Ethical Dilemmas

Place yourself in each of the following roles and consider how you would handle the situation. Keep in mind the ethical standards for your profession and their impact on the issues which arise. In some cases, there may be competing ethical principles. How do you resolve them?

1) You are a staff counselor at a community college counseling center. A group of GLB students have come to you and asked for your help in forming a second recognized student organization on campus. They feel the existing group is not political enough and want to really push the college to deal with GLB issues. There are ramifications of recognizing any student organization considered to be "out of the mainstream" in a given community. What do you do? How do you publicize to get attendees without risking harassment for the other members? Are you willing to be the advisor of this group although you anticipate that several of your current and former clients will likely become actively involved?

2) You are a third-year graduate student at a school of professional psychology. You hear fellow students complain about anti-gay and homophobic remarks in the classroom and in social settings by a faculty member. Based on frequently repeated gossip from the last two and half years, you strongly believe her to be bisexual. Do you confront the faculty member about her alleged remarks? If so, do you bring up her sexual orientation in the process?

3) You are a new GLB professional who has relocated to a conservative, suburban town. Everyone else on staff at the Community College Career Center, your new place of employment, is married or engaged. The only Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual person you have met thus far is a student trainee. You establish a friendship. Is this ethically acceptable? If so, how do you maintain different roles with that student?

4) You are an adjunct faculty member of an educational policy program in addition to your campus work. Two gay male students come to you because of your supportive and understanding attitude towards GLB issues. They report a widely held perception that a gay male faculty advisor who serves as the student group's advisor also uses the group as a chance to meet and seduce young male students. One of the students before you had been approached by this advisor and was briefly involved before deciding he didn't want that kind of relationship. He is now reluctant to attend meetings of the group. The advisor is currently involved with a second year student who does attend the group. The students were also concerned that the advisor takes a very controlling role with the group and belittles students who are unsure about their sexual orientation or unwilling to be open about their orientation. The college has a sexual harassment policy and a committee that considers harassment situations. The policy does not explicitly state that faculty should not engage in sexual activities with their own students but does say that the policy applies to faculty-student relationships. In this case, students have willingly become involved with the advisor and have not been enrolled in courses he teaches. Other faculty members are involved in opposite gender relationships with students and this is widely known and quietly tolerated unless the student voices a complaint. Should any action be taken? If so, what?

5) There is a sexual assault in an empty classroom at the community college where you are employed as the school's Vice President of Student Affairs. In your role, you are in charge of the school's disciplinary policy for sexual assault. The case involves two male students. There are many homophobic, anti-gay comments going around the school concerning the incident despite the fact both men involved are heterosexual. Do you punish this perpetrator differently than you would for a male/female case? Why or why not? If you would do something differently, what would that be?
6) In your private life, you have been asked to help raise money for the local chapter of Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Your group is planning to bring openly lesbian comic Suzanne Westenhoffer to your town for a concert. You have sought the support of the college where you work and have received their cosponsorship of the event. A powerful donor telephones to inform you if the campus continues to encourage this "immoral behavior, such as the Suzanne Westenhoffer appearance," there will no longer be any donations forthcoming from him. He is a member of the Gold Star Club - the highest donors group for the college. What do you do? Do you tell the Vice President of Student Affairs (who agreed to the cosponsorship)? Do you tell the college's director of development?

7) You are a heterosexual, single, unattached, new staff member at a college counseling office. The Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual students on campus have put out the word you are supportive and understanding of their issues. Consequently, many Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual students have been coming to you for counseling and support. This has caused another word to be out on campus - that you are Gay/Lesbian or Bisexual. The campus anti-discrimination statement does not include sexual orientation and you are still unsure of the campus climate around this issue. Do you continue to be openly supportive, even as you wonder if your job is at risk? Do you do certain things to "defend" your own sexual orientation? If so, what do you do? If you defend your sexual orientation, are you making a subtle suggestion that heterosexuality is "better" than homosexuality or bisexuality? If not, how do you avoid doing that?

8) You are the staff member responsible for placing students in volunteer programs. Currently, in your college's Affirmative Action statement, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual rights are not addressed at your institution. A group of students has petitioned the governing body of the college to include these rights in a revised Affirmative Action statement. Your interpretation of the new policy would be that your college would not refer students to agencies for volunteer experiences which would not agree to abide by this nondiscrimination clause. This would mean your students may not get access to volunteer position in VA hospitals or other federal institutions, as well as many local agencies which do not include sexual orientation in their own policies. By not strongly supporting these rights, are we passively discriminating against the GLB population? What about heterosexual students who want to volunteer at one of those settings? What should you do?

At the 1989 American College Personnel Association convention, a program entitled "Ethics in the '80's and Beyond" was presented by Tammy Gocial and Teresa Leopold. They presented a variety of ethical dilemmas. This handout offers adaptations of their dilemmas for your consideration.

http://www.lgbtcampus.org/resources/training/ethical_dilemmas.html 9/26/2005