

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXXII, Number 42, 1 April 1998 — Health Advocacy Project Brings Empathy to CU Gays, Bisexuals [ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

Health Advocacy Project Brings Empathy to CU Gays, Bisexuals

By **SARAH HINES**
Spectator Staff Writer

After more than 12 years at Columbia, the Gay Health Advocacy Project (GHAP) is in the process of setting up The Next Generation Project, a mentoring program for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender students.

GHAP was started in 1985 by its current director Laura Pinsky in response to the AIDS epidemic. The program offers HIV testing, counseling, and treatment as well as gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual outreach programs.

Ryan Kull, Co-Director of GHAP and a founder of the Next Generation Project, said that the purpose of the Next Generation Project is to offer students a way to interact with gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender adults in New York City and gain from their experiences in the workforce.

“The program’s goal is to allow a space for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender students to network with gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender adults in the community,” Kull said.

Kull also said that the program’s success has been overwhelming.

“It is really successful. All different groups want to join, and more students are getting involved,” Kull said.

The Next Generation Project kicked off in December, and the process of matching interested students with mentors is currently underway.

Another purpose of the program is to allow students to see how gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender adults function in their everyday lives.

“One of the reasons we started [Next Generation Project] is because of the stereotypes that still exist that gay and lesbian people can’t have long-term relationships,” Kull said.

“Today’s queer youth don’t have role models,” said Rachel Bloom, CC ’01, a peer counselor for GHAP who works with the Next Generation Project. “You open up a magazine and you see heterosexual couples. You don’t

see stable gay adult figures," Bloom said.

"It is really important that gay youth know that there are gay adults who are married, have children, go to work every day, and lead everyday lives like their parents do," Bloom said.

The Next Generation Project will sponsor an open discussion on April 21, focusing on gays and lesbians who have been in long-term relationships. It will include discussion of the difficulties and benefits of being gay in a straight world and the legal issues involved in gay and lesbian relationships.

This event is a part of the beginning of the mentor and student match-ups.

Bruce Francis, Journalism '84, said he is excited about the enthusiasm that has developed for the Project.

"Right now we are just getting started, [but] the response has been overwhelming," Francis said. "We have no real sense of where it is going to go, but the response has been gratifying. I think that we have stumbled on something unique," Francis added.



PHOTO EDITOR—LAUREN[®] BECKER

Ryan Kull and Laura Pinsky, founded and will direct the Gay Health Project, a mentoring program for lesbian, and gay students.