

An open letter

To the administration and members of the office of Student Activities of the University of Notre Dame du Lac:

On October 9, 2003, over 50 members of the Notre Dame student community—gay and straight alike—met to address a serious issue facing the University: the environment for homosexual students. Earlier that year the Princeton Review ranked Notre Dame the worst college on its list in terms of its environment for homosexuals, and the students gathered together that day saw the need for improvement. Since the Princeton Review bases its rankings on surveys of a college's students and faculty, it should be recognized that this ranking was not based upon a biased outside source but rather upon members of ND's own community.

The students present at that meeting not only observed the problem but also expressed a desire to group together to find solutions—solutions to make ND a more hospitable place for members of the homosexual community and to improve the University's public image on this front. Out of this desire arose United in Diversity, an alliance of students of every sexual orientation wanting to address ND's environment for homosexuals. After several meetings, this group drafted several concrete goals and decided to apply for official club recognition. This recognition is invaluable to the group so that it can access the Notre Dame student-body and so that it can host events and activities.

It is then with the utmost sorrow, that we the undersigned supporters of United in Diversity, received the news of UID's denial of club status. With the utmost respect to the members of Student Activities, and the decision-making process, we do feel that the decision to deny United in Diversity official club status was a mistake.

The letter of denial reasoned that a student-run club is unnecessary due to the presence of University support-structures such as the Standing Committee on Gay and Lesbian Student Needs and Campus Ministry. Underlying this argument is the disturbing premise that University organizations rightfully supersede student ones in terms of supporting



students. This premise shows an inherent lack of trust in student abilities and a blindness to students' own yearnings to deal with these issues as a community. Involvement in student-groups and clubs enriches each student's educational opportunities and ultimately enriches the University's role as a place of collaborative and community learning.

The Standing Committee and Campus Ministry are welcomed as both productive and positive institutions, but they are insufficient in addressing homosexual issues. Campus Ministry provides an invaluable support structure for homosexual students who inevitably face difficult issues of faith, but that is the extent of its offerings. The Standing Committee reports issues important to the homosexual community to the administration, trains residence hall staff in fostering a positive environment in the dorms, and offers a coffee social to homosexual students once a month.

Neither organization fulfills the proposed goals of the United in Diversity group. UID would offer students the opportunity to get involved in a collective forum to raise issues of tolerance and anti-bigotry and to bring those issues before the entire Notre Dame community with speakers, discussions, etc. Furthermore, UID sponsored events would raise the level of awareness of homosexual issues on campus, and would inform students regarding support structures available to them, including the Standing Committee and Campus Ministry. Finally, while the Standing Committee only offers a few students the opportunity for involvement, and while their appointment to the committee is contingent on approval, UID would extend its welcome to every interested student regardless of sexual orientation, and would offer a far greater number of opportunities for involvement.

We are sincerely hopeful that the administration will work to address these concerns and ultimately recognize UID as an official student group. Furthermore, we welcome the opportunity to work with Student Activities to address any problems they have with UID's proposed constitution and to make any changes regarding those problems that are not inconsistent with UID's overall mission.

Sincerely,

The undersigned...

