

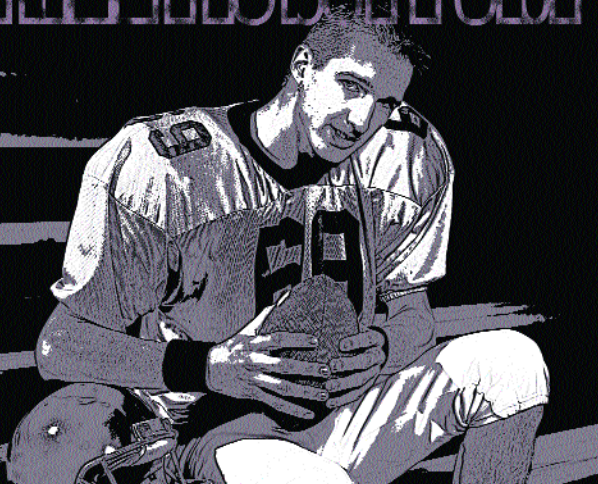
GAY COLLEGE GUIDE 2005

by Richard Morgan

Out's second annual college update tells you what's new, what's now, and what's wow on campus this fall.



ATHLETIC SUPPORT



Years ago the phrase *gay skier* would have only appeared on the back of a movie-rental box way in the back of the store, under the neon xxx. Not anymore. "Finally, you can Google 'gay college athlete' and not end up with porn," says Ryan Quinn, 24, a former nationally ranked skier from the University of Utah. Quinn, who writes and speaks across the country about openly gay college athletics, applauds many of the Web sites that allow gay athletes to meet and talk about their feelings; in fact, he's the cofounder of Discourse: The Forum for Gay Athletes at www.neverstoppingthinking.org. "If you're in the middle of Ohio or something, you can't necessarily go and meet with a ton of gay college athletes, but we can at least know that they exist," says Quinn of online communities.

But not everyone is ready to reach out for that kind of comfort. A closeted sophomore at Penn State who is on a team there calls gays "homosexuals" and says, "The stereotype of homosexuals in sports is that they can't compete or that they hurt a team. I don't want people having those views about me, imposing those judgments on me." His team has had openly gay members before, and he says comments about them have been pretty derogatory. The put-downs come from within too. "When I hit a wall athletically, there is always that nagging question: Is it because I'm gay?" He adds: "I want there to be more out athletes, but I'm not willing to do it. It sounds selfish of me, but I don't want it to be my responsibility. And I don't think just me can make much impact."

Tell that to Graham Ackerman, a top-ranked gymnast who is a senior at the University of California, Berkeley. Ackerman, who was *Out's* cover guy last month, routinely gets e-mails or phone calls from other gay athletes—out or not—sharing excitement or pride. But, he says, "you can't think of yourself as a gay athlete. I'm an athlete, a student, and I'm gay. I keep those things separate but in balance." Balance may come naturally to a gymnast, but Quinn says gay athletes are more common on college campuses in all sports. "I guess the shocking thing is that it's not shocking anymore," he says.

GREEK SPEAK

Imagine a Manhattan without gay bars or clubs, where the closest approximation is a "family night" an hour and a half away that is not officially gay. That's life in Manhattan, Kan., where nine students at Kansas State University set up a colony of Delta Lambda Phi, the nation's largest gay fraternity, this year.

Gay frat houses can be tough places to walk the line between intimate brotherhood and romantic attraction among fellow gay college students. It helps that this gay fraternity can be a little sororitylike; the Kansas State guys had a slumber party this year, staying up late, playing with each other's hair, and gabbing about things like what they think the perfect man is like. "We got to know our life stories and the inner person," says Trent Smith, who graduated this summer.



When Brett Currier, a junior at Kansas State, was diagnosed with depression and had a bad reaction to his medication, he didn't leave his off-campus house for two weeks. His DLP brothers were the only friends who called him to check up—at least one brother, at least once a day. "There's such a level of commitment to one another," says Currier. "It's great because gay culture often isn't about things like boosting grades or lifting each other up. So this is a great way to be gay, if that makes sense."

They attend each other's music recitals, watch movies, and play video games together, and are part of a network that has exploded in the last few years. This year alone DLP has added three new chapters—at the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Pennsylvania, and Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville—to the dozens it has.

Dusty Garner, the DLP national office's outreach coordinator, likens himself to a "mother hen" with his six "little brothers." (Each frat brother gets a "big brother" upon joining, then takes on a little brother.) "These guys really become as close as family, if not closer," he says.

And while DLP is gay-friendly, it's not gay-exclusive. At Kansas State the new pledge class this fall is a mix: two straight, two gay, one bi. "Sexual orientation has been a discriminator in Greek life for too long," says Smith. "For us, if you're a quality guy, we'll take you."

DATING UP: GRAD SCHOOL

When undergrads decide they want to seek out someone “older and wiser,” it can open up a whole new kind of relationship drama: “dating up” with a practically guaranteed-to-be-successful professional-school graduate student. Among law schools, there’s nowhere better to play this game than at Harvard University. The Ivy League program is one of the best in Boston, a city flooded with undergrads year after year. Despite its reputation and expectation for lots of late nights in the law library, Harvard Law School has a kind of party house that gets passed to a new group of law students every year. And the gay law group, HLS Lambda, gets together “just about as much as you can, given the rigor of law school,” says Mark Maher, a 22-year-old second-year student who is the group’s social chair. Last year the theme of the group’s big dance was “Shotgun Wedding,” to celebrate the Massachusetts same-sex marriage law. Some might consider it a downside that you might have to discuss the *m* word with that Harvard boyfriend. But other than that, “people here aren’t really stressed,” says Maher. “We’re in Harvard. We know we’re going to be successful if we want to be—no matter what.” (Beginning salaries for Harvard Law grads start at \$125,000.)

But if it’s money you’re after in your dating search, your best chances might be on the other side of the country, with the gay students at Stanford University’s top-ranked business school. The crowd is a bit older there—the average age is 27, says Justin Riedell, last year’s leader of Out4Biz, the school’s gay student group—but the fact is that your sugar daddy won’t be bringing home the big bucks unless he’s been working for a few years. So when you give up that search for the nonexistent 18-year-old sugar daddy-underwear model of your dreams, head to Stanford. “It’s a very open, accepting environment,” says the current Out4Biz leader, Donny Salazar, a second-year student. “People are always welcoming.” It’s less of a wild scene, though—even though it’s a short drive to San Francisco—and more about lots of low-key dinners and barbecues and cocktails in the city. Stanford guys aren’t all cold cash; they have warm hearts pumping under their designer pin-striped suits. Last year’s Challenge for Charity found gay business school students auctioned off for dates: The \$2,200-a-night price tag went to help disadvantaged kids.

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Carson Kressley might praise the bold choice of green sports uniforms, but otherwise the home of the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame hasn’t always been too gay-friendly. The university’s motto is “life, sweetness, and hope,” and it looks like they’ve finally started to pay attention to that second part. This past school year the famous Catholic university in South Bend, Ind., christened a performing arts center, in the hopes of diversifying the student body and giving the college a reputation for something other than football and sacraments. Although there is an unofficial gay student group on campus, it wasn’t responsible for any of the gay plays the student body presented last year: *Angels in America*, *The Laramie Project*, *Bent*, and *Stop Kiss*. And plenty of straight students wore orange T-shirts that read GAY? FINE BY ME in the campus’s largest-ever turnout for the yearly pride event. Notre Dame has even started a queer film festival. This year, as part of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Questioning Week, the student government hosted a drag queen who was invited to campus to speak to students about sexual identity. There’s even a tongue-in-cheek “Closet Day” hosted by the graduate student union in the main quad, where students walk through a freestanding door and “come out.”

Even with homophobia from some of its straight students, Notre Dame can be gay heaven compared with other places in the country. Chris Vierig, a junior, came to Notre Dame from a Mormon upbringing in Salt Lake City. He came out his freshman year and is now part of a group of about 20 or 30 guys who meet for coffee every week just to talk about being gay or bi. That’s a long way from when Vierig started at Notre Dame, when meetings were held at night, in secret, at undisclosed locations.

“I came out to a priest in confession,” says Day Zimlich, a grad student who is very active in AllianceND, the unofficial gay student group. “He let me know that it’s not something that God hates, just something the world can’t deal with. The church is a very big place. There’s a lot of room.”



GAY PRES!

This fall Harvard-educated Ralph Hexter, a 52-year-old classics scholar and an arts and humanities dean at the University of California, Berkeley, gives up the Bay Area for western Massachusetts to take the reins of Hampshire College as one of the country's first out gay college presidents.

Out: Hampshire is a small liberal arts college in the Northeast; does that make it a better fit for a gay president?

Hexter: You're not going to have conformists coming to Hampshire. We have a wonderful liberal reputation. And by that I mean "liberal" in the sense of "open-minded."

It's just not the traditional college with the traditional conforming. We don't have varsity sports here, for example. Also, Hampshire is so young, so even the oldest alumni are my generation. They understand the commitment to change and open-mindedness.

How do you feel about being the first openly gay college president?

Everything was progressing so rapidly in the '70s when I came out that if you had told me coming out or being out would even be an issue in 2005, I wouldn't have

believed you. Is that sad? No. What's the point of that? The lavender ceiling or glass ceiling is gradually being shattered.

Gradually shattered?

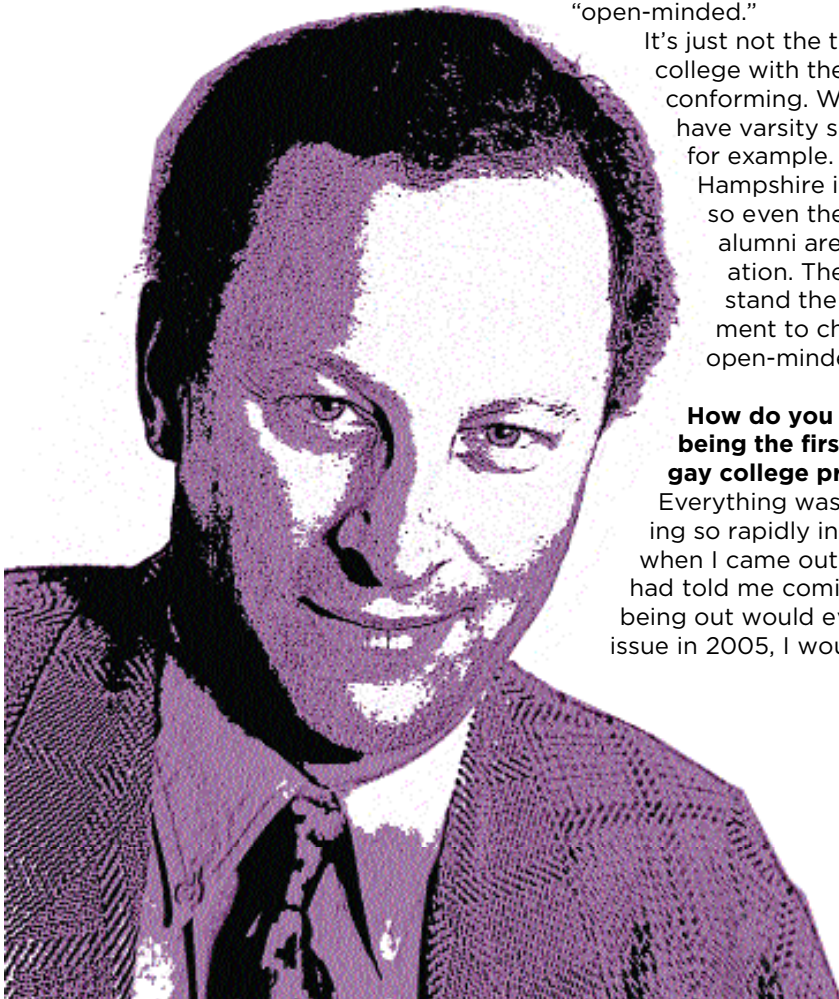
Yeah, sounds funny, I guess. But I think the effect of all of this progress and all of these first steps shows us that we can't underestimate the force of reaction or the power of fear. The reality is that only a few colleges would chance this.

Does being gay affect how you lead?

I'm not honest and empathetic and courageous because I'm gay. But certainly by way of gayness, I've had to pay a lot of attention to my own embrace of those characteristics. We are all a bundle of different interests and concerns. When I'm in the library and poring over a book, I'm still gay even if it's not the focus of my attention.

Do you think of yourself as particularly gay, then?

I met my partner, Manfred, at the opera. Does that count? We'll probably get married in Massachusetts. We just celebrated our 25th anniversary. But something about me that's particularly gay? I just don't see that. I own horses. Three: Omar, Scheherazade, and Susi. But Scheherazade does get called Cher for short.





The weird thing about the gay party scene at Washington University in St. Louis—Wash U for short—is that there isn't one. "Our scenes aren't divided by sexuality like at other colleges," says Justin Huebener, a senior. "The gays aren't sequestered to one corner of campus," agrees Jason Nichols, a junior. While the scene is partly underground, he says, there are also gays everywhere on campus, "so it's this great hidden support structure."

Support. Tolerance. Openness. That all sounds great, but when do they skip to the part about the drinking and the bisexual making-out? That happens all year round but especially at WILD days, which bookend the school year (WILD stands for Walk In, Lie Down). "Everyone gets absolutely trashed by 2 in the afternoon," says Nichols. "People get crazy and make out on the quad," adds Huebener. "Guys will make out with girls or guys or both. It's not like people will stop and take a picture, because they've seen it all before."

Nichols's fraternity (he's the social chair), Beta Theta Pi, is so accepting of gays that it has earned the campus nickname of "Beta Date a Guy." For classier partyers, though, there was also Gayla this year, the campus's first gay formal dance. For a campus of only a few thousand undergrads, the arrival of several hundred students at the gay gala proved it to be an amazing success. "There's a bubble here," says Andrew Ross, a senior, about the campus that is located in the sheltered, country-clubbish Clayton, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis. "So everything that happens is really together, gay or straight. It's really liberating in a lot of ways."

"We're just all very out—gay or not," says Nichols. "And we're not shy about it."

FINANCIAL \$\$ AID \$\$

Danny Leslie wasn't supposed to have finished his freshman year at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor last spring. He wasn't supposed to be in college at all. He got \$12,000 in need-based grants from the university, but it was an award of \$2,500 from the Matthew Shepard Memorial Scholarship—offered to "a student who has demonstrated leadership in promoting diversity and understanding in the community"—that gave him the final boost he needed to make it possible for him to enroll. The scholarship is awarded through the LEAGUE Foundation, an offshoot of the nation's oldest gay employee group, AT&T's. "Towards the end of my senior year [in high school] I just sort of became my own agent," he says. "I Googled everything, applied for everything I could think of. And the gay aspect stood out to me as something that might help."

Coincidentally, Leslie used the money to take a summer class before his freshman year, a geology course that included a field trip to Wyoming to study rock formations there. "It was very evident on that trip that the other students were having yet another vacation," says Leslie. "But it was a big deal to me. I never got to travel much, and it was great to see where Matthew Shepard lived. I never got to vacation much. I still haven't been out of the country even."

Leslie still has to be tight with his money and seldom splurges, but he's most grateful that the scholarship has freed up more time to devote to extracurricular activities. For the fall 2004 election campaign he took a paid internship with a political group and fought Proposition 2, which declared marriages valid only between a man and a woman. (It passed but is being contested in courts.) He also worked with Voice Your Vote and helped make the University of Michigan the campus that signed up the most student voters in the country.

He's very serious, about school and advocacy and even romance. Just 19, he's already in a domestic partnership with a junior; they'll live in on-campus family housing this fall (it's cheaper than regular student housing).

To win the Matthew Shepard Memorial Scholarship students must write essays, submit recommendations, and demonstrate an over-the-top dedication to gay advocacy. Roughly 50 to 100 students compete every year. The LEAGUE Foundation, which has operated since 1996 with about a dozen unpaid volunteers, gives out different amounts of money each year depending on the donations it receives; scholarships usually average around \$10,000.

The scholarship is "one of the best-kept secrets" for gay students, says Charles Eader, president of the foundation. But word is getting out. Since it's included in the scholarship listings of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, it's not likely to remain secret for long.

HOTTEST STUDENT BODY

There is a kind of hottie that goes beyond those who work on their abs for much more than eight minutes a day, a kind of inner hottie. And nowhere are they more plentiful than on the campus of New York University, located in the city's Greenwich Village neighborhood.

"We don't have a campus," says Bryan Moore, a senior. "The city is our campus." That makes for a lot of before-everyone-knows-about-it trend-

setting in music, art, and fashion. Add the skill of Manhattan's chefs, bartenders, and cabbies and you're in for a hot night any night of the year.

"The great thing about being gay at NYU is that you don't need NYU at all," says Doug Marshall, another senior. "There's a great on-campus gay student center, but really, everything we need or want, or want to need, is all around us in the city."

This is hotness that has students

showing up to classes not only in outrageous designer clothes but also in sweatshirts and jeans—think about all those times you see celebrities walking around in baseball caps and old T-shirts. And plenty of NYU students are taking advantage. "It's so fun," says Moore. "It's this super-young neighborhood in this city that already has so much energy on its own. But you add young, excited gay students and it gets pretty fun pretty fast" ●

