

## All About Coming Out

### Student organizations focus on understanding, educating for National Coming Out Week

By KEVIN BURNS  
THE BATTALION

On Oct. 11, 1987, half a million people marched through the nation's capitol for gay and lesbian equality. In honor of that day, Rob Eichberg, creator of the personal growth workshop "The Experience," and Jean O'Leary, former head of National Gay Rights Advocates, founded National Coming Out Day (NCOD). Since its inception, NCOD has been a day of awareness and general promotion of gay, lesbian and transgendered equality.

Monday, Oct. 8 through Sunday, Oct. 14 will be recognized by Texas A&M as Coming Out Week (COW). Several events will take place each day, including speakers, a religious tolerance panel and an informal lecture on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered literature.

Christina Gonzalez, coordinator of COW and a graduate assistant in the Gender Issues

Education Services Office, said the week will focus on making students aware of gender-related topics.

"We try to let people know all the resources [regarding gender issues] and encourage people to visit all the resource tables and come to all the events so they know the kind of support they have on this campus," Gonzalez said.

On the surface, being gay may appear a daunting lifestyle given Texas A&M's conservative history. Yet, Gonzalez said COW is meant to curb that notion and let people know of the many gay and gay-friendly organizations in the Bryan-College Station area, including Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Association (GLBTA), ALLIES, Equal Rights Alliance, the National Organization of Women, Universalist Unitarian Church, The Friends Church, St. Thomas and St. Francis churches and the Bryan-College Station Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays.

Gonzalez also said there are various factors of difficulty regarding homosexuality and coming out at A&M.

"I think it really depends on your coming out process," Gonzalez said. "If you are very

comfortable with yourself, then it's really not that hard, but if you are dealing with a lot of coming out issues, then yeah, it can be."

She noted the campus' lack of organizational awareness and attributes her knowledge of gender issues to her position with Student Services.

"I know of all these resources because of my job," Gonzalez said, "but it might not be so obvious for some people if they are in such a conservative environment. They might feel there's no one there to help them when, in actuality, there are a lot of people willing to help them."

Bradley Frese, secretary of GLBTA and a senior management major said the organization focuses on student support.

"The importance of [GLBTA] is that we provide support for GLBT individuals within the communities," Frese said. "At our meetings, we have educational information. We might have somebody come in and talk about how to protect yourself. At the last meeting, we had somebody come in and discuss resources available on campus to help GLBT students."

"The last purpose is to provide an environment where GLBT students can get to know each other

and interact in a social environment without a threat of exposure or harassment."

He also said the GLBTA's practical approach can help students cope with the difficulty of coming out.

"If someone is working on coming out, we know about the resources around," Frese said. "Several members are very out and open about [being gay] and some are more discreet. We have a whole range of people they can talk to and interact with."

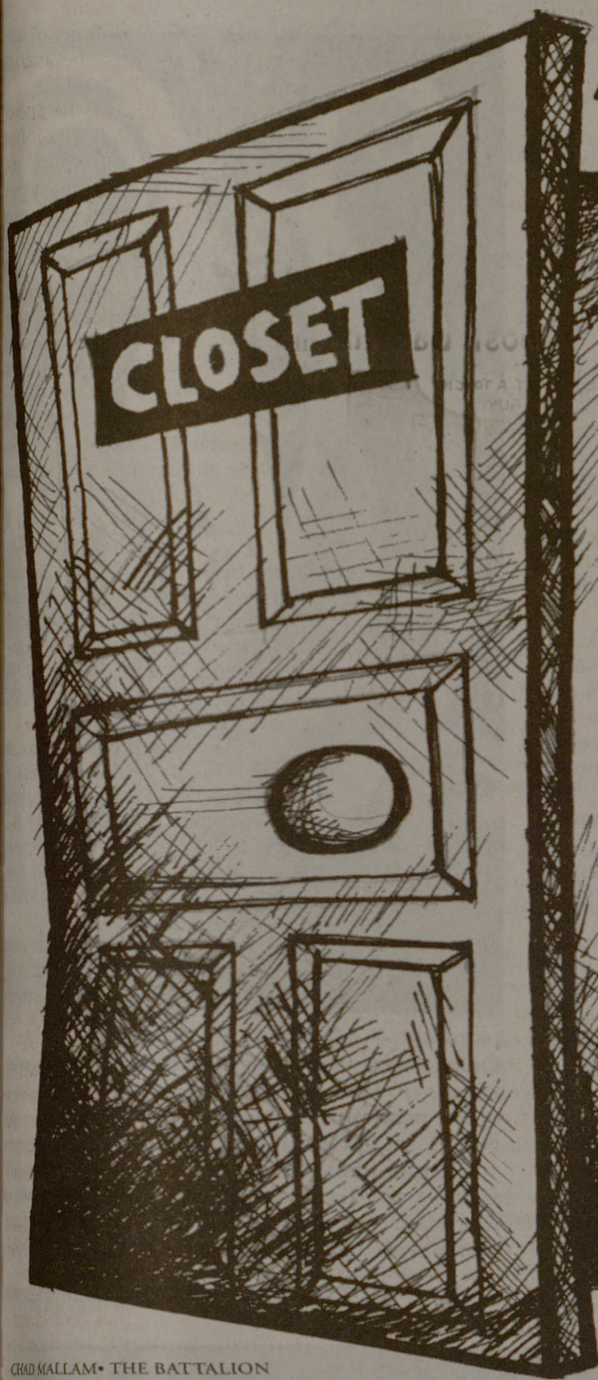
Frese described his own coming out experience as easy but said he realizes many students face more difficult circumstances.

"My coming out experience was very different than for most people," Frese said. "I chose to tell my family first before anybody else knew. I have a very supportive family and it was never a traumatic experience for me. Everyone that I have talked to has been more than supportive about it."

Unfortunately, said Frese, not everybody will have the same feather landing when coming out.

"From talking to a lot of my friends it's not always that way,"

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