

ISU appoints advocate for gay, lesbian students

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ADT 11-24-92

Iowa State University has hired an advocate for the university's gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

"We need more unity in the lesbian, gay and bisexual population," said Tom Owings, who was recently hired to fill the half-time position. He is a graduate student in English from Sioux City.

Owings is only one of a handful of

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official gay advocates in the country.

"I believe there are probably universities that are more progressive that don't have this position," he said.

The job will be part advocate and part coordinator, he said.

There are "pockets" of people in ISU's gay community doing different things that could be coordinated. "I hope to let the left hand know what the right hand is doing," he said.

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He also will help students file harassment grievances and relay concerns to university administrators.

"On other campuses, the (gay) movement is stronger and I think that Iowa State needs to be in step with other campuses," Owings said. "There is still discrimination going on in the residence halls ... There is a great deal of harassment."

Harassment of gays in ISU's residence halls is currently so bad that Owings said he advises students to consider living off campus until the problem gets better.

Owings said residence hall assistants need training to recognize when gay students are being harassed. They

also need to know where to refer students for counseling, he said.

ISU currently has an organization for gay students, the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Alliance. But Owings said the group has failed to reach many lesbians — nearly 30 men usually attend the group's meetings but only three or four women usually show up.

Consequently, the alliance has obtained a reputation as a "men's group," he said.

"The problem is there are many lesbians in this community and they're not showing up at the meetings," he said.

"I believe that women's needs are separate than men's needs ... maybe women want to have their own organization."