

Senate Forum on Sexual Orientation Amendment

11/1/05

6 pm

Gano Assembly

Ground Rules

1. 60 minutes of discussion (with possibility for 15 minute extension)
2. Dr. Pratt will moderate – his and cabinet’s decisions are final
3. An atmosphere of respect and civility is requested and maintained

Brad Dixon’s Rationale

I propose that sexual orientation be added to the list of qualities that we, as a student body, affirm should be protected from discrimination.

I am doing this for two reasons. One: there is a significant number of students on campus who feel that this addition should be made. And Two: I personally feel that this issue is an important one and deserves full consideration. Our campus has been silent and idle about this issue for long enough. I am painfully aware that this issue has caused division and animosity in the past, but I don’t believe that that is a good enough reason to stand by and accept the status quo. I do not pretend that this issue is a simple one. In fact, it is an issue over which I have been torn my years here at Jewell. The intersection between religion, morality and public life has always proven to be difficult ground to navigate. This remains true, even in an environment such as Jewell.

I would like to briefly explain where I am coming from and why I have made this decision. I have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord of my Life. I do whatever I can to show the love of Christ through both my words and actions. As most Christians do, I fail miserably. I recognize that and I strive every day to come closer to and reflect God’s image. This is the basis upon which I confront this issue. The question of whether homosexuality is a sin, I believe, is irrelevant as to whether people with alternative lifestyles deserve to be safe from discrimination on campus. Jewell promotes itself as being a community of faith and learning and is striving toward the noble goal of increasing diversity. I do believe that to be the case. But being a community of faith does not mean discriminating against those with whom we disagree or disapprove. The foundation upon which Christianity stands is very simple. It is to love God with all your heart, your soul and mind and, secondly, love your neighbor as yourself. The challenge that Jesus gave to us is not to root out sinful people and condemn them, but to love them as Jesus loves us. For the basis of human dignity lies in the fact that while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us. I do not claim to be a theologian and I am not here to argue points of doctrine. I am here to say that every child of God deserves to be treated in a certain way and to deny this respect due to God’s children, because of sexual orientation, is not only wrong but also sinful.

I have been considering these points for many years now. It is possible that I am making them sound more simple than they really are. But I keep coming back to a simple scenario that makes my decision painfully clear. Could you imagine with me a scene in which a mob is about to murder a homosexual by stoning him or her. Can you imagine what Jesus would do when coming across that scene? I can’t imagine him saying well done, you have rooted out sin among you, cast the stone and rid us of this plague on society. That is not the Jesus I know and this is not the Jesus that I am learning to love more, day by day. The Jesus I know would confront the mob and say he who is without sin cast the first stone. What I am saying to you is that

discrimination is that stone and it is neither our right nor our duty to cast it. In saying that we have no right to discriminate against homosexuals, we are not promoting that behavior. Jesus protected a woman caught in the act of adultery. He was not protecting adultery but admonishing it, while at the same protecting a child of God, who has infinite value.

There are many fronts that are being fought in the culture wars. Christian morality, every day, is being fought against, ridiculed and disrespected and there are proper fronts through which to fight the secularization of America. But this is not one of those fronts. This is not a left wing agenda or homosexual activism, but a plea for all Christians to recognize the inherent dignity of every person and, to show Christ's love through respect and tolerance rather than condemnation. I look forward to discussing this issue with the whole of Senate and the campus community, and I urge everyone to give this the consideration that it deserves.

-Bradley Dixon, Class of 2006

The Amendment:

A Proposed Amendment to the Student Bill of Rights submitted by Bradley Dixon on October 25th, 2005.

Section one clause four of the Student bill of rights currently reads:

“All persons are equal and shall not be discriminated against on the basis of sex, physical limitations, race, ethnicity, or religion“

I propose that the clause be amended to add sexual orientation to the list. The proposed change would result in the line reading:

“All persons are equal and shall not be discriminated against on the basis of sex, physical limitations, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.”

Discussion

1. CON- Bryan Peters- As one who hopes to be faithful to the commands of Jesus Christ, I want to firmly assert the relevance of those commands for our campus today. IN light of events that have transpired over the past few years, it is truly time to address the harassment and disrespect that some students have suffered. Regardless of whether or not we agree with every belief or practice of an individual, Christ should lead us to treat them as part of a common humanity, created in the image of God and loved by Him. As a campus, we should denounce with firm resolve any physical or verbal harassment of any person. If we are to call ourselves Christians, the labels of “fag” or “queer” should be nowhere near our lips. If we are living Christ's love, the words “that's so gay” must be beneath us and indeed abhorrent to us. A Christian campus must strive to be a place of safety for all, where love is the rule, not fear. We must make this clear without wavering. I personally wish to offer my room as a place of safety. I promise to respect and extend the love of Christ to you, regardless of who you are. Friends, physical and spiritual violence must be condemned. The question that is now before us must be of clarity of message, not of content. Again, let me make clear that my issue is with the clarity of the intended language, not the intent as I have understood it. The words

discrimination and sexual orientation are undefined and may not send the intention they are meant to.

2. PRO- Chris Carr- Speaking on behalf of UNITY. We the student diversity organization UNITY, have as our mission statement: to promote a better world, with equality, opportunity, and freedom for all. This is regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, physical handicap, socio-economic status, gender identity, or sexual orientation. We therefore as an organization support the amendment to the Student Bill of Rights for the following reasons: 1. Today's college represents a microcosm of an increasingly diverse and multicultural society. A wide disparity in backgrounds between the faculty, staff and students has serious implications for the institution of education. An inclusive school culture works to affirm, not just tolerate, differences. Issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, class, religion, etc., must be addressed in any plan that seeks to build a truly inclusive foundation. 2. Young people are particularly vulnerable to discrimination. Discriminatory policies in an educational institution may increase stress and cause anxiety or depression that inhibits learning. The denial of access to opportunities to network professionally may jeopardize students' professional advancement. 3. Finally, discrimination is wrong. We at UNITY look forward to the day when gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans gendered people no longer have to fear the loss of their jobs on the basis of their sexual orientation. When that day comes, our society will have taken another step forward in assuring justice and equality for all of its citizens.

3. CON: James Luce: Despite my association with UNITY and my agreement with Brad on many points, I believe the amendment in its current text is problematic. I fail to see need for list of characteristics against which to discriminate. I suggest an inclusive amendment so as to protect as many people as possible. Example: "All students are equal and shall not be discriminated upon." This, in my opinion, meets the needs of the student body most adequately.

4. PRO- Sean Riordan- I think that in the current atmosphere of US, these issues are present and prevalent in many different areas. They are much a part of the political scene. It's important as a student body to take a stance and set ourselves on one side or another. By taking this amendment it will place us on the right side in fair treatment of everyone, especially dealing with these hot issues.

5. Question - Stephanie Gonzales: What does the Senate mean by "discrimination?"

Response: Brad - We know it when we see it. Homosexuality is a hot button issue. The answer is apparent. It's not putting one group in front of another. Does CSM have the right to discriminate? Individual instances call for individual responses. It is a statement of expectation...people who are homosexual should not be discriminated against by the student body. We don't want to be restricted by precisely defining discrimination. It should be open to interpretation and should be in place to protect the rights of all students. This is the full intent of the amendment.

6. CON: Josh Hastey: I'm not representing CSM, but as a CSM team leader, one interesting point is a blunted meaning of behavior and orientation. They are often used synonymously. Everyone has certain tendencies to sin in certain areas, and if everyone were discriminated against for a tendency to sin, there would be no one on CSM. I don't want someone to want to be a CSM leader and then have their application declined, then

cause file a complaint against CSM. This is something I can see down the road if this amendment is passed.

7. PRO- Tristan Hooker- If you are worried about behavior, what is your concern with this amendment? A main part of it is an association between behavior and orientation has become so close that there is not distinction when people talk. It's hard to tell what someone means when they say orientation and behavior. When it comes down to it, does it mean that they're merely attracted or that they act on that attraction. I'm with Bryan in that we certainly do not want any slander, or anything like that, I'm merely worried about the wording of the amendment.

8. Question & Response - Sean Riordan - "Both of you mentioned that you don't like the wording and the clarity. Do you have any suggestions for wording that would get the message across and address your concerns?"

Brian Peters (Response):

- a) Keep amendment language but add some point of clarification from, for instance, the Supreme Court decision: *Boy Scouts v. Dale*
- b) Get orientation out and religion out. Those two things aren't the same thing as race, gender and ethnicity. Religious discrimination and sexual discrimination should be addressed in a Senate resolution, not the Senate Bill of Rights.
- c) James Luce - No student shall be discriminated against.
- d) Bryan - Replace sexual orientation and discrimination with words we can all agree upon, but it might take away from what the clause currently says
- e) about race, ethnicity, and gender.

9. PRO- Calvin Straughter- I disagree with James that it should read to discriminate or not discriminate against anyone. This is running from the issue at hand. The issue should not be tolerated. It should be accepted. You can't love someone without learning how to tolerate them. If we run from the issue we are not acting in love. We are not doing what is right.

10. Ben Parrott- Going back to Brad's definition, I think there's a logical problem with saying that there will be a subjective judgment of discrimination. We'll treat it more as an expectation. Maybe an objective statement needs to be made saying all acts of discrimination are wrong. The alternative route we take ought to be that objective statement, not leaving it subjective in nature.

11. Question - James Luce: "I'm curious when we are all saying that we're all saying this is a political issue. But we aren't addressing anything in this debate except homosexuality. There are other forms of sexual orientation. For instance, it could be argued that heterosexuals are discriminated against by the current visitation policy. Just a question."

12. STATEMENT: Stephanie Gonzales : Suggestion for language: Replace discrimination with harassment. Response: Emily Abdoler: I don't believe replacing discrimination with harassment is enough. It goes beyond harassment to having all people have their rights protected in every case.

13. PRO- Alex Williams- I was going to say regarding the discrimination thing- Right now this is an individual's choice or tendency to be homosexual which I don't agree with. I don't think there are many problems with the discrimination based on religion as it is included in the bill of rights. Leaving the sexual orientations phrase out of the bill of

rights leaves it open for sexual orientation to be basis on which people are discriminated upon. It needs to be added so there is no possibility of the said discrimination

14. CON: Darin Smith - Two questions for Brad: a) "You said that you don't believe whether or not homosexuality is a sin is an issue. But what is your stance...yes or no? And how do you equate this with our college's mission statement (loyalty to the ideals of Christ." Brad - "Yes, I think homosexuality is a sin, but I think that point is irrelevant. Loyal to the ideals of Christ? Now that's where this issue gets sticky. What would happen if a campus discriminated against homosexuals? They would leave and we wouldn't have the chance to show them love. One of the two most important commandments is to love thy neighbor with all thy heart and mind. To have an all-inclusive clause is to skirt the issue. We are showing homosexuals Christ's love through tolerance and, who knows, acceptance. By adding this clause, we are being more loyal to the ideals of Christ. We may not agree on everything, but I love you because you are a child of God. We need to open our hearts and our minds to all people. This is the greatest witness of all.

15. CON- Emily Fine: Question: Does this mean the campus will have to allow something like the Gay/Straight Alliance?

Response: Dr. Pratt: No

Response: Dean Winslow: In 1998 the college administration and trustees received a request from a pro-homosexual student organization. The trustees would not allow written recognition of such an organization, but did not specify that unrecognized groups of this nature could not meet. The trustees have not discussed the issue since 1998.

Response: Colin: The student bill of rights is not an administrative document.

16. Josh Hastey- What is the senate's response to the amendment to the amendments of the Bill of Rights? Dr. Pratt- There is a process for changing the amendment that the senate will follow in the next few weeks.

17. CON: Allison Pulliam: Brad, I appreciate the compassion you have for those who feel discriminated against. I agree with that. But the word that gets me is "tolerate." I believe our highest calling as Christians is to love people to the extent Christ did. However, I don't feel that Christ "tolerated" lifestyle of sin. I believe homosexuality is a sin. I don't think it's okay for us to slander others w/ homosexual tendencies. Alcoholism is a choice. Where do you draw the line between choice and behavior? Between homosexuality and pedophilism? We should love the person, but we should not tolerate the act of sin.

18. PRO- Courtney Herren: It was my understanding that the proposal did not include the word "tolerate." It was the word "discriminate" and there is a distinct difference between the two.

19. CON- Johnny Fuggitt- I think that we need to be sure to differentiate between personal acts of discrimination and by the school. All the examples of discrimination that have been given are personal acts of discrimination as opposed to discrimination by the school. I don't think I've heard of a single act of discrimination in regards to the school that this amendment is in relation to. I don't think there'll be a tangible effect as there's not a problem. There are negative issues that might come about as we struggle with this issue. Once it goes on to the books, it'll never go off. It seems as though it's been brought up and brought up until it finally passes because we're tired of hearing about it.

20. Tristin Hooker - In response to Johnny, I think the issue is being brought up again and again because there are problems with it. And I feel that personal issues of discrimination *are* covered by this clause. There are students who feel they need to be protected. In regards to image, I feel that this issue can have positive and negative connotations, depending on how you feel about it, depending on how you would vote, so that really isn't an issue.

21. STATEMENT: Chelsie Caldwell: There is a difference in what the students expect and what the college rules are. Faculty and administrators are not currently allowed to discriminate for any reason. This is not a matter of legal issue because the document does affect college policy. It is important to note that this discrimination will not happen anyway according to college policy. Response: Rick Winslow: The college has policy in place against harassment or threats against any student. The student bill of rights is a document for the students by the students. The student bill of rights does not have legal power in that college policy will not be affected by such an amendment.

22. Bryan Peters- Would this govern senate? Must senate abide by this student bill of rights? Would there be any effect of the funding/spending of Student Senate? Rick Winslow- Nothing in the Student Senate constitution ties the senate's decision making to the student bill of rights, but does direct Student Senate toward this bill of rights. Senate cannot recognize any groups that the Board of Trustees doesn't recognize.

23. Sean Riordan - Response to Johnny. It is very important to decide on the amendment now. When we failed the amendment the first time, it dealt a very serious blow to our image to a liberal arts constitution. It said that the students of Jewell feel they can discriminate on the basis of homosexuality. That image is deplorable, and I am in no way in favor of it. I feel it is important we address this issue now.

24. Kristin Lehmer: QUESTION: How are other schools based on Christian beliefs approaching this issue?

RESPONSE: Dr. Pratt: Rick and I have done lots of research looking at schools affiliated with Baptist churches and we've looked at our aspirant colleges and we've looked at colleges with not religious affiliated. By and large, most schools follow their denomination's stance. Methodist and Presbyterian schools follow their official church statements. There are a few Baptist schools that have it. Most aspirant schools have it on their nondiscriminatory clause.

QUESTION: Kristin: In your research, is it well-known that a school recognizes this?

RESPONSE: Dr. Pratt: It's available on their website.

25. Michael Armato- When you searched through and found that most colleges follow what their religious affiliations set out, did these college receive funding that dictated certain restrictions that these colleges had to follow? Dr. Pratt- Most of these colleges didn't have the funding mechanisms Baptists have. They didn't receive significant funding and therefore didn't lose a significant amount. When there is an atmosphere of openness, the students are more likely to follow those atmospheres of openness. Armato- It seems that this would make a big difference in the schools money wise. In the Baptist schools that don't have this amendment, is it possibly be because of this funding issue? Dr. Pratt- Definitely. Could I conclude that since these Baptist organizations fund their schools that way, the student body's feel could be directly unrelated to the bill of rights

due to the funding restriction? Dr. Pratt- As we have differences of perspective on our campus, you will find differences of perspective on other campuses as well.

26. Alex Williams - Comment on Johnny. Bringing this vote every four years? It barely failed last time. We aren't trying to ram this into the student body. It is a split issue. It would be wrong to restrict students from bringing up this issue. Also, there are students who feel discriminated against. We don't want Senate to have a monopoly on what is right/wrong. We need to send this issue to the Student Body to get the true feelings of the student body.

27. SUPPORT: Bryan Peters: Two Questions. To Sean: Do you think that all organizations should be open to all regardless of sexual orientation?

Response: Sean: Yes. Absolutely

To Bryan to Brad: Same question.

Brad: No answer

Dr. Pratt: The answer is no

Bryan: The message we're sending means equal opportunity in leadership and membership

Brad: This does not apply to organization because this is in regard to personal action. It should also be noted that this is already how the campus is run – that no person shall be discriminated against. This is a document of student expectation only and if people interpret it differently is there a problem. I understand what you are getting at and it doesn't apply in this situation.

Bryan: Because there are so many different interpretations within Senate alone, there are going to be many interpretations in the student body and perception outside the college.

28. Jonathon- What is our denominational affiliation? Dr. Pratt- We have a covenant relationship with American Baptist Church USA renewed last year and lasts for 5 years. There's nothing binding in that document but there is a few ideas set out

29. James Luce - The opposition to this on many levels. Like Sean said. People watch this debate. Is it worth sending this to the student body and risk looking bad? Media will be coming in on both sides.

30. Lilia- First, we never addressed what Josh said about orientation mixed with behavior. It is a status, which is why we have it included in the bill of rights. Secondly it's important that we make a statement in the bill of rights so that it will be completely clear lastly- not the issue at hand, our talking that is important it's important that this goes to the student body so that the student body can have say in this process.

31. Courtney Herren: I'd like to speak to the amendment and to the importance of this conversation on our campus. We can all recognize the value of this conversation. Everyone here as been in GEN 100 and knows the importance of a dissenting opinion. I hope that no one leaves here thinking this conversation is futile or unimportant. The idea of "saving face" is abhorrent. Talk about it with other students and with people outside of the campus.

32. Chris Carr- I agree with many comments. My comment is that I think for this issue it's an oxymoron for what we believe as a college. It's up to us to decide about this, like our admissions packet says, we challenge the status quo. The issue is standing up for what we believe rather than worrying about how we appear to the community.

33. Rachel Ibok: I do think it is important for the student body to get to vote. We do not want the Senators to make our decisions for us. It should not be stopped so we can “save face.” The student body should be allowed to vote and decide for itself.

34. Josh Hastey: I would like to respond. I would like to reiterate that my biggest issue isn't the intent of the message of Brad. I agree that harassment of anyone for any reason is unacceptable. I think the wording could be more clear – whether to be clarified to promote a behavior or clarified to prevent discrimination. I hope this discussion continues and Senate thinks very carefully.

35. Colin- In closing I'd like to thank everyone for coming tonight.

Senate Business

Present: Colin Chambers, Emily Abdoler, Tim Perkins, Kate Prather, Mary Ann Hollander, Caitie France, Tyler Folan, Kristen Lehmer, Morgan Romine, Sara Branson, Alex Williams, Krystle Chase, Johnny Fuggitt, Jessica Fiebig, Michael Armato, Chelsie Caldwell, Brad Dixon, Sean Riordan, Andrew Eaton

Confirm Senators: We have nominated Sean Riordan for senior senator and Krystle Chase for sophomore senator. We will vote to confirm: Sean Riordan for: 13 against: 0 abstain: 3. Krystle Chase for: 16 against: 0 abstain: 0

Dinner at Sallee's: Respond to her email!

Hayride: Meeting at 5:30 behind the union on Saturday the 5th