

# THE IRISH ROVER

Serving God, Country & Notre Dame since N.D. 2003

*It behooves a watchdog to bark. Good, Rover.*

Volume VI, Issue 1

*A forthrightly, independent, Catholic publication for the University of Notre Dame du Lac,  
a Roman Catholic institution in Notre Dame, Indiana, U.S.A.*

Price: First six copies gratis  
\$1.25 each thereafter

## Progressive Student Alliance Advocates for Gay Rights

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**R**ECENTLY, THE Progressive Student Alliance (PSA) obtained approval from the Student Activities Office to circulate their petition for the inclusion of "sexual orientation" in Notre Dame's existing Non-Discrimination Clause. The clause currently reads: "The University of Notre Dame does not discriminate on the basis of race/ethnicity, color, national origin, sex, disability, veteran status, or age..."

Mike McCann, senior, is an active member of PSA. Noting the lack of "sexual orientation,"

he commented in an email to the Irish Rover, "Equality for Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and Questioning individuals has always been an important issue to PSA. Many GLBTQ individuals and their allies still do not feel that this University is a welcoming place for them."

Although they uphold this petition at the top and center of their agenda at Notre Dame, members struggled at their meeting Tuesday, April 15 to frame the disagreement in terms of a particular incident. Self-admittedly, their disorganization has worked against them. "The University is counting on our inability to be organized," said one PSA member, speaking to

the circulation of the petition on campus. They vowed to achieve success so as to gain "legitimacy" as a voice on campus. In addition, they discussed the idea of petitioning door-to-door or protesting outside after the evening daily mass at the Basilica.

So far, the PSA has been relatively successful, claiming to have already received hundreds of signatures for the petitions. McCann expressed his excitement. He wrote, "This is an issue that  
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# Students Petition to Amend Non-Discrimination Clause

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many people at Notre Dame are excited to support because it is addressing an inequality right here on campus. Because of this, we have been receiving many positive reactions. We have had individuals from the library staff, the law school, and academic departments contact us about collecting signatures and helping out in other ways with the campaign."

PSA members were unsure of all the implications of the addition to the clause, should it be approved by the University. McCann wrote that, "It would provide the grounds for legal action for individuals who have been discriminated against based on their sexual orientation. GLBTQ individuals would now have redress when they are treated unjustly. Also, it would be a way to demonstrate to GLBTQ individuals and their allies that this University is a place that is welcoming to individuals of all sexual orientations."

Even the members of PSA themselves expressed their ignorance in regards to the legal ramifications of including "sexual orientation" into the clause. One wondered whether "gay and lesbian dances" would be allowed on campus, while another argued that they must push for "everything."

Ultimately, they looked forward to the assistance offered by some law students who are members

of the ACLU.

Arguably, McCann and the PSA express an opinion different from the standing "Spirit of Inclusion," which opens with the following words: "The University of Notre Dame strives for a spirit of inclusion among the members of this community for distinct reasons articulated in our Christian tradition.... We welcome all people, regardless of color, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social or economic class, and nationality.... We value this community as we value all members of this community."

PSA and the movement to include "sexual orientation" into the clause both find their origin in a controversy during a turbulent time in Notre Dame's history. As early as 1985, the elements for this controversy were present: students were denied recognition for their newfound organization, Gays and Lesbians of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College (GLND/SMC). Constantly on the fringes of the University, in 1994, GLND/SMC finally broke the barriers outlined by campus policies regarding non-recognized clubs and openly advertised for their meeting. The resulting outbreak prompted action by University administration which subsequently founded the Standing Committee on Gay and Lesbian Student Needs—presently the Core Council for Gay and Lesbian Students.

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Allison Dobson ('99) was active in College Democrats during this time and very active with the movement. In an interview with the Rover, she shares that she got involved with the movement: when GLND/SMC was denied the ability to have table on Fieldhouse Mall on National Coming Out Day. The College Democrats, sympathizing with GLND/SMC, submitted a petition to have for themselves a table for National Coming Out Day. The University denied theirs as well. In outrage, students rallied to include "sexual orientation" in the non-discrimination clause so that clubs, such as GLND/SMC, would be able to host events on Notre Dame's campus.

In 1997, Fr. Malloy announced the "Spirit of Inclusion," which Dobson claims was "far short" of what the College Democrats were attempting to achieve. Reflecting on the positive aspects of the "Spirit of Inclusion," she commented, "[It] was recognition of the fact that there was a population of Notre Dame that didn't feel included."

1998 also saw the resignation of Fr. David Garrick, a Holy Cross priest and professor of communications and theater who was active in daily ministry at the Basilica. As an article in the National Catholic Register relates, Fr. Garrick was upset about his "secret dismissal" from the Basilica, which he

linked to his "coming out" as a gay celibate priest in 1996. Fr. Garrick left the University in "heartfelt protest." This in turn evoked a "Letter to the Editor," which advocated for equal rights and contained the signatures of over 1300 students, faculty, and staff. Fr. Garrick's resignation also sparked the founding of the Progressive Student Alliance which began as a club centered around the issue of gay rights.

After much debate and a Senate Resolution proposing that the non-discrimination clause be amended, the Board of Fellows convened on Dec. 1, 1998 in London. They voted "no" on the inclusion of "sexual orientation" into the clause.

By Feb. 5, at which time their decision was made public, the Board of Trustees had also given their approval to the Fellows' decision.

Since that time, there has been sporadic uproar over various events on campus, as well as various Senate Resolutions advocating for equal rights, but not until recently with the PSA petition has the issue of "sexual orientation" been so prominent on campus.

Notre Dame has remained firm on this issue, being, in fact, one of the few top Catholic colleges in the nation to refrain from including "sexual orientation" in their non-discrimination policies. It is precisely because of Notre Dame's Catholicity that

Fr. Malloy argued so strongly against the emendation.

And yet, it is precisely because of Notre Dame's Catholicity that others have argued for it. Dobson, in her interview, said, "We thought [the exclusion of sexual orientation from the clause] was completely at odds with the Catholic faith." She went on to add that it was against human dignity that they did not include it.

In a similar vein, McCann wrote, "Notre Dame is a Catholic school and Catholic in some sense means 'universal.' Catholicism covers a wide range of people -- all with their own abilities, attitudes, personalities, and beliefs."

He continued, "With that in mind, I don't think a Catholic school should be in the business of deciding who is a sinner and who is not - especially when they are not posing harm to others. Deciding that is up to someone else. From Jesus' message we see that a Catholic school should be reaching out in love to all types of people no matter their sexual orientation."

Finally, Dobson, passionate about the issue, insisted that "if you care about something, you'll fight for it to be better." She closed the interview by reflecting on her optimism for the University. She said, "I always think there is hope for change." Contact Dan at [dammir@nd.edu](mailto:dammir@nd.edu).

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