

## Lesbian pair needs Brand's help now

Another chance for University President Myles Brand to put his money where his equal-rights mouth has been is slipping right on by. Hopefully he'll catch it in time.

A University lesbian couple filed a lawsuit six months ago against the State Board of Higher Education because they were denied access to family housing.

The suit came after a claim they filed with the University's Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity was downed in July 1990.

Brand has long preached equality for all; here's a golden opportunity for him to back it up.

There are no excuses as to why Pamela Harbeintner and Ann Piazza can't get into University housing; even when there was space they weren't allowed to move in. No excuses — just outright discrimination.

University housing rules require that couples be married. A recent change allows an adult to live with a single parent — the closest a gay or lesbian couple can come to living together.

The couple was joined together, or married, in a ceremony of holy union by a Lane County minister in a Eugene Unitarian Church. Unfortunately, this isn't recognized by family housing or the state as legal marriage.

A denial of housing based on an officially unrecognized marriage bond could be understandable. But not when housing rules also allow engaged couples to live together.

If the marriage-only rules can be bent for engaged couples, as well as single parents who have an adult move in with them, why can't the rules be bent for gay and lesbian couples?

Again, it boils down to discrimination. No doubt.

Gays and lesbians have their work cut out for them when it comes to educating those who buy into the belief that allows these situations.

The lawsuit adds valuable momentum to this group's long fight for equal rights. Now, if Brand would just lend his support at this crucial time, perhaps some real progress could be made.



## OPINION

# Hepner's case made no difference



### THE FINE PRINT

BY CHRISTOPHER BLAIR

In the corner of my high school physics classroom, there was an unofficial rule of science written on a dusty piece of posterboard: "For something to be a difference, it must *make* a difference."

The message? Don't waste your time on a bunch of senseless details when trying to figure out a problem. Worry about what's important, what's crucial to your circumstances.

Just as that applies to acceleration, inertia and protons, it's relevant to certain cases before the ASUO Constitution Court, namely the one that involved Saferide and student Abe Hepner.

Hepner filed a suit claiming Saferide violated the ASUO Constitution by offering a program that "discriminates" against men. Although men can work at the Saferide office as dispatchers and administrators, they cannot ride or drive the vans that transport women home at night.

Hepner alleges that because Saferide uses fees from students of both genders — about \$15,000 a year — men should be able to ride in and drive the Saferide vans.

Any way you look at it, Abe's case made so little difference it was laughable. The ASUO court, which rejected Hepner's argument Sunday, apparently agreed.

Part 1 of the question at hand: Did the fact that

Saferide's money comes from both male and female students make a difference?

No. Unless 90 cents per student per year makes a difference to you. If it does, then you're taking this "starving student" thing way too seriously. Sofia Arhall, a member of Saferide's support staff, told me she once offered to buy Abe a muffin to offset his per-year contribution to her program.

The cost of a muffin offsetting a student's fees? Some difference there.

**So let's put this all together: A program that costs 90 cents a year gives women peace of mind in a truly discriminatory climate, the streets.**

Now Part 2, the discriminatory aspect, the rule keeping men off the vans. Sure, men are left to fend for themselves when it's time to go home. But here's the difference, and you've heard it before: Men can walk home with really no fear of being attacked by a rapist or even having to look over their shoulders at the sound of footsteps.

Many women fear they cannot. More than 1,900 women rode the vans between Oct. 23 and Nov. 22 of this year. What are the odds that if men rode or drove Saferide vans any of

those 1,900 would have been attacked? Probably small. But the fact is that 1,900 women made it home safe, with no chance of being attacked.

Saferide began about six years ago, just as the University was adding more nighttime classes and activities. OPS was overwhelmed with about 150 requests a night for rides home. Clearly, there was a need for a women's shuttle service.

Want to talk about discrimination? If women feel they cannot take a night class or attend a group meeting in the EMU, that's discrimination. If men feel like they need a van ride home on the streets of Eugene — for them a pretty tame place — that's laziness.

So let's put this all together: A program that costs 90 cents a term gives women peace of mind in a truly discriminatory climate, the streets. Any microscopic differences that may exist are washed away by a tide of facts.

I might have sided with Abe awhile back. But I've noticed a funny thing in the past two or three years. After I'm finished night editing at one or two in the morning, I can walk home or to my car without having to look over my shoulder. Some of the other night editors here feel they cannot. That's discriminatory.

What does the cost of a muffin bring to half the student body? A safe ride home when it's dark out.

To all of us, that should make a difference.

Christopher Blair is editor of the Emerald.

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