

Conservatives crack mainstream

Student groups work toward anti-liberal national procedures

With the advent of conservatism as a major, mainstream political force in the 1980s, thousands of previously silent and politically dispossessed people found their voice. During the presidency of Ronald Reagan, conservatives founded the Federalist Society and the Rutherford Institute to promote the idea of limited, constitutional government.

Professor Richard Duncan of the UNL College of Law has served as advisor to student chapters of both organizations for several years, and he is active in both organizations on the state level.

Although the specific focus of each group is different, the larger idea behind them is the same.

The Federalist Society seeks to further the original intent of the Constitution and to counter the liberal judicial activism and law-making of the last quarter-century. The mission of the student chapter is to "bring underrepresented ideas to the university marketplace, taking advantage of the university's commitment to 'diversity' of viewpoints," Duncan said.

As part of their attempts to educate not just lawyers and law students but the public at large, the

Federalists have sponsored forums featuring nationally recognized speakers, and debates.

In the past years, author Dinesh D'Souza ("Illiberal Education"), former Education Secretary William Bennett and Clarence Pendleton, head of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, have all spoken at Federalist-sponsored events.

The Rutherford Institute's focus is on preserving traditional societal values and freedom of religion. In promoting traditional values, the Rutherford Institute does not aim to impose its views on anyone.

"We simply believe that public policy should allow everyone to have a family, to have a husband and wife raise their children and share the duties," Duncan stated. "We are not punitive toward single parent families — I was a single parent myself — but ideally, children are best cared for by two parents."

One controversial stand the institute takes is its views on affording homosexuals special, protected constitutional status. "By this, we again do not seek to impose our views," Duncan noted. "We are

merely defending them. You have to ask, in such cases, who is showing up with the police." State oversight of practices in housing, for example, looking for sexual-orientation-based discrimination should be minimal. "The state should not legislate morality one way or another. Let the marketplace decide." In this, the institute is more libertarian than conservative.

Education of children is another Rutherford concern. Too often, educational bureaucracies harass those who fall outside the system, such as the Amish (who do not believe in compulsory education after grade school) and parents who choose to educate their children at home. In such cases, the state should have minimal involvement in regulation.

The purpose of both groups, Duncan said, is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." They seek to break the monopoly of truth claimed by liberals and give students another point of view and a voice on campus.

Sam Kepfield is the Daily Nebraskan's token conservative and a Diversions contributor.

Conservatives speak up

"We're not here to impose our values on anyone. We are here to defend ideas that have made America great, that are time-tested and true," Boyd Johnston, president of the UNL chapter of the Students for America, said.

SFA is a national conservative student organization that was founded in 1984. It currently boasts 20,000 members on 300 college campuses across America.

The national organization sponsors leadership conferences annually, featuring speakers like Jack Kemp, William Bennett, Newt Gingrich and Jeane Kirkpatrick. It holds an annual foreign policy summit and offers scholarships and internships.

SFA's past projects include translating the U.S. Constitution into Chinese following the Tiananmen Square incident, holding rallies in support of Operation Desert Storm and starting a pro-democracy press in East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The group currently is mobilizing support for formal U.S. recognition of Croatia to help end the civil war in the remnants of Yugoslavia.

Nonetheless, an organization that garners praise from such conservative leaders as former U.S. President Ronald Reagan, Sen. Jesse Helms, former Attorney General Ed Meese, Pat Robertson and Oliver North would, at first glance, seem to be a pretty exclusive club. However, inclusiveness is the credo of SFA.

"We're independent minded," Johnston said. "You can support our organization for any reason

you want. There is no orthodoxy." Until now, Johnston said, the only politically active groups on campus represented the gay/lesbian community, extreme feminist views and the "multicultural juggernaut," who are engaged in a rewriting of American history and culture.

SFA provides a counterpoint to what some might see as the reigning views of the majority on campus.

The UNL chapter of SFA is in the final stages of preparing an alternative monthly newspaper for students, with the print date set at March 29. It is intended to be an organized voice for the "complacent majority" — students who might sympathize with SFA's views, but due to a lack of an outlet for their opinions, do not see any avenue for their sentiments.

Despite what its flyers might say, SFA is not merely the local chapter of the Rush Limbaugh Fan Club. Its members are not slavish adherents of an evil master plan to subvert American society, as it is often charged by the liberal media.

Johnston praised Limbaugh as "a terribly intelligent man who gets no credit for this because he ridicules the liberal establishment intelligently, exposing them for the frauds they really are." But, he added, no one agrees with him entirely on every issue.

Students for America will hold its next meeting tonight at 8:30 p.m. in the Nebraska Union.

Sam Kepfield is an Arts and Entertainment reporter and Diversions contributor.

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