

Controversy in a new light

Last week, *The Print* covered a controversial story regarding a complaint filed by a student against Dr. Donald Epstein for comments he made about homosexuality in his Judaic Studies class.

While I openly disagree with

From the Editor's desk...



John Thorburn
Editor-in-Chief

Epstein's religious and moral views on the subject of homosexuality, I certainly don't condemn him of any wrongdoing in the classroom. This year we have seen much controversy on this campus. Lately it comes from Dr. Epstein's classroom, but largely has grown from a core of political science students.

Topics brought up in Dr. Dean Darris' political science classes have seen coverage in this newspaper. While at times it reflects badly on a

student or the campus as a whole, they are excellent tools for learning—both for students of Darris as well as members of this staff. When certain stories broke, some members of this staff cried foul against Darris

for inspiring whatever topic was at hand. Over the past few months, I've had the opportunity to work with and speak with a small

number of Darris' students. It is my opinion that some of these students are not ready to handle the topics brought forth in his classroom. Darris is a very intelligent, perhaps even a brilliant man. Some of his students, however, fall short of that stature.

While at times I strongly disagree with some of Darris' views, I do applaud what he tries to do as an instructor. I have never taken a class of his, but have a number of friends

that have. Dr. Darris makes students think—he raises questions. Some of those questions aren't handled in the best fashion by some of his students, but that does not mean that we condemn the teacher.

In light of recent public debate regarding academic freedom, I pose a few questions; what is wrong with challenging students' minds? What is wrong with stating an opinion regardless of your position as an instructor or a student? The times we live in are thought to be times of open debate, times of change and times for people to question. If people say that the rights of homosexuals are being won because of these times—because there is so much acceptance in society—then how does someone have the right to question the opinion of any man in a classroom and say that it is inappropriate for students to hear?

This is a learning institution. With being a student come certain obligations of willing to be open to all ideas. When did we receive the right to not be offended by someone?

Where would life be without differences of opinions?

I've been extremely introspective this past week as I've pondered the happenings surrounding the "Epstein Debate." There are still a few questions that I haven't answered, and perhaps they never will be answered. It is an issue, as a friend of mine said

(or our voice) and say we disagree.

It is my own personal opinion that Josh Alexander did not do something worthy of praise. As a matter of fact, I think he did the

most cowardly thing a student can do when they disagree with an instructor. Something offended him and instead of



Shelbi Wescott
Feature Editor

View from the soapbox

recently, where both sides are right. Nobody wins.

However, there is a piece to this story that hasn't been fully addressed. And the entire foundation of the controversy lies on this one, small piece. The question to be asked is, what was Epstein's *intent*?

I do not think that that the comment was made maliciously or with any trace of hatred. Epstein said that he was using the Bible as a reference (an excellent source of information for a Judaic studies course, if you ask me) and, during his interview he said, and I quote, "The Bible says... I didn't say that."

Now, let's say (for the sake of argument) that Epstein does believe that homosexuals are better off dead. While I don't condone or agree with Epstein's alleged comment regarding homosexuality, I do feel, however, that he had every right to voice that opinion. I am a proud defender of our first amendment rights, which includes our right to freedom of speech.

Does a teacher need to keep his/her personal opinions out of the classroom? No, just like we, as students, aren't forced to keep our personal opinions out of the classroom either. If we disagree with an instructor, it is our responsibility to raise our hand

taking a stand for what he believed in, he ran away (by dropping the class and filing a complaint). What are we supposed to learn from this? Are we to assume that if someone bothers you, you should go and tattle on him/her? Are we first-graders, or are we grown-ups?

Where would life be without differences of opinion and an occasional heated debate? "Don't conform," we preach to others. "Be yourself!" And then we say, in the same breath, "Be politically correct. Share in society's accepted viewpoints."

We live in a world where people are taught to be freethinkers, so why does society condemn someone for thinking outside the norm? Isn't that what we encourage people to do? Seems to me we should be applauding a person who comes forward with a different view, shouldn't we?

Those who have built up all this anger and hatred toward Dr. Donald Epstein, those who want to see him fired or burned at the stake, I have news for you. Your hate is based on a comment that he may or may not have meant in spite. And what makes you think that your hatred is justified and Epstein's (assuming that he even does hate) is not?

It's just something to think about.

'Epstein in same company with Hitler'

Students should know that Dr. Donald Epstein's views against homosexuals do not represent those of all Jewish people. As with every religion, there are a spectrum of people who are more tolerant of those different than themselves, and those, like Dr. Epstein, who are intolerant. When I discussed the instructor's classroom comment with a Jewish friend of mine (who attends a synagogue unconcerned about the sexual orientation of its members), she was appalled by the instructor's behavior. She said, Jews, of all people, have suffered persecution. We, of all people, should know to practice tolerance. She added that Dr. Epstein is an embarrassment to my culture and to my religion.

Although I cannot argue Biblical matters with Dr. Epstein, I recognize the passage he cites to sup-

port his bias as Leviticus 20:13. I suspect he does not place as much importance on nearby verses. Leviticus 25:44, for example, says that people may buy slaves, as long as they come from neighboring nations. Leviticus 19:19 states, "...nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff." Perhaps Dr. Epstein also spends classtime condemning polyester clothing, but I doubt it.

It is ironic that this instructor would use a class focused on the Holocaust to spread prejudice against homosexuals. As he is well aware, the Nazis targeted not only Jews but other segments of society as well—including homosexuals. Gays were killed simply because of who they were—just as surely as were Jews. Dr. Epstein placed himself in horrific company when he said that gays are better

off dead. It's strange and unsettling to realize that this Jewish man and Adolph Hitler would have shared a belief in common.

I commend Joshua Alexander, the student who walked out of Dr. Epstein's class. Alexander has made it clear that he will not listen to people in authority who suggest those who are different from himself would be better off dead. If more people in Nazi Germany had had this student's moral integrity, the Holocaust would never have happened.

If other students on this campus refused to listen to a man in authority who says those different from themselves would be better off dead, Dr. Epstein's classes would no longer happen either.

Patricia K. Lichen
Student

Epstein abuses power

Dear Editors:

I would like to thank Don Epstein for exercising his academic freedom in such a disrespectful way. Having leaders in the faculty and community show their bigotry with such arrogance and openness helps students understand power and its abuses. Much like the O.C.A., Epstein helps homosexuals prepare and implement an agenda that we probably had not considered before, and heterosexuals show their compassion and civility by speaking out loudly against a small-minded professor. Josh Alexander and The Print staff rose from the ashes of this incident and model a type of leadership that fosters respect and compassion.

Sincerely,

Kate Gray

English Instructor

Rainbow Coalition, Advisor

'Better off retired - than to be Epstein'

Two years ago I brought one of my classes to hear Diana Golden, a Holocaust survivor invited to campus by Donald Epstein. During the course of her speech she mentioned that the Nazis imprisoned homosexuals as well as Jews in Auschwitz.

Isn't it ironic that Don Epstein would be willing to treat homosexuals the same way the Nazis did: that is "better off dead."

In my opinion—which, of course, I have the academic freedom to express—it would be better to be retired than to be Don Epstein.

Sincerely,

Diane Averill

English Instructor

'History doomed to repeat itself'

I find it very disconcerting that several teachers at Clackamas Community College think that expressing homophobic remarks in class is challenging and instructive. These so called professionals, even a psychology professor, fail to realize that by having a person with a leadership role in the classroom making hateful comments doesn't promote discussion or debate. It only goes a long way in quieting any dissent from members of a minority group.

Several students were quoted say-

ing that the college is not necessarily a safe place to be 'out.' Students are afraid of being harassed or hurt if they are identified as gay. That fear is only perpetuated by inflammatory speech from a self-described conservative Republican and defended by people who should know better. This speech which is being so vehemently protected can in turn give credence to someone with warped views and can justify their dangerous actions.

Homophobia is not an acceptable position to state by a teaching pro-

fessional, no matter how conservative or passionate one is. I don't believe that other racist or sexually degrading remarks should be tolerated at a college campus and I hope that Clackamas Community College will recognize the seriousness of this situation and publicly rebuke Mr. Epstein. I am sure that this highly schooled educator can't forget that unless remembered, history is doomed to repeat itself.

Tony Loeffler

West Coast Plant Company
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Both Letters to the Editor and A Student's Voice/Another Voice are subject to editing. If the letters do not meet these requirements they may not be published. We've made an exception with this section due to the high volume of response.