

Gay symposium begins amid only slight protest

ORONO — The controversial statewide homosexual conference quietly got under way here Friday night with only a few banners and posters of protest scattered about the university and a mimeographed broadside which one conventioneer described as "obviously the work of a sick paranoid" marring the otherwise tranquil atmosphere.

Loretta Lotman, a member of Gay Media Action in Boston, said Friday night that an estimated "several hundred" copies of handwritten doggerel were "widely circulated throughout the campus."

In what she termed "a very rotten poem," an unknown author threatened bodily harm to the conventioners at the hands of the "homo hammer" and "queer spear."

"We do not know where they're coming from," she maintained, "but we'd like to point out that this has in no way stopped the conference."

A scheduled speaker at the three-day event, she said 150 people had registered for the conference by Friday night. "We expect more at the door tomorrow," she said.

Steve Bull, chairman of the sponsoring Wilde - Stein Club, said he was "surprised that we have had so many people to register so early."

The gay conference has sparked considerable controversy throughout the state the last two months. The most vocal opponents to the meeting have been conservative clergymen and legislators.

Several measures were introduced in the recent special session of the legislature aimed at trying to force the university's board of trustees to reverse its decision to allow the conference.

Citing the gays' First Amendment rights to freedom of speech, the trustees resisted all pressure to stop the meeting on the campus.