

Students try to educate each other about gender, sexuality

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In order to promote understanding and respect among individuals of all sexual orientations, members of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Alliance and other UB students have created a Gender Roles and Sexuality Program, also known as GRASP.

The LGBA and Epsilon Nu Omega, a service fraternity, conducted a workshop to present the program to other UB students last Wednesday, but no students showed. The only people attending were the presenters from LGBA.

"Over the last two years we have done 50 to 60 programs — from Canisius to Niagara University to Nazareth College. Usually there are a lot of people," said Tina Barfoot, UB student and one of the creators of the program.

The Gender Roles and Sexuality Program got its start when Chris Goffredo, another of its creators, and Barfoot were students at Canisius College.

"I was at Canisius, a close-minded school in need of (sexual orientation) education. Chris and I decided to come up with an education program we could take to high schools and colleges," said Barfoot. "It took 12 months to create the packets — we were constantly revising it."

The program begins with an introduction section, which lets everyone in the room know who is heterosexual and who is homosexual, and a suicide poem is read dealing with gay teen suicide.

The second section is titled "BINGAY." This section is used as an icebreaker to give members of the workshop an idea of what they actually know about gay, lesbian and bisexual culture.

The third part involves various members of LGBA telling their stories about what it is like to

come out and tell people they are gay. A question-and-answer section follows.

The fourth part, "Guided Journey," involves an exercise that goes through a person's life and gives them a chance to see what it would be like to grow up in a heterosexual society when the person is not heterosexual. A question-and-answer period follows that section as well.

The program also provides a comprehensive booklet containing definitions used in dealing with everyday homosexuality — a true/false section and a questionnaire to determine how much a person knows about homosexuality. There is also a section explaining statistics and symbols dealing with homosexuals.

The last page of the booklet is a questionnaire about the program and its effectiveness.

"The program's doing great — so far we have only received two negative evaluations," said Barfoot.

The program is used in UB sexual education classes in dealing with homosexual awareness training.

According to Ellen Christensen, director of Health and Human Services for Sub Board I, the program has been "very effective" in training leaders in the peer education program.

But, Christensen would like to see a lot more done with the program.

"I would like to see a program instated at the university that deals with sexual education," she said. "Even college students, who should be educated, aren't. They are afraid of the topic (of homosexuality), and the way GRASP presents (the information) helps."

