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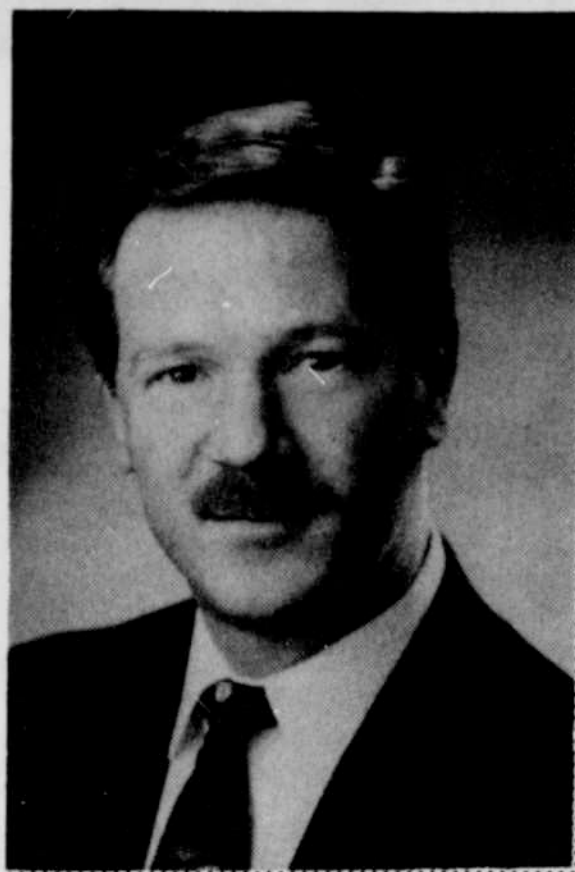
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# local news

## Denied Access

A group of University of Portland students are putting together a club to discuss sexual minority issues, despite a rejection by the school's administration

By Pamela Lyons

A proposal to form a club at the University of Portland that promotes tolerance of sexual minorities has been rejected by Vice President of Student Services Guy Sievert.

Sophomore Jeff Conn and freshman Brandon Clark submitted a proposal for the club called University of Portland Needs Outreach, Understanding and Tolerance, or Up-N-Out, in early October. It was rejected because it "goes against Catholic values," Sievert said. The university is a private Catholic institution.

The student senate voted on Nov. 1 to support the group. The senate vote is non-binding and does not affect university policy.

Without official recognition, the group cannot put up flyers on campus, reserve campus space for meetings, or receive university funds for speakers or events.

Currently, a support group for gay, lesbian and bisexual students meets on campus. That group is not visible and cannot hold special events on campus. Conn said a student club would provide visibility to gay, lesbian and bisexual issues and give all students a chance to discuss those issues.

"Basically, our purpose is to educate the campus," Conn said. "No where in our writings do we say we advocate gay sex. But that's why the administration opposed it."

The group's proposal makes clear that it is not about exploring sexuality, it is about openness and tolerance. "The purpose of this organization is to provide the University of Portland community with an active and positive atmosphere of openness, understanding and tolerance for all people." It adds that Up-N-Out is "not just a 'gay' and 'lesbian' club," and encourages membership from the whole community.

Conflicts surrounding celibacy and the Catholic Church is one of the main reasons the group was rejected, Conn said. The official word from the Church is that having sex outside of a legal marriage is wrong; therefore, because gay and lesbian marriages are not legally recognized, sex between two people of the same sex is considered a sin.

Some Catholic groups have distinguished between the act and the person, Conn said. He points to a 1991 article by the United States Catholic Conference that says, "Homosexual genital activity, as distinguished from homosexual orientation, is morally wrong. Such orientation in itself, because not freely chosen, is not sinful." Conn is asking the university to make that distinction as a compromise.

This case is similar to one at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. There, a gay and lesbian club that was denied funding took its case to court, charging discrimination. In a 1991 settlement, the group received more than \$7,000 in back funding. Sievert said the situation at University of Portland is different, because the District of Columbia has an equal access law. There are no such laws in Oregon.

Up-N-Out has been in contact with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries to examine the possibility of filing a discrimination complaint. It is not clear if a private university falls under the jurisdiction of Portland civil rights law, which includes protections for sexual minorities.

Conn said the group has gotten support from faculty members at the university and from Portland's sexual minority community, including Dignity, a gay and lesbian Catholic organization.

Each year, the school chooses an issue to focus on throughout the year with speakers and events, called the Dedicatory Topic. "The Challenge of Diversity" is this year's topic, and Conn said it's ironic that the university turned away the club while focusing on diversity.

The university supports other minority student clubs, and it sponsors "Campus Crusade for Christ," which is not a Catholic organization, Conn said.

Up-N-Out maintains that a visible group to discuss sexual minority issues, along with a support group, is a basic need for all students.

"The campus provides a support group, but that doesn't provide the information to other people. And that segregates us," Conn said.

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