

COLLEGIAN OP-ED

'No comment' sends message

Katherine Clark

The University of Richmond campus is a community of leaders. Nearly every soul you will meet here claims to be interested in leadership and leadership opportunities. Our administration and students have learned the politically correct vocabulary for organizational behavior: we form organizations to empower people, we support them, we share our feelings and we give each other all the "warm fuzzies" that are necessary to get through the complicated business of life in the '90s. Yet when The Collegian asked University of Richmond students, "How would you feel about a gay/lesbian/bisexual student organization on the UR campus?" in the "That's What You Think" section last week, UR students buttoned their politically correct lips and five blank spots, rather than pictures, appeared in the section, with the message: No comment.

The blank spaces were accompanied by weak and embarrassed excuses for the interviewees' inability to voice an opinion on the issue of the Lambda Coalition, a group that has recently formed on campus as a social organization and support network for gays and lesbians on campus.

The lack of response to the issue of homosexuality at the University is disturbing to me for several reasons. It shows that the UR students polled, as well as many other students who think as they do, are out of touch with reality on this issue. The inability to talk about or deal with homosexuality shows that these people believe themselves to be unaffected by this issue. It is not necessary for them to consider it, nor is it worthy of their consideration.

Worse, their silence sends a message to gays and lesbians on this campus that they are "offensive," and a "tough question." Sororities and fraternities, which are social organizations and which, for good or ill, seem to be at the heart of the heterosexual scene at UR, are completely acceptable to UR folks. However, the response in The Collegian (and the general atmosphere on campus) communicates unequivocally that the Lambda Coalition is not acceptable. Only heterosexuals can be leaders, or be empowered, sanctioned or supported at UR.

Is this what we really think? Are UR students living so far back in the Dark Ages that they couldn't have answered The Collegian's poll with some variation on the hackneyed (but reliable) "live and let live" theme? Couldn't they have answered as if they were running for Congress, something along the lines of "while I do not practice homosexual sex myself (or don't admit to it), I support every person's right to choose." I suppose that "No Comment" is honest—I'll grant these students that much, at least—but to me, this "honesty" reflects a narrow-mindedness, bigotry and homophobia which I am ashamed to witness at the University of Richmond. It is my guess—and my hope—that these students were also ashamed that they were unwilling to let their community see who they are. That way, at least, the Lambda Coalition and those who genuinely support them would know where they stand at the University of Richmond.

Ed. note: Some people have expressed concern that last week's That's what You Think section was created by The Collegian staff to make a point. This is not the case. The Collegian tried on Monday and Tuesday of last week to collect opinions on the question, How would you feel about a gay/lesbian/bisexual student organization on the UR campus? No one would make a comment on the record. The comments listed under the picture boxes were representative responses given for not wanting to comment in The Collegian about this subject.