

The other side

RAY MORELLI

Professor smoking marijuana hurts Penn State's reputation

In an open letter to the Penn State community, President Graham B. Spanier made the following remarks: "Drug abuse and crime are destructive forces that divert time, energy, and resources away from the educational and personal growth that is the primary reason for being at Penn State....We seek a safe and drug-free environment not only out of concern for the serious individual consequences of abusive or unlawful behavior, but also that we may have a supportive campus characterized by civility and respect." Spanier goes on to say that these goals "require the commitment of everyone at Penn State."

In front of the main gate of main campus at twelve noon in the afternoon, Hecklen made a direct challenge to the University and its authority.

How did the University respond? For all practical purposes, it didn't. University police informed Hecklen that he committed a misdemeanor but that they would not make a citation

session of an illegal substance with the excuse of it being a "political statement?" Several students objected and wrote letters to President Spanier, asking him to take disciplinary action against Hecklen, but to no avail. Penn State made no formal actions against Hecklen.

The fact of the matter is that Hecklen is an embarrassment to Penn

and, "Today the lighted marijuana weed is the torch of liberty." When its staff starts comparing illegal drugs to patriotic symbols, the University comes off looking like a joke.

In order to preserve its integrity, the University needs to make a strong stand against Hecklen and his radical ideas. Not only is he an embarrassment to everyone at Penn State, he is encouraging dangerous and self-destructive behavior among the student body. Marijuana has mind-altering effects clearly in opposition to learning, which President Spanier calls "the primary reason for being at Penn State." While Hecklen no doubt has the support of many tie-died, sandal-wearing hippie-types, the majority of Penn State students would rather not be thought of as attending "that school where they don't care if you smoke pot." Students who support Hecklen do serious damage to the school's reputation. Frank Burns, a junior at UP, said, "I smoke it (marijuana) daily; it would be nice if they made it legal." Worse yet, he states, "The war on drugs is bad." Unfortunately, this mentality is going to be seen as representative of Penn State as a whole unless the University makes a stand against Hecklen's extremist ideas and disregard for university policies.

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or an arrest. University police supervisor Dwight Smith said there was a lack of evidence since Hecklen wasn't smoking the joint when police arrived. Apparently, the fact that a large crowd witnessed it, media reported it, and Hecklen admitted smoking the joint doesn't matter to University officials. Smith then went on to say that it wouldn't be in the community's best interest to arrest Hecklen and that the police felt he was making a political statement.

It's alarming that the University elected not to take any action against Hecklen. As with all laws, the drug policy must be uniformly enforced if it is to be taken seriously. Could a student have gotten away with the pos-

State, and the University was seriously mistaken in choosing not to discipline him. Hecklen is a poor representation of Penn State, and that would be evident to the general public only if the University would have taken action against him. Hecklen's challenge to the University's authority remained unanswered and he has since held three additional demonstrations. These demonstrations were reported on by media from all over the country, including the Associated Press. It's damaging to the image of Penn State as a leading educational institution when its staff makes comments like Hecklen's. He's gone on record making comments like, "I'm trying to get the drug laws abolished,"

The word that jumps from that last sentence is "everyone." "Everyone," as in every individual affiliated with Penn State, without exception. No one would argue that "everyone" excludes the staff and faculty here at the University. Spanier himself mentions them in the afore-mentioned letter. Why, then, is a professor leading pro-marijuana protests and smoking weed in blatant opposition to Penn State's drug policy left unpunished?

The professor in question is Julian Hecklen, a chemistry professor at University Park. To protest the prosecution of marijuana users, Hecklen staged a rally where he smoked a joint in front of a crowd of about fifty people on January 15, 1998. He did

Put teachers to the test

By Diane Ravitch=Special to The Washington Post

Last summer, a suburban school district in New York advertised for 35 new teachers and received nearly 800 applications. Officials decided to narrow the pool by requiring applicants to take the 11th-grade state examination in English. Only about one-quarter of the would-be teachers answered 40 of the 50 multiple-choice questions correctly.

As Congress considers reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, teacher education has emerged as a major issue. Many states—and now President Clinton—are clamoring to reduce class size, but few are grappling with the most important questions: If we are raising standards for students, don't we also need to raise standards for teachers? Shouldn't state and local officials make sure that teachers know whatever they are supposed to teach students?

Almost every state claims that it is strengthening standards for students, but the states have been strangely silent when it comes to ensuring that teachers know what they are supposed to teach. Most instead certify anyone with the right combination of education courses, regardless of their command of the subject they expect to teach, and many states require future

teachers to pass only a basic skills test.

Today, in some states it may be harder to graduate from high school than to become a certified teacher. Something is wrong with this picture.

Last summer, the U.S. Department of Education reported that approximately one-third of the nation's public school teachers of academic subjects in middle school and high school were teaching "out of field," which means that they had earned neither an undergraduate major nor a minor in their main teaching field.

Fully 39.5 percent of science teachers had not studied science as a major or minor; 34 percent of mathematics teachers and 25 percent of English teachers were similarly teaching "out of field." The problem of unqualified teachers was particularly acute in schools where 40 percent or more of the students were from low-income homes; in these schools, nearly half the teaching staff was teaching "out of field."

Many states now routinely certify people who do not know what they are supposed to teach. No one should get a license to teach science, reading, mathematics or anything else unless he or she has demonstrated a knowledge of what students are expected to learn.

A majority of the nation's teachers majored in education rather than an

academic subject. This is troubling, even though most of those who majored in education are elementary school teachers. There is a widely accepted notion that people who teach little children don't need to know much other than pedagogical methods and child psychology; that is wrong. Teachers of little children need to be well-educated and should love learning as much as they love children. Yes, even elementary school teachers should have an academic major.

The field of history has the largest percentage of unqualified teachers. The Department of Education found that 55 percent of history teachers are "out of field," and that 43 percent of high school students are studying history with a teacher who did not earn either a major or minor in history. This may explain why nearly 60 percent of our 17-year-olds scored "below basic" (the lowest possible rating) on the most recent test of U.S. history administered by the federally funded National Assessment of Educational Progress. Is it any wonder that today's children have no idea when the Civil War occurred, what Reconstruction was, what happened during the progressive era, who FDR was, what the Brown decision decided, or what Stalin did? Many of their teachers don't know those things, either.

Many state officials say that they

have an abundance of people who want to teach and that this is an excellent time to raise standards. For career-changers with a wealth of experience in business or the military, however, obsolete certification requirements get in the way. Instead of requiring irrelevant education courses, states should examine prospective teachers for their knowledge of their academic field and then give them a chance to work in the schools as apprentice teachers.

As Congress ponders ways to improve the teaching profession, it should consider incentives for colleges of liberal arts to collaborate with schools of education in preparing future teachers. Representatives from both parts of the same campus should sit down together, study state academic standards and figure out how to prepare teachers who know both their subject and how to teach it well. Teachers need a strong academic preparation as well as practical classroom experience to qualify for one of the toughest jobs in America.

Every classroom should have a well-educated, knowledgeable teacher. We are far from that goal today. Congress can address this problem by focusing on the quality, not quantity, of the nation's teaching corps.

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EDITORIAL

How low can you go and still get into Behrend?

The admission standards at Behrend have been shown, for the most part, to be fairly noncompetitive. Because of Penn State's size, most students are accepted more for their GPA and SAT scores, which are plugged into a formula, than for their activities and outside interests. In addition, although the scores needed to gain acceptance to Behrend are higher than at the Commonwealth Campuses, they are not comparatively high.

One of the biggest complaints among student leaders is that Behrend students are apathetic and spend far more of their time complaining about things than actually doing anything about it. The fact that Penn State looks at scores more than outside activities is probably a major factor in this problem.

Of course, there are many students who do a lot for this College and are recognized for it. However, these students usually have a large work load to make up for the lack of student interest in participating in extracurricular events.

The behavior of the majority of students who attend Behrend creates an unfair environment for those who are active and want to get things done. Many times when a class seems like it may become too academically challenging for some students, or the professor is one who takes his or her grading moderately serious, the class is dropped by many in it.

For these reasons the standards for grading in classes are curved or due dates for assignments are delayed in order to make up for those students who could not meet the capacity of

work. Test grades are argued to the point where a professor has little choice but to manage some kind of a curve. Many students seem to not realize that by merely studying the material, they will most likely earn the grade they desire. Instead, many resort to debating or begging for extra credit assignments in order to salvage their GPA.

For the ones who do work hard to comply with the requirements of a class it means a level not as challenging as they may have expected and they don't leave the class with the knowledge they assumed they would have obtained from it at the beginning.

On the side of student activities there are consequences to be had from student apathy as well. A very small number of students make up a majority work to be done toward Behrend's activities and programs, which many times are unattended or unappreciated by the student body as a whole. Yet the same students who don't attend or put any time in the school's programs are the ones who complain about them.

The admissions standards at Behrend may have something to do with this apathy. Behrend is a fairly non-competitive school. Because of Penn State's size, applications for admissions are not given the consideration they require in order to have a more adequate selection of students. Now that the admissions standards are beginning to be more selective, hopefully Behrend will see its student body become more active and involved in what the college has to offer.

Equal Protection for the Last Outcasts

By Robert Dawidoff=Special to the Los Angeles Times

Last month, Maine voters repealed that state's law prohibiting discrimination against lesbians and gay men. Why do most Americans continue to exclude gay men and lesbians from the ranks of citizens whose rights to equal protection of the laws are the same as everybody else's?

The answer is contained in a recent opinion sampling by Alan Wolfe of Boston University, who found that middle-class Americans no longer believe that Jews, Muslims or atheists are inherently less worthy than Christians. But Wolfe notes one exception to "America's persistent and ubiquitous nonjudgmentalism." No matter how much they are willing to accept most things, Wolfe said, "most of the middle-class Americans I spoke to were not prepared to accept homosexuality."

Given the homophobic character of so many of our formal and informal traditions, the calculated campaign of the anti-gay religious right to reactivate those traditions in the cause of their special interest in American politics and the prudery of public conversation if not conduct, we should not be surprised. Were Americans to look candidly at human sexuality, they

might recognize that erotic response is not fixed but changeable and that "straight" and "gay" are convenient terms to describe a pattern of variation, not an either/or identity. But why won't Americans recognize lesbians and gay men as their fellow citizens entitled to the same constitutional rights?

It appears that most Americans continue to think that one chooses to be gay. If you think homosexuality is a choice, it is easier to think that discrimination one suffers on account of sexuality is not a constitutional or social issue, but the consequence of a personal "lifestyle choice."

Equal protection of the laws applies to persons because of who they are rather than what they must do to deserve it. The notion that one chooses one's sexual desires in effect removes those desires from the realm of constitutional protection. But do homosexuals "choose" their sexual orientation? No. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals have within them, just as "straights" do, the congeries of elements that create individual sexual desire. Gays do not choose to be gay, but they do in ever growing numbers choose to live their lives in harmony with their inner truths.

The choice gays have come to is not to have same-sex relations; people

have always done that. The choice is whether being homosexual is something to deny or to venture. The choice is one the sexual majority need not make. Heterosexuals can skip over the process of having to choose to be who they are and go directly to conduct. One can choose to be monogamous, to live according to a morality of sexual conduct, to live out one's feelings honestly and ethically. Those are the choices that lesbians and gay men would like to make for ourselves.

Gay rights are at the core an attempt to gain equal protection of the law for one's intimate associations. You cannot have privacy if you must conduct your personal life in secret. The "don't ask, don't tell" policy in the military is just one example of this double bind. Lesbians and gay men must choose daily whether to deny our feelings and natures in order to live freely, to have our work and lives judged by the way we live them and not by whom we live them with.

Dawidoff is a professor of history at the Claremont Graduate University and co-author of "Created Equal: Why Gay Rights Matter to America."



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