

Campus Climate Survey Reveals LGBTQ+ Students Are ‘Least Likely’ to Feel Comfortable on Campus

34% of the queer students surveyed said they were either very uncomfortable, uncomfortable or neither comfortable nor uncomfortable with the campus climate.

Kylie Valluzzi, Staff Writer

On Saturday, October 21, Arin Henderson received a text message with a picture of his organization’s pamphlets – shredded – laid on a table inside the Memorial Union Building (MUB) with a sign reading ‘free’ above them. Henderson is a junior Spanish student and the Chair of Alliance, an LGBTQIAP+ student organization at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) committed to making a safe environment for students and the Durham community.

“I can’t say that I’m entirely surprised,” Henderson said regarding the incident. “But it’s still extremely hurtful to know that there are people cowardly enough to do this but not say it to our face.”

The pamphlets contained information about Alliance and were displayed in the Diversity Support Coalition (DSC) office in room 145 in the MUB. Alliance is part of the university’s DSC, along with other organizations like the Black Student Union, United Asian Coalition and Hillel, a Jewish student organization. Henderson and other members of Alliance filed a bias incident report, but he is “doubtful much will come of it.”

According to a recent campus climate survey conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center, respondents who identified as queer or another identity were the least likely to say they are comfortable with the overall campus climate. The survey had 3,297 respondents, 642 of which identified themselves as on the “queer- spectrum.” 34% of the queer students surveyed said they were either very uncomfortable, uncomfortable or neither comfortable nor uncomfortable with the campus climate.



Ryan Malloy

UNH’s Diversity Support Coalition houses many student organizations for minority students, including Alliance.

Henderson believes that 34% is not representative of the number of queer students who feel uncomfortable on campus and that the percentage is actually higher.

Apart from targeted incidents like pamphlet shredding, one of the biggest contributors to this uncomfortability among queer students is the “religious people” who come to campus to set up booths and hand out flyers, said Henderson.

“There’s a lot of harassment in which we will not interact with them or tell them we aren’t interested and they will chase us down. I’ve heard multiple people say they were told they’re going to hell, they’re sinners, they’re against God, or something like that,” he said.

According to the Student Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities (SRRR) handbook, non-affiliated third parties and agencies who wish to distribute literature, solicit contributions and/or engage in “sequential, incidental, brief and transitory” verbal interactions with passersby on the sidewalks and in the parking lots on university property must first obtain a permit from the UNH Police Department.

Deputy Chief Steven Lee said that multiple permits have been issued to “a number of different individuals and/or groups,” and that no complaints have been made regarding these permit-holders. Some groups holding permits for this semester include Great News Ministry, Gideons International and the Greater Dover Jehovah’s Witness.

“It’s always challenging when First Amendment rights and offensive speech conflict with our community values,” said Dean of Students Michael Blackman. “As a public institution, we’re not permitted to revoke or restrict permits based on the content of what someone intends to share, even if there are concerns that the content will be hurtful or offensive.”

Dean Blackman urges anyone who feels threatened or intimidated by a third-party solicitor to contact UNH Police and provide a statement.

“When we say this is a problem, we’re being specifically targeted for this and we’re not listened to,” Henderson said. “That’s why we say we’re not comfortable here.”

Henderson and other members of DSC organizations met with President James Dean, Dean Blackman and Chief Diversity Officer Nadine Petty to express how they feel consistently marginalized and discriminated against on campus.

One of their main suggestions was related to the UNH system and how that handles preferred names and pronouns. Currently, preferred names and pronouns are the same across every UNH platform, so if a student identifies as a different name from their given name or a different gender than the one they were assigned at birth, those names will show up in the Parent Portal. People have been outed because of the portal, Henderson said, because there is no option to choose what names and pronouns show up where.

“This is my logic,” Henderson said. “If they can create a whole new website for every student to use and have it be mostly functioning, they should be able to change it so students can choose the names and pronouns that appear in certain places.”

In response to community feedback, Petty said the university has “sought to address these concerns and create more opportunities and visibility for LGBTQIA+ groups on campus.”

In 2021, the Civil Rights and Equity Office unveiled a new reporting tool for incidents of bias, discrimination and harassment. Last year, lavender stoles were provided to graduating queer students to celebrate their achievements and contributions. Earlier this year, the Alliance office was relocated to the first floor of the MUB and refurbished to provide a more visible and welcoming space.

“We recognize and acknowledge there is still much work to be done but inclusion efforts are ongoing and we are committed to continuing to listen to the needs of LGBTQ+ students and to seek out ways to address them,” said Petty.

Henderson is skeptical of the UNH administration’s commitment to listen.

“It’s complicated; sometimes they’ll seem genuine and act as if they want to listen to us and then other times they just completely contradict that and it’s frustrating,” he said. “I just wish they would actually try and talk to us and actually understand that our issues are important and we deserve to be respected as much as anyone else.”