus policies that excluded them as legitimate organizations. Many institutions used the belief that these groups would promote “sodomy” (then a criminalized act in Texas) to exclude student groups from using campus facilities and gaining benefits granted to recognized organizations. Students brought suit against Texas A&M for violation of the First Amendment to gain legitimacy, and SMU’s student senate did not vote to recognize the Gay and Lesbian Student Organization on their campus until 1991. Local accounts accuse TWU of homophobic intimidation and of purging faculty and staff on suspicions of homosexuality. UNT GLBT groups did encounter broad undercurrents of homophobia, which underscored UNT’s unique institutional support. When an outside group protested Courage’s first meeting, UNT police protected those who wished to attend the meeting. The development of a “Studies of Sexuality” minor, which Dr. Morris supervised in 1997, and more recent efforts to combat discrimination based on sexuality demonstrate that UNT’s environment has been increasingly conducive to the development and understanding of GLBT issues that stands in stark contrast with the opinions held in other parts of the state and the county.

REFERENCES

References listed on handout.