

Be all that you are

Until a proven threat, homosexuals should be allowed in the military



"Come on, John, what are you, a faggot?" I screamed at my roommate.

He was trying his hardest to pull himself over an obstacle at the Lackland Air Force Base confidence course.

Please understand that the military, and particularly combat units comprised of young men, is not very tolerant of homosexuals.

You might say I was less than surprised to see that a recent study by the Pentagon Inspector General found anti-gay sentiment rampant in our armed forces.

If I had a nickel for every joke or slur about gay people I heard in my four years of service, I would be a venture capitalist, not a college stu-

dent.

Eighty-five percent of the soldiers surveyed believed anti-gay comments are tolerated at their institution. The survey also found a widely held view that Clinton's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy isn't working.

Once again, I'm not surprised. I can remember people in my unit calling people gay if they couldn't make a run or if they didn't shine their boots well enough. It wasn't an attack on the alternative lifestyle. We just saw ourselves as manly men, and the worst insult we could think of to inflict on our friends was the stereotype we held in our minds of the gay male. We were insensitive to everything PC.

My entire argument for the exclusion of homosexuals from military service, at that point in my life, was centered on function: What is the function of the military?

A salty old commander once asked me this question. He walked around a room full of new recruits and asked us with that rough, guttural voice that old commanders do so well, "What do we do?"

"We defend our nation," one

recruit said meekly.

"No!" the old commander said, his voice booming with what sounded like anger. "We blow up shit and kill people! That's what we do, and if you can't deal with it, get out of my Air Force."

He was right. He may not have been eloquent, but he was right.

But would giving homosexuals the right to openly serve in our armed forces diminish our military's capacity to function as an effective killing machine?

When I was in the military, I would have answered with an emphatic 'yes,' but I'm not so sure anymore.

The military will not be a hospitable place for gay people any time soon. One in 11 respondents to the survey said they had actually witnessed a physical assault. We wouldn't even need to look at this study to figure out that the military does not tolerate those who are perceived to be outside the aggressive soldier mold.

If homosexuals are willing to either hide their sexual orientation or deal with the problems it will cause

in their personal and professional military lives, they should be able to serve openly. I do not envy them, but if they want full rights in the military, they are going to have to have some brave pioneers who take a lot of abuse and have stunted careers. Combating intolerance is costly.

My ideas about manhood and military service are very traditional, but this doesn't give me the right to mandate others' views and choices. The truth of the matter is that no one really knows whether or not homosexuals serving openly in the military would harm our national security. I think it likely would not.

When faced with a situation where giving people a right will have an unknown consequence, we need to err on the side of personal liberty. We need to change our policy and let homosexuals serve openly. If military effectiveness breaks down in any way, then I will advocate a complete ban on gays in military service.

But, until we have some evidence to justify our exclusionary practice, we should give homosexuals this chance.

Unless there is some reason to

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assume gays are a threat to our moral or societal structure, we should practice tolerant coexistence. I don't think gays are any more a threat to our mainstream morality, whatever that may be, than those who are attracted to red-headed midgets for example.

And those with a red-headed midget fetish should be allowed to serve as well, but that is another column.

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Cheap talk

NU mouths diversity but won't commit



Diversity is nothing more than a pretty word. It should be said frequently to give the appearance of a welcoming environment, but it's not really necessary to do anything about it.

At least that's what the administration of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln seems to think.

Our well-paid bureaucrats glorify diversity in every speech and announcement; they form committees, issue reports, write diversity plans and sponsor workshops. But when faced with an opportunity to bring about real change, the administration rarely puts its money where its mouth is.

Consider the Culture Center, part of UNL's "Union System," along with the East and City Unions. The Culture Center was designed as a place to provide a safe and welcoming environment for minority students and to host diverse events for the campus as a whole. The Culture Center should be an attraction for minority students, and a place where they can feel comfortable.

Instead, the Culture Center is a dark, cramped building in desperate need of repairs. There are problems with the Center's heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, and only the first floor is accessible to people with disabilities.

The offices for student groups like UNITE (University of Nebraska Inter-Tribal Exchange) are barely bigger than the closet in my residence hall room and are equipped with antiquated computers; they still have 5 1/4 drives and green screens.

Instead of committing the funds necessary to bring the Culture Center up to par with the other unions, UNL spends millions to build a new residence hall for com-

puter honors students, which will inevitably attract mostly white, middle-class males.

This is not diversity.

The administration is not just blind to the need for diversity among students, it's also not committed to achieving a diverse faculty.

UNL is behind the average of its peer institutions in having minority faculty and failed to meet a legislative benchmark, which required the University to hire and retain a certain number of minority professors.

If UNL were truly committed to diversity, it would not need threats from the Legislature to bring it about.

Even more frustrating is the administration's refusal to offer domestic partner benefits for same-sex couples. Although supported by both the student and faculty senates, the UNL Fringe Benefits Committee will not recommend them.

"They couldn't support insurance coverage to same-sex partners because the state didn't support it,"

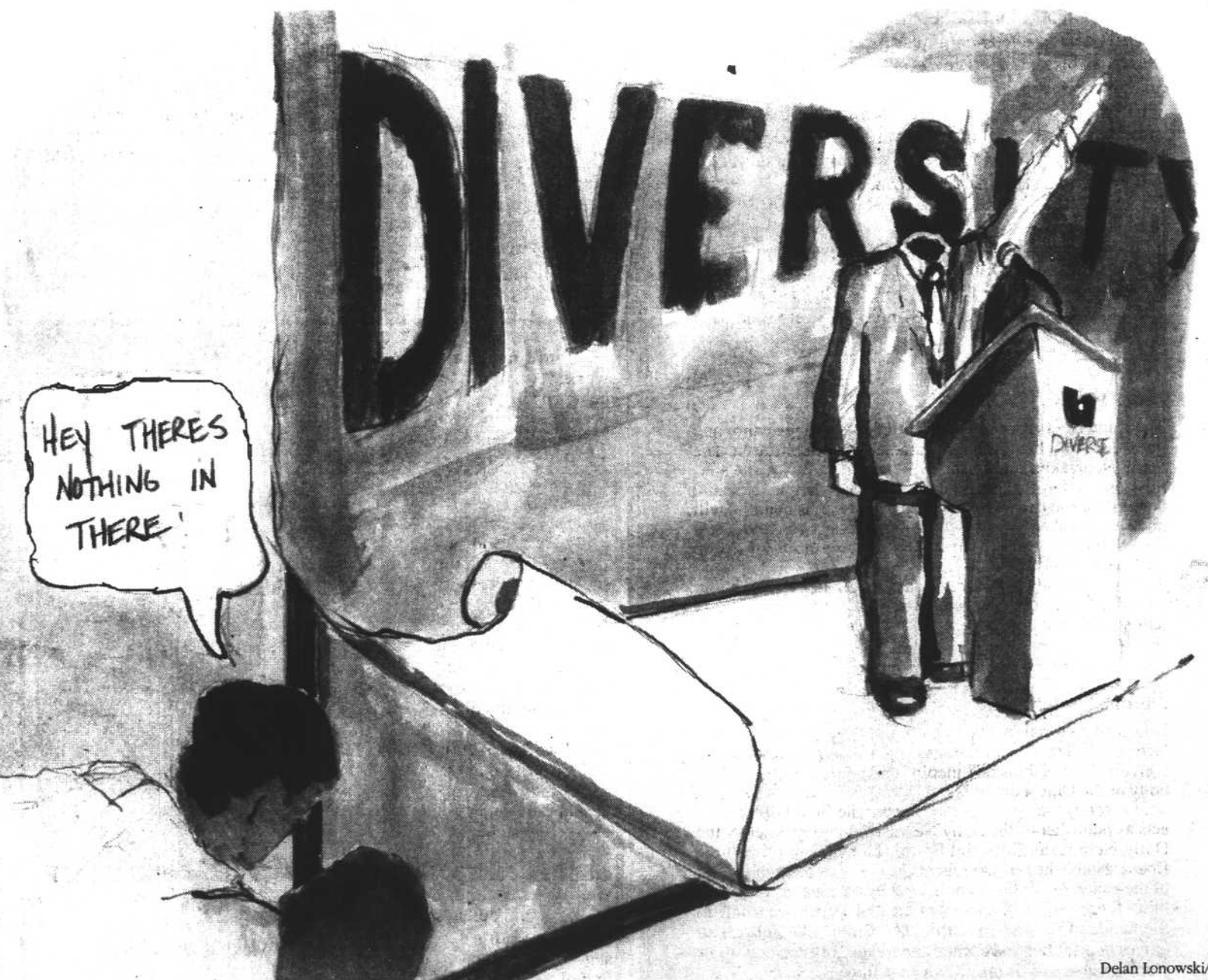
Agnes Adams, chair of the committee, told the Daily Nebraskan (1/18/00).

If a university in a state like Iowa can establish domestic partner benefits without the legislature's support, UNL can, too. The administration has shown no fear in taking on a majority of the senators in fighting against a proposed ban on fetal tissue research.

If this administration were truly committed to diversity, it would fight for domestic partner benefits as well.

To quiet discontent, the administration consistently talks diversity even as they consciously avoid committing to it. Speakers and workshops are nice, but all the "diversity enhancement" events in the world cannot compare to hiring more minority faculty or offering domestic partner benefits.

If the administration really thinks diversity is more than just a word, it's time they act like it.



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