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Sample Safe Zone Membership Email

Gary Burkholder

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James A. Eby
218 Keezell Hall
English Department
James Madison University
Harrisonburg, VA 22807

sample

May 18, 1994

Dear James:

Enclosed is some information you requested concerning the SAFE ZONE Campaign at the University of Rhode Island. I have included a brochure about the Committee to Eliminate Homophobia and Heterosexism (creator of the campaign), a sticker with accompanying explanatory memo, and a sample faculty member reaction with the committee's response.

To kick off the SAFE ZONE campaign, we held two events. The first was a showing of the movie "Pink Triangles" with a panel discussion following. In the evening, we had a night of comedy, "Gay Gaiety". Both events were open to the University as well as to the general public. Included are the flyer and press release for the kick-off events.

We also had a press event with the president of the university, a small ceremony during which he posted a sticker on his door. The affirmative action officer, then the chair of the H&H committee, distributed stickers from her office. Currently, the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Association (of which I am the graduate co-president) and members of the committee give out stickers upon request from faculty, staff and students. Stickers are also available at our lesbian-gay film series evenings and other events in which the lesbian community takes part.

Our general strategy was to try to maximize publicity about the campaign in all available media both on campus and in the community. Now, the information is passed by word of mouth. However, we have discussed the possibility of having another "Safe Zone Day" in the fall in order to ensure the campus community remains informed about the program.

As I have probably mentioned, we have had little negative reaction to the program. On three occasions, stickers were vandalized in a building housing the English, Language and Communications departments. It is a building heavily used for classes new freshman would take, and it is also right in fraternity row. However, the last incident of this kind was in the late fall. As you can see from the faculty member response enclosed, there is always some question among some about what displaying and not displaying the sticker means. Although many faculty do not display the sticker, a cursory tour of the campus in the late fall showed that at least some offices in most campus buildings were displaying the stickers.

The stickers are available to students as well, upon request. Many students have chosen to post the stickers on their dormitory doors.

I think the biggest benefit to the program is that it provides campus support for those who for whatever reason choose to remain "invisible". The safe zone campaign is hopefully visible, continuous show of support to gay, lesbian and bisexual people, especially in a campus that might be considered hostile. I would not classify this particular university as "hostile", but it is an extremely difficult environment for young people to feel comfortable in coming out.

Good luck with your efforts at starting such a campaign. If you need any other information or have other questions that arise as you plan your campaign, do not hesitate to contact me. My E-mail address is: BYU101@URIACC.URI.EDU. My home address is:

Gary Burkholder
480 South County Trail 2-11
Exeter, RI 02822
401-294-7896

Also, you can contact the University of New Hampshire, which has just recently instituted a safe zone program at their school. Unfortunately, I do not have a contact for the campus at this time.

Peace and Best Wishes

Gary Burkholder
Co-Chair, Committee to Eliminate
Homophobia and Heterosexism
Co-President, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual
Association