

# inspires campus debate

## 'There is a time and place for everything'

Dr. Donald Epstein,

I wanted to write to you to express my thoughts, feelings, and opinions regarding your offensive and *ignorant* statement, "You're better off dead than being a homosexual."

Now, I admit, I am not familiar with you personally, nor have I ever enrolled in any of your classes. I would also like to mention that I have been told by other students that you are a very thorough instructor, who teaches informative, interesting classes. However, I highly admire Joshua Alexander for having the courage and self-confidence to come forth and speak up on his beliefs on the fight for gay rights. I would therefore like to express my opinions on this matter. After all, like you stated in the *Clackamas Print*, everyone has a right to their opinion.

First off, I am well aware of the fact that certain religions condemn homosexuality, and view it as immoral. However, when you come right down to it, religion is based merely upon beliefs, and therefore holds absolutely *no* authority or seniority whatsoever as to say what is right versus what is wrong. Because religion is

based merely upon human beliefs, there are so many diverse religions and religious beliefs in existence worldwide, and for some odd reason, people such as yourself feel as though it is perfectly acceptable to use many of the *ignorant* beliefs of certain cultures to back up your very own *ignorant* prejudices. Everybody needs something to believe in, in order to obtain a feeling of purpose and self-fulfillment. Unfortunately, many people, including you, have abused religion and used it as a tool of discrimination against people who are different and hold different beliefs. Regardless of what The Bible says about homosexuality, it is merely a book; merely one that many people irrationally believe is the universal expertise in such matters. But being that, The Bible not only discriminates against homosexuals, but also degrades women, I do not find The Bible worthy of any reference-serving object. Natu-

rally, I mean no disrespect to The Bible in any sense, but its collections of religious beliefs and the science of psychology of sexual orientation are two very different, separate subjects which unfortunately, in the eyes of many, seem to run parallel to each other as far as religion and The Bible are concerned. Which is why your views on homosexuality should *not* be included in your class lectures, regardless of the fact that a vast number of people in history have held the same *ignorant* views toward homosexuality as you. The main theme here is *ignorance*, and that people should not preach about things they so obviously know nothing about. I speak of history and religion only in the context of its ludicrous accusations regarding homosexuality, which I will remind you has no supporting evidence whatsoever, but based simply on people's own *ignorances* and the fear of what it really means to be different in a society that strives to be alike. It is obvi-

ous that you know nothing about homosexuality, as every one of your *ignorant* comments on the subject support such. In fact, people who are anti-anything are *ignorant* individuals who speak of what they know nothing about.

Furthermore, such offensive comments show not only disrespect for homosexuals, but disrespect for people in general, as seen by a heterosexual student who filed a complaint against you. I think your comment in the interview, and I quote, "...somebody has to stir them up," is absolutely absurd. It is one thing to stir up a debate in an attempt to force students into a mode of critical thinking and in-class discussions. But doing so by means of preaching your own *ignorant* prejudices is by far wrong.

If anything is immoral and should be condemn, it should be discrimination against homosexuals in today's society. Good instructors are not dependent on the subject material they teach, or the degree which they have obtained. A good instructor is a person who *never* discriminates against students for the way they are (*not* the way they supposedly choose to be), whether it targets their race, sex, religion, or

sexual orientation. The last time I checked, instructors were to serve as good role models for students. A good instructor teaches the material from an objective (not subjective) point of view, encouraging students to explore the realm of the subject at hand. All the while treating each and every student with the utmost respect he or she deserves.

I feel as though I have relayed my opinions on this matter quite successfully. Yes, I do agree that everyone has a right to his or her own opinion, and yes, everyone is biased to some extent, including me. However, there is a time and a place for everything, and the classroom is surely not the place to incorporate the *ignorant* prejudices, using your subject at hand as a scapegoat. I can respect the fact that your personal opinions include that of anti-homosexuality, even though I do not agree with you. After all, life would be boring if everyone agreed with everyone else on everything. But I can't respect your decision to state that, "You're better off dead than being a homosexual," in an academic setting. I feel my work here is done, class dismissed.

Chris M. Bartel  
Student

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## Misely and Arter bring up ideas of respect in the class

Thank you for your very thorough coverage of the student complaint against Dr. Epstein. One of the reasons he gave for making the remark he did is to stir things up, by which we take him to mean that he wanted to generate a lively discussion of the issue. We thought we'd take him up on his offer.

In the course of the interview, Dr. Epstein asserted that, according to the bible, "homosexuality is immoral" and therefore "should not be legally right." He is certainly entitled to his opinion that homosexuality is immoral, and to act on that belief by not engaging in it himself and even, politically incorrect though it might be, to try to discourage others from doing so. But we believe that he goes too far in arguing that the practice should therefore not be legal. Religious dogma is an unacceptable basis, in and of itself, for making law. There are, of course, many things that are illegal that are also proscribed as a part of religious doctrine, but they are illegal because common sense and a decent respect for the basic rights of all human beings convince us that

they should be so - not because they violate Jewish or Christian or Muslim or any other religious doctrine.

And what justification is there for banning homosexuality based on reason and human decency? It is becoming increasingly difficult to make a rational case. Genetic research is uncovering an ever more diverse biology of human sexuality. We learned in high school, for example, that males have an X and a Y chromosome while females have two X chromosomes. While this is true of most people, in fact more than 15 different combinations of the chromosomes governing human sexual development have been discovered. Each year 65,000 babies are born that have neither the standard male nor female chromosomal configuration - easily discernable intersexuality occurs in roughly one out of ev-

ery 2,000 births. This alone, even discounting the huge variation in the genetic make-up of the chromosomes themselves, suggests that normal human sexual behavior is far more diverse than we appreciate. (A fascinating article on this subject, which we recommend, appears in the January, 2000, issue of *Discover* magazine.) In fact,

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Dave Arter  
Bob Misley  
Instructors

what research has been done on the subject suggests that human sexual behavior results from a complex interaction between an individual's genetic make-up and his or her experiences in life and that, once established, sexual preferences are nearly impossible to change.

The corollary to this is, of course, that the strong aversion to homosexual sex that many people seem to feel is probably no less natural, but the strength of those feelings is no more justification for ban-

ning homosexuality or discriminating against homosexuals than the aversion some gays and lesbians might feel for heterosexual sex is for banning heterosexuality or discriminating against heterosexuals. It seems to us that the most reasonable (not to mention humane) course for those who feel strongly on the subject is to live and let live.

While we believe that Dr. Epstein is entitled both to have and to express his opinion and, as a corollary, that the complaint against him should be summarily dismissed (and, by the way, Joshua Alexander, the student who filed it, should be acknowledged for having the strength of conviction and the courage to raise the issue) we still feel that his remark was ill-advised and unfortunate. Had he said merely that he felt homosexuality is wrong, or that it is or immoral, or that it should be illegal, or that it is destructive to society, or even that it is a tragic psychological disorder, this controversy would probably not have arisen. But to say that "you're better off dead than being a homosexual" is not only unnecessarily harsh and hurtful, it can appear to

justify, and therefore encourage, violence against gays and lesbians (a consequence we do not believe Dr. Epstein intends).

As a man whose own culture and religion have, over the centuries, been subjected to the worst kind of discrimination and violence, it is surprising that he does not display a greater degree of empathy. What would his reaction have been had an antisemitic instructor remarked "you're better off dead than being Jewish?" Even if he believes that there is no right to sexual freedom similar to the right to religious freedom, he cannot fail to appreciate the feelings of fear and alienation an assertion such as he has made generates.

Dr. Epstein, of course, has the right to express himself in just about any way he sees fit. It seems to us, however, that simple respect for the humanity that unites us all would suggest that he be more circumspect in its exercise.

Sincerely,  
Dave Arter,  
Bob Misely  
Instructor of Physical Science and Life Sciences