

EDITORIAL

Task force initial step in AIDS fight

The fight against AIDS took a positive and substantial step last week with the meeting of a University task force on the disease.

The AIDS Task Force, made up of educators and others from the University and Lane County, works to develop AIDS-related policies for the University. Unfortunately, the committee stopped meeting after it developed guidelines for the group — a tragedy for the University and community. The group decided to meet again when members decided to discuss the issue again.

It's heartening to see that the AIDS Task Force is meeting again. While the task force might have gone away for a while, the problem of AIDS hasn't.

Fighting HIV and AIDS on campus must be more of a priority than it has been over the past few years. The reinstatement of the task force at the University is a first step in the fight against AIDS in Eugene-Springfield.

The fact is that more groups on campus need to be talking about AIDS. As the oft-repeated slogan goes, silence equals death. Ignoring or playing down the crisis of AIDS will do nothing to solve the problem.

The Student Health Center must be commended for the ongoing work that it does on the issue of AIDS. From HIV tests to educational programming, the Student Health Center has been in the forefront on the fight against the disease. While the Student Health Center and precious few other groups take the time to talk about the disease, their involvement highlights the need for others to discuss the issue.

A survey at the University stated that 3 percent of students consider HIV or AIDS to be a personal problem. Only 31 percent of students thought AIDS and HIV to be the most serious health problem on campus. University students need to wake up and realize that AIDS is everyone's problem, not just that of a select few. With this type of attitude pervasive on campus, it is obvious that it's time for a stepped-up HIV/AIDS campaign on campus to begin. Complacency on campus is almost as large a problem as the disease itself.

A large part of the solution to AIDS and HIV lies in the fact that the attitudes of individuals must be changed. If real change is to be made at this University, it will involve people, not committees, but everyday, ordinary people changing the minds and hearts of others.

Task forces aren't the solution to a complex societal problem like AIDS, but they can help to be part of the answer. For that, the University's AIDS Task Force should be commended for meeting. With persistence and luck, as well as involvement by ordinary University students, they might be able to do what others have not — to change the attitudes of students about a deadly disease called AIDS.

While the Student Health Center and precious few other groups take the time to talk about the disease, their involvement highlights the need for others to discuss the issue.



■ OPINION

Diversity training has harmful aspects



BRIAN WOMACK

Wandering to and from my car everyday here at the University, I get to take in just about every bumper sticker known to the greater part of the human race.

Stuck next to the parking permits, I see signs giving me cutting-edge advice like "No on 9" or "Clinton/Gore '92."

Others want me to "visualize world peace" while others instruct me to "visualize whirled peas."

But probably the one I see more than any other is the ever-popular "Honor diversity."

People in this town who like to communicate via their rear fenders want to make sure, above just about anything else, we Americans honor diversity.

"Diversity" claims the unique distinction of being one of the few catch-phrases of the 1990s.

And why not? Diversity is the answer to all our problems. If we can only learn to value the differences between us, then we Americans can only "get along."

Or can we? Let's look at some examples.

In our efforts to get diversity into every facet of society, the crusaders have found a major outlet in worker and management training.

An article in Sunday's edition of *The New York Times* showed how a course in management skills and diversity awareness can cause the same problems that it seeks to rectify.

Employees of the Department of Transportation testified to a Congressional subcommittee that the "men were groped, women sobbed for hours and blacks and whites were urged to exchange epithets," the article explained.

One woman said she had been hospitalized for depression and

later considered suicide because of the sessions.

Another woman took an early retirement because of the meetings. In one meeting the instructor screamed "muffin queen" at an obese woman, called the women "jerks" and "jerkettes" and taught supervisors to "provoke, control and degrade the staff."

Hey, but we're all just exploring our differences, right?

James M. Ferguson, an air-traffic controller from Salt Lake City, said in one of the meetings in 1993, participants had "been told to list vulgar terms for women and minorities."

The only problem is that he didn't know what all of these terms meant because of what he called a "somewhat sheltered" upbringing.

That should do wonders for people "getting along" — learning new words to degrade them.

Yet it's not just happening in the government. The private sector has its share of attempts and is getting those diversity training sessions to make some headway too.

In an article published in the Aug. 1, 1993 issue of *The New York Times*, we get just such a glimpse of what such endeavors produced.

It says that despite the well-intentioned efforts, problems arise like "confrontational trainers who accuse employees of bigotry or pit them against each other and resentment by employees who feel left out of the process."

One case involved an electronics plant in Los Angeles where a diversity trainer asked white male managers to volunteer stereotypes, which gave responses like "Women cry under pressure." Women and minority employees were encouraged to vent their anger about being excluded in the workplace. The article says, "By the next day, the managers were taunting the women about what they'd said, and the women were upset about what the managers had said."

Other cases involve diversity

programs that blame certain groups like white males for inequalities. These can obviously backfire.

Nevertheless, some like Nathaniel R. Thompkins, diversity manager at the Baxter Healthcare Corporation in Deerfield, Ill., say these kinds of things are to be expected. "Changing a culture is never easy."

Obviously, much of this is anecdotal. Situations like this don't always arise. I know that from personal experience.

But the real reason I used these examples lies in the very notion of diversity and what that means.

Focusing on diversity is, by definition, focusing on the differences between us. When we expend all of our energies focusing on our differences, those differences may be something we can no longer honor. Instead, we break off into smaller and smaller groups as we keep discovering more and more differences between us.

As we saw in some of those examples, that's exactly what happens.

Maybe it's time that we quit rallying around what makes us different and, instead, what makes us similar.

Perhaps it's the sameness in all of us that could make us able to live more in harmony than our focusing on what ethnicity, gender or anything else we are.

We are all humans with certain inalienable rights endowed by our Creator. That is what makes us equal.

We can live in better harmony when we realize that because a fellow human being is a fellow human being, that is enough for one to want to honor him or her.

There should be respect for differences because no two people are alike. But above all, we are all humans who deserve respect for that reason alone, and no band-aid attempt will ever make up for this realization — even if it can't fit on a bumper sticker.

Brian Womack is a columnist for the *Emerald*.

Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 3159, EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

The Emerald is private property. The unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

Editor-in-Chief: Kaly Soto
Managing Editor: David Thorn
Editorial Editor: Robbie Reeves
News Art Editor: Jeff Paslay
Freelance Editor: Lori Bettineski
News Editor: Rebecca Merritt
Sports Editor: Chris Metz
Supplements Editor: Trista Noel
Night Editor: Lori Bettineski

Associate Editors: Amy Colombo, Student Government/Activities; Marcelene Edwards, Community; Colleen Pohlig, Higher Education/Administration

News Staff: Steve Asbury, Regina Brown, Melody Conroy, Amy L. Devenport, Primo Fontana, Gayle Forman, Matt Garton, Joe Harwood, Kris Henry, Trevor Kearney, Shannon Kilduff, Adam Kincher, Samantha Martin, Matt McBride, Mark McTyre, Patrick Minford, Ben Moebius, Natalie Montgomery, Anne Moser-Kornfeld, Sherry Rainey, Natasha Shephard, Paul Van Sickle, Sean Smith, Mathew Stiffler, Mara Stine, Jeremy Stinson, Kim Weiss, Brian Womack, Les Zaczek

General Manager: Judy Riedl
Advertising Director: Mark Waller
Production Manager: Michele Ross

Advertising: Anne Amador, Anita Borges, Marco Ching, Tony Fox, Erin Hersher, Nicole Herzmark, Jeremy Mason, Sarah Mitchell, Tom Mittelstaedt, Kelsey Weikel

Classified: Becky Merchant, Manager, Kyle Davis, Joli Sellen

Distribution: John Long, Ferenc Rakoczi, Graham Simpson

Business: Kathy Carbone, Supervisor, Judy Connolly

Production: Dehila McCobb, Production Coordinator, Shawna Abele, Tara Gaultney, Brad Joss, Molly McCanta, Jennifer Roland, Clayton Yee

Newsroom: 346-5511 **Display Advertising:** 346-3712

Business Office: 346-5512 **Classified Advertising:** 346-4343