

LGBT Support for International Students

- Are you an International student who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT)?
- Do you think you may be attracted to people of the same gender?
- Do you have a friend who is concerned about their sexual orientation or gender identity?

If you answered “YES” to any of these questions, please read on . . .

What is it like to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning at Cornell?

Cornell University provides ALL students with many opportunities and resources to help you learn about and explore your sexual orientation and gender identity.

Beliefs and expectations about sexual orientation and gender here in the U.S. and at Cornell, in particular, MAY be very different from your home country. Some countries have harsher attitudes towards homosexuality (same-sex orientation) and rigid expectations of how men and women should behave, whereas other countries have more flexible and accepting views of sexuality and gender expression.

The LGBT community (or “gay community”) at Cornell is a diverse community made up of interconnecting relationships that may cross every race, religion, ethnicity, cultural group and national boundary. You may find acceptance, love, support, and intimacy among the LGBT community. You may find your own LGBT “family” here and create your own “home” away from your home country. However, the LGBT community here is not perfect. For the most part, you may find many of the same problems, such as racism and homophobia, within the LGBT community that you might find anywhere.

Cornell, the Ithaca community and most U.S. metropolitan areas, such as New York City (which is only 4 hours away) are *relatively* safe and open-minded locations to explore your sexual orientation and gender. Sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are included in Cornell’s nondiscrimination policy. It is illegal to discriminate against actual or perceived sexual orientation in New York State and, furthermore, Tompkins County prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression. It is important to be aware that other parts of the U.S., even nearby areas surrounding Ithaca, may not be as understanding of your sexual orientation or how you express your gender.

What is it like for International LGBT students at Cornell?

International students who identify as LGBT may face unique and complex issues here. International LGBT students commonly have many different identities and some find it difficult to honor these diverse (and, sometimes, conflicting) parts of their multiple identities. For example, a gay, Muslim Malaysian male student may wish to emphasize his gay identity at some times, his Muslim identity at certain times, and his cultural identity at others – and, sometimes, all three identities at the same time. Some students are anxious or fearful about identifying as LGBT around other students who come from the same country, even if these students may also identify as LGBT. Why? Students fear that information about their sexual orientation could travel back to their home country, village or family, and they may face negative reactions. Other students living here spend much time and energy considering whether to tell their family about their LGBT identity. Those students who choose to “stay in the closet” (not tell their family), are sometimes not able to fully share important life experiences with loved ones back home. Some International LGBT students have commented that they have felt misunderstood or they don’t fit in with other Cornell LGBT groups or individuals who are from the U.S. As you can imagine, it would be isolating to avoid your own cultural group and not feel part of the U.S. LGBT community.

For students who struggle with these challenges over long periods of time without support, they may feel depressed, socially withdraw from others, or bury themselves in their studies to avoid these difficulties. There are many resources on campus where you can find support and guidance. It should be noted that most International LGBT students are very resourceful and resilient and navigate these challenges remarkably well. There is a new confidential discussion group, OUT Internacional, at Cornell which addresses the challenges of International LGBT students (Contact Jamie Sorrentino at jcs14).

Considerations when visiting or returning to your home country

Returning to your home country after finishing your studies can be a difficult process for some students. This is particularly true if you have openly and comfortably identified as LGBT while you were living here. Some LGBT International students insist they can never be openly LGBT among family in their home country. For some, going home means hiding their sexual orientation and gender identity from family and friends. As well, leaving the U.S. can be painful if you must leave behind people whom you love, such as a long-term partner.

Some students wonder if marrying their same-sex partner would help them to gain residency status in the U.S. At this stage, same-sex marriage is only legal in the state of Massachusetts (and only if both partners are residents of that state) and even marriages in this state would not be recognized at the federal level for immigration purposes. It should be noted that foreign nationals on a student visa who engage in any legal partnership agreement with a US citizen (i.e., same-sex marriage, civil union or domestic partnership) may be refused student visas because they may be considered more likely to have immigrant intent and overstay their visa. An international student with any intention of returning to this country should seriously consider the possible impact on visa status before legally formalizing a same sex relationship. It is possible to gain asylum in the U.S. if you feel that you would be unduly persecuted for your homosexuality in your home country. Students considering this option should consult with a competent immigrant attorney familiar with these challenges (www.immigrationequality.org may be a useful resource).

Of course, many students find that their LGBT experiences in the U.S. have helped them personally develop, and this growth enhances their life and happiness when they return to their home country. We know you are here primarily to study your academic disciplines. However, be sure to take some time during your stay at Cornell to learn about and explore who you are. Be assured that there are other safe, convenient and confidential LGBT resources available to you on campus (see attached).

Written by Jamie Sorrentino, Assistant Dean of Students, Office of Student Support.

531 Willard Straight Hall, Tel. (607) 255 3869, Email: jcs14@cornell.edu

If you have questions or want further information about this article or would like to chat with someone about being LGBT, please contact the writer. Mr. Sorrentino has lived overseas for many years and his long-term partner is part of the International LGBT community. He can match you with services, organizations, or individuals on campus that suit your needs and comfort level.

LGBT Resources at Cornell

GENERAL

Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Resource Center

**341 Caldwell Hall; 254-4987; e-mail: lgbtrc@cornell.edu; www.lgbtrc.cornell.edu;
10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday**

Provides support, education, and referrals on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues. Maintains electronic mailing lists for news of local interest. Offers confidential placement with peers to discuss "coming out" concerns. Groups meet to share perspectives about sexuality and spirituality. Gwendolyn Dean (Coordinator) facilitates a transgender support group and bisexual

discussion group. Direct Action to Stop Homophobia (DASH) operates out of the LGBT RC. Weekly drop-in Coffee House is on Wednesdays at the LGBT RC from 4.30 – 6 PM.

HAVEN

531 Willard Straight Hall, 255-3869; haven.dos.cornell.edu

E-mail Haven advisor, Jamie, for further info about Haven groups: jcs14@cornell.edu

Haven is a student-led umbrella of 8 diverse groups that sponsor social, educational, and supportive programming and events for members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) and straight ally communities. Haven provides a vehicle for these groups to secure funding and ongoing training and consultation with staff professionals. By promoting understanding, inclusiveness and diversity, Haven strives to enrich and celebrate sexual and gender expression at Cornell University.

Haven is a byline-funded student group that adapts to changing student needs and is currently comprised of the following groups which meet weekly as below:

- q **GSA** (Gay-Straight Alliance), Mondays, 7-8 pm, Music Room, WSH, Contact Dovie (dlw58).
- q **Mosaic** (Same gender-loving people of color), Alternate Wednesdays, 5.15 pm, Stimson 116 (Contact Hyo, hp63).
- q **Ga'avah** (Jewish pride), Contact Marissa at msw27 or Rima at rjt23
- q **faQ** (Online mentoring service), 8-11 PM Sun & Wed; Contact Andrew at yl358
- q **LBQ** (Women's social group), Tuesdays, 7.30-8.30 PM, Music Room, WSH, Contact Natalie (no36) or Stephanie (smm88).
- q **OUTreach** (Men's social group), Wednesdays, 9-10 pm, Int'l Lounge, WSH, Contact Mark (mrz4) or Matt (mjm254).
- q **Greeks United**, Contact Haven advisor, Jamie at jcs14
- q **ZAP!** (Diverse LGBT members), Wednesday, 5.30 pm, 210 WSH, Contact Dodi (dls47).
- q **Safe Place Project**, Register to signal your commitment to combat homophobia, heterosexism and gender oppression (<http://www.lgbtrc.cornell.edu/safeplace/>)

Q-Chat

A weekly discussion group on LGBT issues run by staff psychologist Ken Cohen. Meets Tuesdays from 4.30 – 5.30 in the LGBT Resource Center.

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL LGBT GROUPS

Lambda Law – Social group for LGBT Law students that works for legal recognition for LGBT communities. Contact their co-presidents Lisa Newstrom (lmn32) or Aaron Skrypski (avs29).

Out in the World (OIW) – Regular social group for graduate and professional students. All events are listed on the OIW-L list-serve. Contact Alston Ho (ah358) for further information.

Out for Business - This is the Johnson School's LGBT Alliance. Please refer to <http://forum.johnson.cornell.edu/students/orgs/glib/> for further details.

Vet School – They also have an active LGBT and Ally group. Contact their student rep Chrissy Wimer, clw36

TRANSGENDER RESOURCES

The Office of Workplace Diversity has a site dedicated to transgender students, staff and faculty , and this can be accessed at the link:

<http://www.ohr.cornell.edu/workLife/balancing/transgender/index.html>

Transgender Activist/Awareness Group (TAG)

TAG is an education/awareness group that will raise consciousness about transgender issues. We hold discussion meetings and plan events (speakers, panels, etc) to raise awareness of transgender issues at Cornell. For more information, contact Jamea Bateman at jamesbateman@cornell.edu

SUPPORT

Jamie Sorrentino

Assistant Dean of Students/Haven Advisor, Office of Student Support

531 Willard Straight Hall, 255-3869, email: jcs14

Mr. Sorrentino is a gay male therapist in the local community and social worker by profession. He is available by appointment to provide confidential, short-term counseling to LGBT students.

- q Jamie facilitates a biweekly discussion group for International LGBT students.
- q Interested students may contact Jamie by calling (255-3869), emailing (jcs14) or dropping by his office on the 5th floor of WSH (Room 531).

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

Gannett Health Services, 255-5208; www.gannett.cornell.edu/CAPS/; 8:30 am–5 pm M-F

Professional therapists offer assessment, referrals, crisis-intervention, psychiatric evaluations, consultation and short-term counseling about mental-health issues. Services are confidential. Ken Cohen, staff psychologist, runs a weekly “coming-out” group for men. For urgent, but not emergency, after-hours problems, call 255-5155.

Empathy, Assistance, and Referral Service (EARS)

211 Willard Straight Hall; 255-EARS (255-3277); sss.dos.cornell.edu/ears/; operates during academic year only: 3–11 p.m. Sun–Thurs; 3–10 p.m. Fri; 6–10 p.m. Sat

Trained student volunteers provide free and confidential telephone and walk-in peer counseling and referrals during the academic year.

COMMERCIAL VENUES

Several venues in town serve as social gathering places for the LGBT communities. Alcohol is served strictly to patrons who are 21 years of age and above.

- **The Oasis Dance Club** (bar/dance club), (607) 273 1505, <http://ithacaoasis.com/>, 1230 Danby Rd, Ithaca
- **Felicia’s Atomic Lounge**, www.atomicloungeithaca.com, 508 West State Street