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Our VIEW

Absolutely powerless UNL should give ASUN a say in decisions

Recently, a university administrator turned the ASUN — our representation — from our governing body into the university's most expensive advisory board.

And now students are slated to be taxed without representation.

When the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska told top university administrators last week students wanted tobacco sales to continue in the Nebraska Union, Chancellor James Moeser said "no."

He brushed aside our government and decided to tax students through student fees to make up the thousands of dollars of lost revenue from tobacco sales.

“Now students are slated to be taxed without representation.”

Although ASUN has brought about positive changes on campus this year, it has only advisory power in the university's policy-making process. It can recommend changes important to students, but it cannot change university policy unless the top administrators approve.

And senior administrators don't hold just veto power, where the ASUN can override their "no" vote with a two-thirds majority. Moeser holds absolute power over the decisions of an intelligent, hardworking group of students who want the best for their colleagues and their university.

But when Moeser denied the ASUN resolution to continue tobacco sales, he said it was best for students.

It was like turning a parking lot into green space three years ago, he said. Students opposed the measure, but, in the long run, it's better for them and the university.

Perhaps it is good that the hundreds of students, who we must remember are legal adults, must walk extra blocks to buy life-choking cigarettes.

But the opinions of the ASUN senators and University of Nebraska-Lincoln students they represent were stifled — snuffed out like a bad cigar one week before the annual ASUN election.

So, on Wednesday, administrators shouldn't puzzle over student apathy for ASUN elections or wonder why some students squirm at giving the ASUN about \$197,000 annually in student fees.

To find the reasons, they should look in the mirror.

The ASUN needs power other than resume-building opportunities. Its members are trustworthy university leaders who students elect to govern.

University administrators should treat them as such.

Haney's VIEW



Presumed prejudice Efforts to 'cure' homosexuality are futile



ANTHONY COLMAN is a sophomore general studies major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

There is an enormous amount of research and writings on homosexuality, spanning several decades and the full range of opinions on the subject.

Titles vary from "Gay is Not Good" to "Flaunting It." Any reasonably sized bookstore has a whole section devoted specifically to gay and lesbian studies, and there exists at least a handful of gay-related journals and periodicals. The scrutiny of homosexuality has been thorough, to say the least.

With so much concern for the ideas of sexual theory and practice, one would assume that a comparative or much greater body of work exists on heterosexuality. There is not. For all the scrutiny of divergent sexualities, it seems very few have ever thought to examine our basic assumptions about heterosexuality.

This may be because it's taken for granted that heterosexuality composes the culture at large.

Heterosexuality is never a target of scrutiny because it is presumed to be the universal position of "objective" knowledge of other subjects, like gay and lesbian studies. Heterosexuality is constituted as the privileged stance of subjectivity — the very condition of knowledge in our culture.

So while homosexuality is perennially the object of inquiry, heterosexuality evades any thoughtful examination.

Heterosexuality acquires its distinction by default. It's defined, not by what it is, but by what it's not — namely, that it's not gay. But beyond its status by default, few have asked what it actually means to be heterosexual.

Nonetheless, despite a lack of definition of what exactly it means to be heterosexual, the pressure to conform to notions of heterosexual behavior is so strong that anyone who feels inclined to behave otherwise is certain to face tremendous difficulty.

Last week, "60 Minutes" featured

a segment about Exodus International, a ministry that claims to help pull willing homosexuals from their disordered lifestyle into the purity of heterosexual living. Exodus claims they can cure gays, and by curing them, they mean making them straight.

Despite increasing scientific research confirming that sexual orientation is genetically predisposed, the antiquated concept of homosexuality as a "curable affliction" is unfortunately still with us.

The American Psychological Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973 and has recently adopted a resolution to discourage so-called conversion therapies that attempt to turn homosexuals into heterosexuals. Exodus cannot use coercive means of conversion, but relies on those who voluntarily seek conversion.

Why would people willingly attempt to change their sexual orientation? Because it's damned difficult to grow up gay or lesbian in our culture. Young gay, lesbian and bisexual people grow up very aware of the prejudice, discrimination and possible violence they will face if their family and peers discover their sexual orientation. Cultural homophobia often is internalized, reinforcing feelings of isolation and rejection.

Studies over the past decade indicate that 25 to 40 percent of young gays and lesbians have attempted suicide. Naturally, a lot of folks who find themselves in a transgressive mode of sexuality believe their lives would be easier if they were straight.

One problem with Exodus and similar "ex-gay" ministries is that they offer little evidence to back up any of their assertions of therapeutic success. Bob Davies, executive director of Exodus, claims tremendous success. Though the organization won't allow any independent confirmation of its data, even some of the group's basic claims just don't add up.

Exodus claims that 70 percent of the lesbians and gay men who complete its yearlong program are either celibate or living as heterosexuals. Their only long-term figures, however, are less impressive and indicate that less than 30 percent have stopped all homosexual behavior five years after completing the program. Figures indicate that just 3 percent are "successful heterosexuals" seven years after entering the program.

Even the gay men who started

Exodus, Gary Busse and Michael Cooper, proved to be stunning failures at heterosexuality — falling in love with each other, quitting the movement and starting to preach tolerance and self-acceptance instead of conversion.

The ex-gay groups have nothing new to offer — efforts to convert homosexuals to heterosexuality are nothing more than ordinary social prejudice garbed in pseudo-scientific dress. They do little more than peddle the most restrictive and authoritarian kinds of gender stereotyping, and long-held beliefs that anything other than an opposite-sex relationship is immoral.

A large consensus of mental health professionals believe that any kind of conversion therapy is not only ineffective, but potentially harmful. In an updated summary of findings in 1990, the American Psychological Association stated that scientific evidence has yet to show that such methods work. "It can often do more harm than good," the statement reads.

Worse than being a waste of time, these so-called "reparative" therapies are a potentially harmful practice, damaging self-esteem and creating a sense of inferiority to "normal" heterosexuals.

Exodus offers a false and needless hope that people can willfully change their sexual orientation. It's all about trying to be something you're not. These groups basically prey on people who are unhappy. What they can't see or won't admit is that what they're peddling as a cure is actually the very source of the unhappiness they claim to be treating.

It would be funny if it wasn't so destructive.

This whole heterosexuality thing has gone too far. We're stuck with a static, ahistorical and vaguely defined notion of what is natural behavior for humans. An examination of polar sexual identities reveals the degree to which they are social inventions. This, in turn, reveals the degree to which the edifice of heterosexuality that envelopes us is not a natural form, but a historical construction, and what has been historically constructed can be politically reconstructed.

We now have an opportunity to construct an alternative vision of sexualities — new and genuine opportunities for pleasure, fulfillment and choice. Now we can work for the end of sexual domination and subordination.

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