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Homophobia; an obstacle for gay communities

by E.J. Vongher
Staff Writer

"Homophobia," the fear of homosexuality, is a major obstacle which inhibits universities from acknowledging the needs of the homosexual portion of their communities, a speaker for the Women In Curriculum program said last week.

Lee Nicoloff, a staff psychologist, cooperating assistant professor in education and self-proclaimed homosexual, said things won't change for students until they change for faculty, staff and administrators.

"I see gay students out there taking risks on their own, without our help," Nicoloff said. "If things don't improve, most of them will go back in the closet when they graduate in order to get the kind of jobs we have. They won't be able to serve as role models for our next generation of undergraduates." She said men tend to be more homophobic than women for two reasons.

"One (reason) is that homosexuality is experienced as a threat to a system of male privilege, and the other, which is closely tied, is that we raise our male children from the time that they are very young to be terrified of being un-masculine," Nicoloff said.

She said the lesbian/gay rights movement could not have made the progress that it has made if it were not for parallel changes brought about by the feminist movement.

bian/gay studies courses, but the problem with these (courses) is they "tend to reach an audience which is already relatively well-informed."

"A gay/lesbian course shouldn't be used as an excuse to justify not integrating the subject (of homosexuality) into the curriculum in a broader way," Nicoloff said.

She said programs must be developed for those who work with homosexuals,

"The biggest problem with the curriculum is one of omission. Historically, editors, biographers and historians have hidden the truth about homosexuals' lives. ... An educational institution should be at the cutting edge of social change."

**—Lee Nicoloff, psychologist
at Cutler Health Center**

for the homosexuals themselves and to educate the general campus population.

"We (educators) must prepare ourselves by grappling with our own heterosexism and educating ourselves about the gay experience," Nicoloff said.

Another program for homosexual students could involve alcohol education

specifically targeted at gay students because, she said, the lesbian/gay population has a significantly higher rate of alcoholism than the general population.

In regard to policy changes, Nicoloff said administrative support is of the utmost importance.

"At the present time, UMO lacks a non-discrimination policy in regard to sexual orientation. This is an important

forces that have managed to defeat the ERA are also the forces of gay oppression," Nicoloff said.

Nicoloff said that when considering the homophobic attitudes of college undergraduates, it is necessary to consider the importance of developmental influences.

"Charlie Howard was murdered by a group of adolescent males. Most 'queer-bashing' is perpetuated by adolescent males. Two factors contribute to this phenomenon: adolescents are at a vulnerable stage in their psychosocial development, and they are at a dualistic stage in their cognitive development," Nicoloff said.

She said one goal of a college education is to move students beyond a dualistic level of thinking to a level where the individual is better able to tolerate difference.

"An educational institution should be at the cutting edge of social change," she said, "and I feel we're behind the cutting edge." There are things, Nicoloff said, which can be done to improve the plight of the homosexual student on campus. She said changes must come in the curriculum, new programs must be developed and policies must be changed.

"The biggest problem with the curriculum is one of omission," she said. "Historically, editors, biographers and historians have hidden the truth about homosexuals' lives." One way to change the curriculum content, she said, is through the development of les-

agenda," she said.

"When half of our university administrators, tenured faculty and professional staff are women and half of our secretaries are men, I think we will have made a giant leap toward equality for lesbian and gay people on our campus," Nicoloff said.

"It isn't coincidental that the same