

DeGioia Vows LGBTQ Reforms

Agrees to Pride Demands at Town Hall

By MICHELE HONG
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University President John J. DeGioia committed the university to multiple reforms aimed at creating a more inclusive community for LGBTQ students in a public forum Wednesday evening, answering repeated calls for action from many students and faculty in recent weeks.

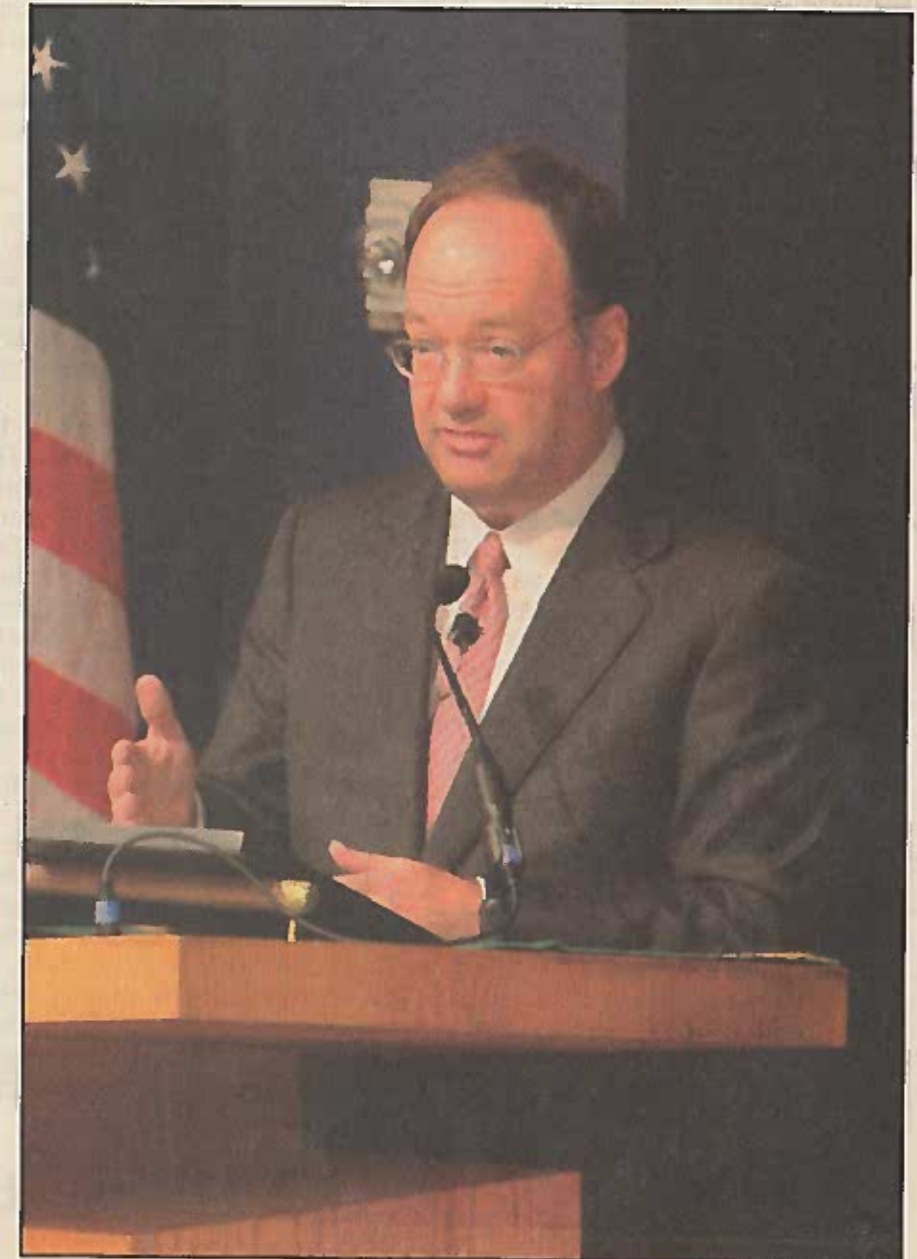
DeGioia agreed in principle to each of four demands voiced by GU Pride, announcing the formation of three committees — one that will focus specifically on community notification of bias incidents, another that will work to create an LGBTQ resource center and a third that will concentrate on promoting tolerance through co-curricular educational initiatives — and agreeing to create a more permanent LGBTQ working group after the recommendations of the three committees are implemented.

"The four ideas brought to me ... should be a platform, but not the ceiling," DeGioia said. "I propose that our community work together in a more comprehensible effort to address the needs of LGBTQ students."

DeGioia said he expects to open the LGBTQ resource center by the beginning of the Fall 2008 semester.

DeGioia also announced that Rosemary Kilkenny, vice president for institutional diversity and equity, and Daniel Porterfield, vice president for public affairs and strategic development, will be coordinating the three committees. The groups are expected to make recommendations throughout the semester, and DeGioia said that he expects "action within one month of when the groups start working."

After a gay student was assaulted in what is being considered a hate crime in September and another gay student was shoved on campus earlier this month while being called homophobic slurs, students and professors, led by GU Pride, have repeatedly called for increased LGBTQ resources at Georgetown and censured the university's delayed response in alerting the campus community about the incidents. DeGioia has since faced criticism for declining to speak at a proposed open



ALEX WONG/THE HOYA

University President John J. DeGioia said that the campus must be more inclusive of the LGBTQ community and agreed in principle to each of GU Pride's four demands in a forum Wednesday in the ICC.

forum during National Coming Out Week.

Scott Chessare (SFS '10), co-president of GU Pride, which has circulated a petition voicing demands that members gave to DeGioia, said that he strongly supported the new initiatives.

"This is just a huge victory for us. President DeGioia agreed to everything we have in our petition," Chessare said. "I don't think we could be any more happy or thrilled than we are right now."

"From the time between the first time we met with him and the second, which was punctuated with the second hate crime happening during that period of time, it seems like something really came over President DeGioia and the administration that they had to act and act really decisively," Chessare added.

DeGioia said on Wednesday that he

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decisively," Chessare added.

DeGioia said on Wednesday that he would like notifications of bias-related incidents to be "more timely, consistent, transparent [and] responsive."

DeGioia also said at the meeting that Vice President for Mission and Ministry Fr. Phillip Boroughs, S.J., can be a resource that can provide support for LGBTQ students, adding that all university policies must be consistent with Georgetown's Jesuit identity. "[There is a] Catholic insistence on the dignity and worth of every individual," he said.

The university is willing to expand both current and future programs to educate the campus about the LGBTQ community, DeGioia said.

DeGioia said that the university has already started to take action — Vice President for University Safety Rocco DelMonaco has increased DPS foot patrols on the weekends, and the Student Safety Advisory Board will begin conducting focus groups with LGBTQ students to determine specific safety issues that must be addressed. He said that the university also plans to enhance its partnership with the Metropolitan Police Department's Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit and that it will discuss approaches to bias-related incidents with peer institutions.

In addition, DeGioia said that Kilkenny and Porterfield will look into other steps the university can take in other areas, such as campus ministry, athletic programs and alumni relations, to increase campus inclusion of the LGBTQ community. Porterfield said that he and Kilkenny have begun discussions with faculty, staff, alumni and members of the Jesuit community and have already scheduled meetings with the faculty and students recommended for the committee.

Porterfield said in an interview that he looks forward to leading the working groups.

"Speaking personally, this is one of the most important assignments I have been given in my 11 years at Georgetown, and I undertake it with profound gratitude for the presence of the LGBTQ community at Georgetown and in my life," Porterfield said.



ALEX WONG/THE HOYA

University President John J. DeGioia described committees that would address LGBTQ incident notification, education and resources in the ICC on Tuesday.

Chessare said that he and seven other students involved in the "Out for Change" campaign, which is comprised of GU Pride and members of the Georgetown Solidarity Committee, met Porterfield and Kilkenny for dinner last night to discuss the formation of the committees. He said that members of the campaign are making recommendations of individuals for the committees, which will each consist of four permanent members and one open spot that can be filled by anyone during each meeting.

"The largest group represented will be students, specifically LGBTQ students, so there's going to be a really big queer voice in all these," he said.

The committees, which will meet for four to six weeks, are expected to be filled by Wednesday, Chessare said.

Several professors who have advocated for reforms in recent weeks were present at the meeting. Dana Luciano, associate professor of English, said in an interview that she was satisfied with the discussion although she would have liked to see it take place earlier. "After the first assault would have been good, but before that assault would have been even better; we shouldn't have waited until violence pushed us to remember our responsibilities as a just community," she said.

Ricardo Ortiz, associate professor of English, agreed that the forum was "genuinely positively productive."

Luciano said that she believes the university has further steps to take. "I think a fully staffed, adequately funded, spacious and well-situated LGBTQ resource center will be a good start and can provide a base for other work that needs to be done."

Luciano said that the response to undergraduates must also be supplemented by reaching out to graduates, faculty and staff. "Issues of workplace climate and employment equity deserve to be addressed in an active and sustained way, perhaps through the kind of working group [or] task force structure that the president outlined last night," she said.

As DeGioia's forum was meant to specifically address undergraduate students, Provost James O'Donnell sent an e-mail yesterday to faculty, staff and graduate students, asking them to raise concerns relating to Georgetown's LGBTQ community to Associate Provost Marjory Blumenthal, Kilkenny and Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Timothy Barbari, respectively. "The 'Promoting a Respectful Campus Community' system that all faculty and staff are now working through will make us better informed and, I hope, more alert to some of the ways in which we risk failing to be a real community," O'Donnell said in the e-mail.

During an hour-long question-and-answer session that followed his speech on Wednesday, DeGioia was questioned about the barring of about 15 student protestors from GU Pride carrying a petition to his office in Healy Hall earlier this month. DeGioia said that he was not in his office that day, and that the administrator who decided to bar the students did so based on the university's Speech and Expression Policy.

DeGioia was also faced with several questions about whether addressing LGBTQ issues conflicts with Roman Catholic doctrine.

"We can't use resources in a way contrary to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church," DeGioia said, but he added that aside from this, he has "no limits" in terms of helping students.

Another student also asked DeGioia if he believed there is a culture of homophobia at Georgetown. "Students are describing a culture that doesn't resonate with my experience," he responded. "In my 30 years here, the behavior of some members can only be [considered] homophobic."

— Maria Kefala and HOYA Staff Writer Richie Frohlichstein contributed to this report.