

COMMENTARY

USSA represents student interests

By Brian Hoop, JoSonja Watson and Sheila Stickle

When Saferide was vindicated of discriminating against men there was overwhelming support from both men and women. The ASUO Constitution Court ruled that the women-only policy was reasonable in lieu of the greater potential for violence against women that men do not confront daily.

Unfortunately, when a similar case arose charging the United States Student Association of discriminating against white, heterosexual men in its hiring of an affirmative action officer, there was no such outpouring of support for the services USSA offers to students. Without much comment USSA was assumed guilty; the ASUO was barred from membership in the organization, and student life went on without USSA.

Students are not getting the whole story. One, the leadership of USSA recognizes the flaw in their hiring structure and intends to democratically alter the USSA Constitution at the next constitutional conference this summer.

Two, the benefits of the only nationwide student organization fighting for students in Congress are going unrecognized on campus and underreported in the *Emerald*, and are too important to lose.

Third, I believe the individuals responsible for pointing out the inconsistencies in USSA are not interested in simply righting a wrong but have a conservative political agenda to destroy USSA.

Applicants for USSA's affirmative action officer "must be a traditionally underrepresented person" from one of several protected classes. These writers believe it should and will be changed without deterring the integrity of USSA's mission.

USSA has taken great strides to be a truly multicultural organization providing services that are important to an increasingly diverse nationwide college-age population. They have made wise and extraordinary steps to insure that "all" students inclusive of students of color, gays and lesbians, etc. are empowered in leadership roles.

At their January meeting, the USSA Board of Directors agreed to support changing the hiring guideline this summer. In the meantime, the ASUO should not pay dues. But the ASUO should not be precluded from participating in USSA

events that are germane to critical issues affecting University students such as financial aid funding.

No other nationwide student organization exists which speaks for students on Capitol Hill for financial aid, quality education, civil rights, campus violence and women's safety, diversity of students and faculty on campus, gay and lesbian discrimination, and reproductive rights for women.

USSA's constitution states its purpose as "to improve standards of higher education, to insure equal access to higher education, to promote and defend student interests in state and national bodies," and to provide a forum for debate and student opinions and encourage diversity within higher education.

The USSA Constitution is governed through a democratic process in which student delegates from across the country convene at an annual constitutional conference. The leadership of USSA is held accountable by a regionally elected board of directors, which meets several times a year.

The lobbying efforts in Congress and the networking of student leaders nationwide goes unrecognized and unappreciated by the vast majority of students, although I would be hard pressed to locate a student who has not benefited from the efforts of USSA.

At USSA's March legislative conference, students were granted the first all-student congressional hearing on changes to the landmark 1965 Higher Education Act, which created financial aid as we know it today. The Higher Education Reauthorization Act of 1991, if passed as approved by Senate and House committees, will contain benefits to student that were won by USSA.

Pell Grants will become an entitlement, meaning every student eligible will receive a grant, and raise the maximum award to \$4,500. Funding will be increased for many of the federal student aid programs, and the financial aid form process will be simplified.

USSA has been instrumental in voicing student concerns on the Violence Against Women Act, Civil Rights Act, Universal Health Care Act, and Department of Defense ban against gays and lesbians.

The attempts by students to kick USSA off campus are not isolated to the University. Conservatives fear the effective power of students organized on a national level, and have or-

ganized against USSA at dozens of campuses, including the University of Washington.

Conservative students at the University have veiled their opposition to USSA by opposing the IFC funding of \$10,000 to \$15,000 on membership fees and travel costs to USSA conferences. Year after year, the opposition seems to emanate from a small group of white, heterosexual, disenfranchised men who think nobody is representing their interests.

Considering 46 percent of University students receive financial aid — and that includes a lot of white men — \$1 per student per year seems like a small cost for increasing your ability to afford college and protecting student rights.

But students opposed to USSA are not acting alone. Powerful ultra-right think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation and the National Association of Scholars, are providing organizing expertise for young conservative students to oppose the left-oriented campus organization.

And that brings us to their main objection — that USSA only represents left-oriented students. Not only left, but communist-sympathizing students because of alliances with student exchange programs with known communist countries like Cuba and North Korea on such radical issues as "education, health care, human rights, government, politics, economics, and the environment."

Odd actions for several hundred students of an organization to be recognized by U.S. Rep. William Ford of Michigan before the Houser Education and Labor Committee lobbying for increased financial aid. Would these conservative student prefer that students not lobby for the Civil Rights Act, the Violence Against Women Act, the National Voter Registration Act, and a multitude of national legislation that directly affects students?

Don't believe the hype. USSA represents everyone at the University.

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