SPOTLIGHT
ON LBGQTQIAA
Welcome to our LGBTQIAA edition of Transformations. The contents of this edition were prepared and edited while Diane Reid was serving as coordinator of diversity for Academic Affairs. Michael Jackman, the new coordinator of diversity for Academic Affairs, is now on board and providing solid direction for campus diversity initiatives. All of the articles in this issue were written by students in English W364: Editing for Publication and English W295: Individual Study of Writing. Both are taught by Tom O’Neal, senior lecturer in English. We are grateful for the students’ research and their contributions, and we are pleased to be able to provide publication opportunities for these students.

In this issue, you will be given the opportunity to read about the accomplishments of our 2014-15 ADIE Research and Service Fellows. These two women, Dr. Kelly Ryan and Dr. Lucinda Woodward, were able to make outstanding contributions with their reassigned time. Many of you will be benefiting from their work. You will also have the opportunity to explore various aspects of the LGBTQIAA experience, including the evolution of campus progress on these issues over a 25-year period.

The goal of each issue of Transformations is to encourage inquiry and enhance understanding. It is in this spirit that we open the pages of this issue.
As the ADIE Service Fellow for 2014-15, I was able to use my reassigned time to make significant headway with projects important to International Programs (IP), most significantly to our study abroad programs. I began by petitioning for a small office space and a bulletin board in our university center to be delegated for IP announcements on campus advertising. I was also able to schedule four student informational sessions across campus and collaborated with 10 total program presentations.

During the fall 2014 semester, I prepared two grant proposals and was successful in obtaining one external grant from the Institute of International Education to support study abroad scholarships for six IU Southeast students to go to Ireland. This grant has a total value of $7,000 and will be used in March 2016 to sponsor a faculty-led program to Ireland to study Historical Geography during spring break.

To facilitate student outreach, advertising was increased, and I was able to respond to 8-10 e-mail inquiries each week, meeting individually with approximately five students per week and forming alliances with student organizations across campus to increase awareness of study abroad. Presentations on international programs were made to the Non-Traditional Student Union, the Honors Program, Psi Chi, the IU Southeast Activities Fair, student orientation, First Year Students (FYS), and the 21st Century Scholars program in 2015. Thanks to support from the FYS coordinator, IP is now a formal resource in the FYS instructors’ materials, and we have been called upon to make five presentations on study abroad in FYS classes during the fall 2015 term.

With the additional time made available to me, I was able to increase my contact time with faculty members who wish to organize study abroad programs. Two new faculty-led study abroad programs were developed: one to Wales and one to Italy. During the spring 2015 semester, I organized faculty training seminars and developed a comprehensive training manual for IU Southeast study abroad program directors. There were eight faculty from IU Southeast enrolled in the program, and these participants attended a series of seminars dedicated to specialized topics including grant writing, program development, logistics, ethics and post-trip reporting. A 100-page training manual with seminar materials was compiled, and will be posted for public use and for future program directors. The training materials generated for this workshop will be used every 2-3 years to provide supplemental half-day day seminars in conjunction with Institute for Learning and Teaching Excellence or Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching for interested faculty.

All in all, I was able to reach additional students to generate interest in our study abroad programs. It is my hope that access to the new training manual will make sponsoring a study abroad program feel less daunting to faculty who would like to lead students in an overseas experience.
2014 and 2015 were violent years. The shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, led Americans to take a closer look at incidents of racially motivated violence and the problems in policing. Lesser known homicides, like that of April Jace, resulted in discussions about spousal murder and abuse, and the how the criminal justice system handles domestic violence before it escalates. These violent episodes are mere drops in the bucket of a much larger systemic problem of violence in the U.S., and these issues have been with us for a much longer period of time than most people think.

As the ADIE research fellow over the last year, I was well-positioned to respond to these events. My new book project focuses on the relationship between violence and civil rights in early United States history. Over the past academic year, I wrote and researched chapters on the ways African Americans and married women contested violence during an era when their legal rights to serve as plaintiffs against their husbands and whites were comprised by customs and laws, including slavery and the doctrine of coverture, which denied married women a legal identity outside of her husband.

I shared my findings with the IU Southeast community in several ways. Dr. Elizabeth Gritter and I held an event in March where we presented our research on the way violence affected African Americans in the past and the ways they fought back to successfully claim access to political and public spaces. In April, I presented my research on spousal assault and rape at the Social Sciences Forum and the Women and Gender Studies “Happening.” I was also able to share my research with my students in the classroom. After examining court records from the era, I transcribed two stunning cases in which slave masters were tried in New York City for assaulting their slaves, and I distributed it as a reading assignment. I asked students to free write their thoughts on the relationship between slavery and violence, as well as how they felt the judicial system handled the cases. Reading these individual cases personalized their understanding of slavery and moved them beyond numbers and generalizations to consider the real impact of the system.

Violence structures hierarchy; it affects the way we interact with each other, our mobility and our expectations and experiences within the criminal justice system. As I continue to work on this project, I look forward to sharing my findings with IU Southeast and the local community and broaden our understandings of the roots of violence. My most recent publication on this project, “The Spirit of Contradiction: Wife Abuse in New England, 1780-1830,” appeared in Early American Studies (Summer 2015). I am grateful to IU Southeast for supporting this work as I complete the manuscript.
LGBTQIAA can be a mouthful, but this initialism has been working its way into the English vocabulary since the 1980s. Originally containing only three letters, LGB, it now includes numerous letters in different ways including LGBT, GLBT, LGBTQ, and LGBTQIAA. Any way you put it, the purpose of the letters is to provide inclusion.

According to Angelica Wiseman, a Gay Straight Alliance officer on campus, the initialism is always changing in reaction to the “increased awareness” about people and their identities. It’s important for there to be terms groups of people can identify with, but how much does the general public really know about the meaning of LGBTQIAA? The following is a guide to understanding each term, its origin, and its cultural significance.
**LESBIAN:** A lesbian is a woman attracted to a woman.

FYI: The word lesbian can be traced all the way back to 600 B.C. to a Greek lyricist named Sappho, who lived on the Island of Lesbos. Sappho is associated with the word primarily because of her school for girls on the island and her erotic poems that have been said to include infatuation between same sexes.

**GAY:** Gay is “often used to refer to men attracted to men, but also colloquially used as an umbrella term to include all LGBTQ people.” (IU Southeast Safe Zone Manual)

FYI: Its origins lie in 12th century England derived from the Old French word “gai” meaning “joyful,” “carefree,” or “bright and showy.” In the 17th century it was used to express immorality meaning to be “addicted to pleasures and dissipations,” an expansion of its original meaning of “carefree.” Then in the 19th century “gay” became an ironic reference for a woman prostitute and also a term for a man who had sex with many women, mostly the prostitutes. It wasn’t until the 1920s and ’30s that “gay” took on the meaning as we know it today. By 1955, it “officially acquired the new added definition of the meaning homosexual males.”

**BISEXUAL:** This is a person who is attracted to not one, but two sexes or genders; however, this attraction is not necessarily simultaneous or equal.

FYI: Some famous individuals have identified as bisexual.

Marlon Brando 1924-2004: Hailed as one of the greatest and most influential actors of all time, Brando admitted having sexual encounters with other men in his biography “The Only Contender.”

Janis Joplin 1943-1970: The singer-songwriter best known for her fusion of hard rock with blues. Her relationship with neighbor Peggy Caserta was documented in Caserta’s memoir “Going Down with Janis.”

Frida Kahlo 1907-1954: Most notably Mexico’s most famous artist, she was also courageously open about her bisexuality in a time when female sexuality was taboo.

Alfred Kinsey 1894-1956: The founder of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at IU, Kinsey was openly bisexual and maintained an open relationship with his wife.

**TRANSGENDER:** Transgender may be the most difficult term to define in the LGBTQIAA sequence because it means different things to different people. At its most basic level, it functions to define someone who doesn’t fit within society’s standards of how a male or a female should look and behave. It also can refer to someone who doesn’t feel they identify accurately with the sex they were born with, as well as people who feel in between male and female or identify with neither. It is important to recognize transgender is not a sexual orientation. Someone may fall into this definition, but not identify with it.

FYI: In 1975 a film adaptation of Richard O’Brien’s musical, Rocky Horror Picture Show, quickly became a cult classic. The movie packed theatres with youth dressed in fishnets and red lipstick. Tim Curry’s iconic role as Dr. Frank-N-Furter, a “sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania,” has become a staple in pop culture. According to June Thomas, culture critic and editor of Slate magazine, “Dr. Furter’s sex-positive (and, yes, murder-cannibalism-positive) message may have helped more people come out of the closet than any other work of art.”
**QUEER:** This is an umbrella term, a political statement and a simple label. Queer is used as a term to refer to all LGBTQIAA people. Secondly, it is a political statement and sexual orientation that advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid. It aims to change the way we see and think about sexual orientation and gender as separates. It is possible to see orientation and gender as a whole and not two separate identifications. Lastly, it is a simple label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires.

FYI: Originally a synonym for “odd,” this word became a derogatory expression for gays in the 20th century and for many years was used as a homophobic epithet. However, the term has been reclaimed by the youth as a unifying term to collectively refer to the LGBT community. It is important to note, according to GLAAD’s, *Ally’s Guide to Terminology: Talking about LGBT People and Equality,* “the word queer is an in-group term, and a word that can be considered offensive to some people, depending on their generation, geographic location, and relationship with the word”.

**INTERSEX:** Intersex is an example of how society’s way of thinking about sex is socially constructed. Intersex refers to a people born with external genitalia or internal reproductive system that do not fit into the socially constructed boxes of male or female. The existence of intersexuals proves that there are not just two sexes.

Hermaphrodite is labelled by IU Southeast’s *Safe Zone Resource Manual,* “an out-of-date and offensive term for an intersexed person. Intersex has now replaced this dated term and is now the socially accepted term.”

FYI: Emily Quinn’s story, “I’m Emily Quinn, and I’m Intersex,” was posted in September 2014 and has been shared widely in the social media world. It is featured on MTV Act, a website that “is all things pop culture and social impact” that raises awareness about current social issues.

**ASEXUAL:** According to The Asexual Visibility and Education Network, “an asexual is someone who does not experience sexual attraction.” Asexuality is not celibacy. Celibacy is a choice, whereas asexuality “is an intrinsic part of who we are.”

FYI: “Love from the Asexual Underground” is a blog and podcast that raises awareness for the asexual community.

“(A)sexual” is a documentary directed by Angela Tucker that shows the social struggles and identification for asexuals.

**ALLY:** Just as important as all the rest, an ally is someone who advocates for and supports members of a community other than their own. They see beyond differences and help to achieve mutual goals. While not a sexual orientation, identifying as an ally helps create an inclusive community for all.

Reference language is often intimidating and can be plagued with ambiguity and vagueness. This happens with language concerning those who orient under any of the terms in LGBTQIAA, as well. Rule No. 1 is to never assume heterosexuality. Rule No. 2 is to be aware of your words and how you use them, but most importantly, educate yourself. Keep up to date with new and evolving language. Humble yourself and apologize where necessary; learn from your mistakes, and always try to broaden your understanding of LGBTQIAA.
ANCHORING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE: THE GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE
Before Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) spread around the country, Project 10 was established in 1984 as the first school-based LGBT organization at Fairfax High School in Los Angeles. The point of the organization was to help with abusive behavior, suicide prevention and reliable information regarding AIDS. In colleges, LGBT organizations started several years earlier with the founding of the Student Homophile League in 1967 at Columbia University. The First GSAs were established in 1988 at two private schools in Massachusetts.

Gregory Roberts, currently an academic advisor at IU Southeast, proved to be a pioneer during this time, founding an early incarnation of the Gay-Straight Alliance at IU Southeast. This group was called The Drummers, with the slogan “For those who march to a different beat.” Although the group was meant
According to a 2013 study published by the Huffington Post, gays and lesbians ages fifteen to twenty-four are seven times more likely to attempt suicide.

to support LGBT students, this was not explicitly reflected in the name because the political climate was quite different then. Gregory Roberts recalls, “At first, I was hesitant to start such a group, but my colleagues were supportive, and I saw students who needed help.” The early years proved to be the most difficult, for while the campus was very supportive, much of the student body was not.

Dr. William Sweigart arrived at IU Southeast in 1990 from San Francisco, where he had been an activist for LGBT equality and a supporter of Harvey Milk’s campaign in the 1970s. Upon his arrival, he experienced a considerable culture shock, going from the liberalism of San Francisco to the social conservatism of Southern Indiana. During Sweigart’s first year on campus, one of his students committed suicide. This motivated him to get more involved with the GSA. He could not be sure, but he suspected that the student was gay and struggling with a hostile environment. “Sometimes the work of the GSA is a matter of life and death,” Sweigart said.

In the early 1990s, posters for the organization were defaced, and the office was vandalized, but this did not deter Roberts or Sweigart from keeping the GSA alive. Roberts points out, “Society is afraid of change, but each generation has been more progressive.” Dr. Sweigart went out of his way to keep that office door open. “The movement has waxed and waned over the years, and I was afraid we might lose the office. I would often take my paperwork into the GSA office so that the organization could be available for students.”

There were three major events in the
1990s that ultimately strengthened the numbers and influence of GSAs around the country. The State of Massachusetts began to support the development of GSAs in 1993 with its Safe Schools Program. In 1998, Matthew Shepard, an openly gay student from the University of Wyoming, was savagely beaten to death. His murder galvanized a movement that was already gaining ground. In 1999, a federal court decision made it clear that a school could not deny students access to a GSA.

According to a 2013 study published by the Huffington Post, gays and lesbians ages 15 to 24 are seven times more likely to attempt suicide. Dr. Sweigart is very troubled by this. “Groups are fundamental. It provides an environment so that students know they are OK. The GSA is just as important now as it was 20 years ago.” Today almost every campus around the country has a GSA, and a growing number of middle and high schools do as well. A 2007 study from the California Healthy Kids Survey shows that 76 percent of students who attended a middle or high school with a GSA felt safe.

The name of the organization has changed over the years to reflect the changing political climate and the goals of the GSA. The Drummers represented a cautious beginning because of the harassment and abuse in the early years. In 1990, the group became Students for Human Rights, and it 1994 it was changed to Allies and Advocates. The group gradually became more assertive and comfortable on campus, calling itself the Gay Lesbian Student Union. Using the 11th letter of the Greek alphabet, the organization became the Lambda Student Union in 1999. The name Gay-Straight Alliance, settled on in 2007, achieves several goals: The organization is able to freely assert its dedication to LGBT civil rights and also have a name that is more inclusive.

Angelica Wiseman, past president of the GSA, has first-hand experience with the value of the organization. “I went into the GSA while in a turbulent and lonely time, and they gave me the time and support to heal. I went in as an ally and was not treated any differently for it.” Wiseman is particularly proud of the campus for its support. “IU Southeast has been so good on LGBT issues, and Bloomington was one of the first to oppose House Joint Resolution-6.” That proposed amendment was intended to ban same-sex marriage in the Indiana Constitution. Michael Gardner is currently treasurer.
The National Center for Transgender Equality reports that one in five transgender people have been refused a home or apartment because of their transgender status. One in 10 have been evicted because of their status, and even more report that once they are homeless, they may even get turned away from shelters, the very agencies that should be helping them. People that identify as transsexual or transgender have to face rejection on almost every conceivable level — not just from their own family, but also from every facet of society. According to a recent article published by the LA Times, 69 percent of people that identify as transgender and also are or have been homeless, have attempted suicide.

In addition to the expected challenges of academic life, transgender students face unique ones in their quests to become their authentic selves. When they feel safe to be themselves, they benefit both in and outside the classroom. Transgender students are most comfortable in environments that are supportive of their self-identification. Daiyu Hurst, an IU Southeast student who is transgender, notes that, “while IU has procedures in place to provide for preferred name on the student record where different from legal name, the student record provides for their legal gender only. With only legal gender and a name as guidance, it’s possible that faculty and staff might mis-gender a transgender student. Rather than assume, faculty and staff will find most transgender students quite open to being asked for their preferred pronouns. Not all students will identify as a conventional binary gender, so faculty should be open to the possibility they may offer unique pronouns such as ze/hir or may prefer that no pronouns be used to address them. Similarly, while most binary-identifying trans students will choose their preferred gendered...
restrooms, a few find neither appropriate. The IU Southeast campus provides only four gender-neutral restrooms on campus; this should be expanded."

Colleges like IU Southeast, which have on-campus housing available to students, need to pay particular attention to the needs of transgender students. Amanda Stonecipher, the director of Residence Life and Housing at IU Southeast, is here to help. “We have about 400 students living on campus. We are lucky because we have such a tight-knit community here, and we really get to know our students,” she said. Stonecipher said that the most important aspect of addressing transgender students’ needs is communication and honesty. “We validate and respect all student needs, whether it be from a person who identifies as LGBTQIA or not, but we need open communication to make that possible.”

IU Southeast is taking further steps towards making a student who identifies as transgender feel as comfortable as possible when applying for student housing. The housing application now has a transgender option, which is marked with an asterisk, to assure the student that his or her needs will be met. The addendum reads: “Residence Life and Housing will contact you if you identify as transgender so we can provide you with the best possible placement.” This is a positive step towards making what could be a daunting process for transgender students easier and more inclusive. The application also asks for the student’s preferred name, which is not an option just for transgender students, but is definitely a boon to those that may be transitioning and would like to be called by a name that more accurately describes their gender expression. Preferred names should also be honored in the classroom by professors for this very reason.

Housing is only one challenge that people who identify as transgender or transsexual may have to overcome when on campus. Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Jason Meriwether emphasizes that latent bias can be just as harmful as overt discrimination. He emphasizes that all staff members should be conscious of how their attitudes, actions, and language can contribute to campus culture. “It’s not about the policies – it’s about the people,” he said. His vision for the campus is to make sure all students feel comfortable. “I want this campus to be one place that a student’s identity will not be antagonized,” he said.

Vice Chancellor Meriwether noted that administration is looking into adding more unisex bathrooms on campus.

In addition, one of Vice Chancellor Meriwether’s top priorities is expanding the Safe Zone program on campus. This program was created purely to support LGBTQIA students; the purpose is to let these students know that they have a safe place or person to talk to about things they may be frightened or uncomfortable sharing in another setting. Basically, these safe zones indicate that a student can be his or herself. Once they receive training, members receive a sticker they can place on their door to let students know they are safe and supported. Thankfully, IU Southeast already boasts a considerable number of faculty and staff who have taken the extra steps to be qualified as a safe zone member. As Vice Chancellor Meriwether stressed, latent bias is a problem, but it can be combated with symbols of support, such as the Safe Zone stickers. These stickers discreetly but firmly reassure students that they have allies. The program offers training in sensitivity to students, faculty and staff.

If any faculty member should have a student that they think could benefit from therapy, free counseling services are available to all students, and the director of Personal Counseling, Dr. Michael Day, is Safe Zone certified. IU Southeast is making positive progress to ensure that all students feel comfortable while on campus. There is always more work to be done, though, and faculty members are encouraged to seek Safe Zone training, as well as consider other ways they can contribute to the effort. ■
What do you think of when you hear the word bisexual? Most people would say the definition would be one who likes or is attracted to either sex, male or female, but this definition is too simplistic and only partially correct. Robin Ochs, an American bisexual activist, said “I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge in myself the potential to be attracted, romantically and/or sexually, to people of more than one sex, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.” According to The Bisexual Index, “Bisexuality isn’t more complicated than that – ‘attraction to more than one gender.’ It’s not incompatible with identifying as gay, either. Bisexuality is proof that sexuality isn’t ‘either/or,’ it is ‘and.’” June Jordan, a bisexual Caribbean-American poet and activist, declares, “Bisexuality means I am free and I am as likely to want to love a man, and what about that? Isn’t that what freedom implies?” The definition can vary depending on the person who is asked.

Audrey Landford, an IU Southeast student who self identifies as bisexual, says there is a common misconception in both of these communities that if someone comes out as bisexual, that individual is really homosexual or is on their way to becoming gay/lesbian. This is especially true if the individual is male. Females that come out as bisexual are often seen as just experimenting.

According to Audrey, some familiar misconceptions include the statements “You are just confused” or “You just have not had sex with the right person yet.” These statements are not only false, but hurtful. Another misconception is that bisexuals are more promiscuous and therefore more likely to cheat. An individual who identifies as bisexual...
is no more likely to cheat or be promiscuous than anyone else. Some people assume bisexuals become straight or gay when they are in a monogamous relationship.

Woody Allen once said, “Bisexuality immediately doubles your chances for a date on Saturday night.” He was making a joke, but this is just another example of a bisexual stereotype. There are numerous generalizations about appearance, hair length, or masculine/feminine traits. Stereotypes are often misleading. Bisexual women who have longer hair and have a stereotypically feminine look are assumed to be straight, whereas women with short hair who wear more masculine clothing are assumed to be lesbian. Men who are not stereotypically masculine are assumed to be gay, based upon speech features or clothing choices that might be interpreted as markers for sexual orientation. “With so many people questioning their sexuality, some bisexuals begin to question their own sexuality,” says Landford.

Dr. Alfred Charles Kinsey, a controversial but influential sexologist who founded the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University, developed a scale by which one’s sexual tendencies could be determined. The scale went from 0-6, zero being totally heterosexual (no homosexual tendencies) and six meaning homosexual (no heterosexual tendencies). Kinsey determined, through his research, that very few people fall into either of these categories; most people fell somewhere in between, which would classify them as bisexual.

In their book, *The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior (1993)*, Samuel and Cynthia Janus found, through their broad scale survey of 3,000 participants ages 18-90, that 5 percent of men and 3 percent of women identified as bisexual, while 4 percent of men and 2 percent of women identified as homosexual. Sometimes called the “invisible majority” of the LGBT community, because there are slightly more people who identify as bisexual than gay, bisexuals are caught in the middle between the straight community and the lesbian/gay community. In 2011, the Williams Institute looked at four national and two state level population-based surveys and found that 3.5 percent of the population (approximately 9 million people) in the United States identify as LGBT. Those who identify as bisexual (1.8 percent) slightly outnumber those identifying as lesbian or gay (1.7 percent).

When asked how bisexuals are treated at IU Southeast, Audrey says she has had no problems and bisexuality is more accepted on campus than off campus (family, friends and the public) or on the Internet. “In my experience on campus, most people I have come out to haven’t really had a problem with it. I come out to anyone if it’s relevant to the conversation or if I know them. I haven’t really had any problems on campus with anyone.” One can find biphobia on the Internet from straight sites and LGBT sites and forums. Both communities tend to believe there is no such thing as bisexuality which is the most hurtful misconception to someone who is bisexual. The country is moving toward equality for the lesbian and gay community and acceptance of their lifestyles but is moving more slowly for bisexuals and transgendered persons. The bisexual community simply wants their sexuality to be recognized as legitimate.
For Dr. William Sweigart, moving to IU Southeast in 1990 from San Francisco, where he lived for almost 20 years as a gay activist, meant adjusting to a new environment. Sweigart's transition to the conservative climate of the south was, for the most part, a smooth one. "Everyone I worked with knew I was gay from the minute I walked through the door." However, tragedy struck during his first semester teaching at IU Southeast when a student in his freshman composition class committed suicide. Having thought sexuality may have been an element in the student's death, Sweigart decided to take on the responsibility of mentoring by serving as the faculty advisor for the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Upon retiring, he had held the role for over 20 years.

After Sweigart's retirement, Michael Abernethy, senior lecturer in Communication Studies, assumed the role of faculty advisor for the GSA. As a teacher, the biggest university community change he’s seen has been with his students — how much more open and accepting they are of him. He recalls an instance several years ago when a former student of his asked another
student in class if he thought their teacher was gay. The second student, a body builder, responded by asking if it really mattered. What the first student didn’t realize was that the student he had asked happened to be gay. “He’d just stereotyped us. The big burly guy couldn’t possibly be gay but the skinny guy at the front of the room? He can be.”

In that more conservative climate, Abernethy admits his sexuality wasn’t something he discussed. “I didn’t talk about my personal life or my partner because I figured it was none of their business and it wasn’t what I was here to teach.” He’s much more open about it now simply because a student forced his hand on the issue. After spending months at the hospital with his partner, who was battling cancer at the time, Abernethy was routinely running on about four hours of sleep when a student voiced concern. He quickly realized he couldn’t hide the toll it was taking on him and that if it was obvious to this student it was noticeable to others. At that point he figured the cat was out of the bag and why not discuss it?

“It’s still not an integral part of my class. I don’t walk in and say ‘Hi, I’m your gay teacher.’ But if it comes up, or if someone asks, I don’t skirt the issue like I did before with the more conservative student body that we had.”

IU Southeast registrar Jay McTyier acknowledges that. “As you get to know people, you have to decide, am I going to play the pronoun game? Am I going to substitute she’s for he’s, say girlfriend when I mean boyfriend?” he said. “When it comes to that point, I’ve never shied away from using the correct pronoun and knowing that in fact I would be revealing myself by doing so.”

It’s because of IU Southeast’s reputation for tolerance that McTyier accepted a position with the university. Arriving on campus, he was pleasantly surprised that his suspicions of a progressive and accepting environment were confirmed. The university currently offers benefits for domestic partners and forbids discrimination based on sexual orientation. As far as policy goes, McTyier believes the university is doing everything they can. “They are being responsive to changes in national and state policy as well as being true to their own institutional guidelines.”

According to Abernethy, “The University has always been supportive of LGBTQIAA faculty and staff.” Though Abernethy knows of colleagues who are reluctant to come out, he believes IU Southeast
is a safe place to do so. “I can’t imagine anybody on this campus being discriminated against. That being said, I only know my experiences.”

Another faculty member who believes IU Southeast to be a tolerant, safe environment is professor of Fine Art Debra Clem. Having come out in her interview, she describes IU Southeast as “the most accepting, tolerant school you could possibly ask for.” In April 2002, Clem remembers the resolution approving the provision of benefits to same-sex domestic partners of Indiana University employees and students. “At the time we were the only school in the metro area to have such a policy, and we’ve been ahead of the curve in terms of domestic partnership rights and policies ever since,” she said.

As advisor of GSA, Abernethy stresses the importance of being aware of the challenges that LGBTQIAA faculty, staff and students face such as healthcare, recognition of rights and acceptance from family members. “A student who is coming out is going to have to deal with things at home. Additionally, some people live double lives. They’re open on campus, in the closet at home, or vice versa. As an educator, if you come across a situation where you don’t know what to do, reach out to a faculty member, find resources and educate yourself.”

LGBTQIAA faculty and staff who feel secure also promote an atmosphere of security and acceptance for LGBTQIAA students. As a member of the GSA, Calvin Barron believes “it’s good to have professors who are comfortable coming out. Students who grow up in rural areas may have misunderstandings about who LGBTQIAA people are and it helps them understand that it doesn’t have to be something that is feared.”

Past president of the GSA Angelica Wiseman agrees with Barron and said, “I feel safe talking to professors who make that extra leap in their classes to include a small sense of diversity. I feel like if they’re out here on campus and the university accepts them, then that indicates acceptance within the workplace in general, including other fields.”

Former GSA advisor William Sweigart said, “Change socially is very slow; there are still blind spots and difficulties. It takes a real effort and resources to support and create the kind of climate change that’s needed.” Although things have slowly evolved for the better over the years, older discriminatory views of the LGBTQIAA community and attendant homophobia die hard, both with the so-called “straight” world and the LGBTQIAA community. Moving forward, McTyier believes, “The key thing is to have a conversation. It’s all about creating a dialogue, getting past the discomfort and understanding one another.”