

United without the mainstream

The Nontraditional Student Union hosts activities year round such as family friendly game nights

BY SUSAN GOODWIN
FREELANCE REPORTER

"Nontraditional student" is a self-identified label used by students from a variety of backgrounds.

"Nontraditional is anything not thought of as typically mainstream. So there is huge room for interpretation," 21-year-old Richard Pryor said. He came to the University immediately after high school and studies creative writing and English literature, but self-identifies as a nontraditional student.

Pryor serves on the Student Recreation Center Advisory Board as the nontraditional student liaison.

"I was referred to the co-director who invited me to participate in the union. From there, I've just been trying to get involved as much as possible, pitch in and lend a helping hand," he said.

Nontraditional students who have a family or full-time job do not have as much time as traditional students to socialize.

"You can only fill your life with so many extra-curriculars and relationships, so you prioritize the ones that are important to you," said Michael Creech, a 45-year-old geophysics and mathematics major. Creech spends his free time with his children and grandchildren or in his wood shop at home.

Director Kyna Langhorne, 30, is a

second-year transfer student studying mathematics and Spanish. She returned to school after moving from Virginia and taking time off to raise her daughter.

"Nontrads are more at risk than traditional students because they have so much riding on this. In their day, they have to get schoolwork done and then go home and cook dinner, then pick up the kids and do the kids' homework and somehow fit in their own studying. If they have a partner, spend a few minutes with their partner to keep everything going well. ... Nontrads are at risk for feeling isolated on campus if they didn't have a place to come, or don't know about this place," Langhorne said.

Not all nontraditional students have families or full-time jobs. Some, like Nontraditional Student Union co-director Shimeon Greenwood, identify as nontraditional students because they transferred after taking a hiatus from school.

Greenwood, a 23-year-old business major, has two groups of friends he socializes with on a regular basis. One is fellow nontraditional students and the other is "students who have more free time to hang out."

"After last year's Spring Potluck where we elected this year's officials, I had a cocktail party for everyone. Only two nontraditional students were able to attend because of prior obligations. So I had to fill my house

with other students who had never heard of the Nontraditional Student Union," Greenwood said.

Suite 20A, a small office with five computers and hot coffee next to The Break Pool Hall and Arcade and the Campus Copy Center in the basement of the EMU is a meeting place for nontraditional students on campus. Nontraditional students go there to relax and chat with fellow nontraditional students who experience the stress of student life while also parenting or working.

"Every student has difficulties on a daily basis," said Pryor. "But nontrads have different difficulties to face in addition to the typical student challenges, like a family or full-time job, so they understand what each other is going through. Even if they don't understand another nontrad's specific conflict, they understand going through a conflict that challenges their success as a student. The office is a place for nontrads to relax and support each other."

The NSU organizes events to further build the nontraditional student community. This year the NSU plans to host a family-friendly game night once a month beginning Nov. 4. Game nights are evenings of board games, eating, and socializing in the River Rooms of the EMU.

The NSU has two annual parties during spring term, the spring Potluck and the Nontrad Grad. These parties are for nontraditional students and their families to celebrate the end of the year and elect new officers for the coming school year.

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North Country disappoints

Star appeal and promising premise can't raise movie above made-for-TV melodrama

BY CHRISTY LEMIRE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Charlize Theron doesn't stand on a table in the middle of a factory holding up a cardboard sign in "North Country," but you suspect that she could at any moment.

The film from "Whale Rider" director Niki Caro, about one woman who fought the horrors of sexual harassment at a northern Minnesota iron mine by filing an unprecedented class-action lawsuit, definitely has that inspirational "Norma Rae" feel to it. It also feels like a glorified TV movie, with its topical subject matter, well-timed emotional turnarounds and corny courtroom ending.

What elevates the film above the frequent two-dimensionality of Michael Seitzman's script are the performances from an esteemed cast — especially from Theron, powerfully reserved but still radiant beneath her stripped-down exterior. Frances McDormand has a no-nonsense likability as the friend who encourages her to take a job at the

mine, Sissy Spacek is quietly moving as Theron's disapproving mother, and Thomas Curtis has some wrenching moments as Theron's unsympathetic teenage son.

But for a movie about sexual harassment — which can be a gray area in terms of interpretation and can be hard to prove even at its most offensively obvious — nearly everyone and everything about "North Country" is painted in didactic black and white.

Inspired by a true story, the film stars Theron as Josey Aimes, a single mother of two who returns to her hometown after leaving her abusive husband. In need of work, she applies for a job at the local mine on the urging of her old friend Glory (McDormand), who drives a truck there and is a union leader.

One of only a handful of female employees, Glory warns Josey that the work can be tough and the treatment from male colleagues can be tougher. But the money is good, which is Josey's primary concern as she struggles alone to support son

Sammy (Curtis) and daughter Karen (Elle Peterson). She can't count on help from her parents — her father (Richard Jenkins from "Six Feet Under") is a longtime mine worker who resents his daughter for taking a job he believes a man should have; her old-fashioned mother dutifully, silently agrees.

Even before Josey starts, her boss warns her that the job will require her to do "all sorts of things a woman shouldn't be doing," and urges all the female employees to have a "sense of humor, ladies — rule numero uno."

A sex toy hidden in a young woman's lunch box eventually gives way to unwanted physical contact in dark corners and dirty words smeared in feces on the walls of the women's locker room. (Caro and cinematographer Chris Menges evoke a sense of their isolation through beautifully bleak wide shots of the smoky mines and the cold, vast terrain.)

The men are unrelentingly cruel — even Josey's father looks the other way at the treatment his daughter endures. The leader of the bullies, Bobby Sharp (Jeremy Renner), happens to be someone Josey was involved with back in high school, who still

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