

# Sexual Non-education

By Ralph Speas

Following is a very brief chronological account of the history of sexual non-education at Downtown Guilford College, from the author's point of view.

When I first began teaching at Downtown Guilford College in the summer of 1969, I proposed to school authorities that a course in Human Sexual Behavior be offered for credit and made a permanent functioning part of the sociology curriculum. The original proposal included a course description, detailed subject outline, suggested text and a bibliographical list of some 400 resources prepared and collected over a seven year period specifically for a course of this type. A significant portion of my own graduate academic training and intent had been directed toward this specific goal.

In keeping with standard recommendations for starting new courses like this in a given community, the course was to be staffed by a variety of local and regional guest lecturers, whose efforts would be coordinated by myself and student committee leaders as discussants. No effort was made to elicit support from any other segment of the college community since it was my feeling that the course was of sufficient value, quality and need that it should stand on its own. Those of you older and wiser in these matters are already sadly shaking your heads - and rightfully so. Not only was the proposal not accepted, it suffered the fate of benign neglect for the next two years. From time to time I would discreetly bring up the subject as to how consideration of my proposal was coming along, and would be just as discreetly informed the time was not yet right. Eventually I got the message - I was the only one who seemed to feel the great need for such a course on our campus and my tactics of gentle persuasion were being read as weakness and indecision in the face of an opposition which never had to take me seriously.



Photo by Catoe

Well, what to do? Perhaps I hadn't done as good a job as I should have in the first place in presenting the whole idea, so I started over. A new proposal was drawn and submitted in Oct. 1971, with considerably more extensive reasoning and support for the course. An enlarged bibliography and sample examination were included. Remaining, of course, were the plans to utilize various Greensboro area resource people in the instructional phase, including some from our own sociology faculty. Student support was actively sought and received for the first time in a concerted way. Articles began to appear in the student newspaper regarding the proposed course and subject areas. An air of anticipation and confidence could be felt by this author in campus discussions with interested staff and students. The expressed view of several was that the subject matter was simply too important and needed to be held back further and that those making the final decision would soon give the OK to go ahead with the course.

I was wrong again. Resistance stiffened. Word came from the chairman of the department of sociology that there was just no way the course could be offered at that time. I requested and received a meeting (Feb. 18, 1972) between myself and other members of the sociology faculty in an effort to bridge whatever gaps might exist in that direction. Perhaps they simply didn't realize what was involved, or the importance of providing course material of this nature at this crucial time to our students. After all it was so very clear to me. I must confess I was surprised at the degree of antagonism and even outright hostility expressed toward the idea of this course on the part of some of those present - a depth of feeling I hadn't previously realized existed. And some of this hostility appeared directed at me - the perpetrator - the troublemaker. (Yes, Virginia, Ralph is still pretty naive about some

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things.) I was literally shocked, and it took me a bit to regain my composure. I backpedaled by handing around evidence of my competence to be promoting such audacious subject matter at this school; (I had a need to protect my bruised ego, and perhaps they hadn't heard!). Obviously I had seriously miscalculated the feelings and knowledge of the subject matter by these people who were sitting in judgement of me and the proposed sex course. Certainly each of those sitting in that room on main campus approximately one year ago will have their own version of what occurred, and if you are sufficiently motivated (if you really give a damn) you should take the trouble to question each of those involved as to their interpretation of what occurred.

Well, what would you have done? I made it clear that if there were any objection to me personally as instructor for the course I of course would withdraw any connection whatsoever I had with the project in order to get it off the ground, if that's what it would take. Let someone, anyone they wanted, take over as coordinator and get the show on the road. No, no, that wasn't the problem - as the meeting changed now to a more conciliatory mood. Certainly my qualifications were most competent for what I had been proposing, they said. Well, what then, was the hang up? Briefly, here is what I have recorded in my notes of that meeting:

The Dean of Students, who sat in on the meeting, indicated that "the administration," (that rather convenient, nameless authority from on high) was pressuring against such a course at that time. The rationale given was that this subject matter of a full-credit, full semester course in Human Sexuality was already approached or covered in the existing Marriage and Family course, and the budget was simply too tight at this time to allow another course to be introduced into the curriculum. As I said, there had been a serious lack of communication here. The sociology department chairman, in light of this official attitude of the administration, was of course reluctant to introduce any new course at this time. Therefore, it was with regret that the decision to continue to refuse the Human Sexuality course must stand.

Again - what to do? Give up? "If you push this any further, Ralph, you're gonna lose your job for sure." Naw, it

I said, these people aren't like that. It's just that they don't understand yet how important this course is for this overall benefit of the entire student body. It's just a matter of presenting them with enough evidence in a more convincing way - then they'll see the light. (I know - you're saying to yourself this guy will never learn). At any rate, I pushed now harder than ever. This authority was consulted, then that one; and so

on until I had some really interesting and sometimes conflicting advice on how to deal best with this particular situation. And the introduction of sex education and human sexuality into a given community or college must be dealt with as just that each time a unique situation strategy designed specifically for that place and situation.

Putting together what I had been trained to do as a professional sex educator and what advice I was given from

comment and quite favorable reaction from many in the college community. A few weeks later, the phone call from Dr. Zopf came - the four semester hour credit course HUMAN SEXUALITY to be taught and coordinated by this author, was now officially a part of the Downtown Guilford College Sociology curriculum! Needless to say those of us who had believed in the need for this course and had worked so hard for its acceptance were grateful

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various people in the field as of this particular situation, I asked the editors and staff of the downtown campus paper URBAN WORD to aid in determining how many students actually wanted to take such a course and would sign up for it, once offered. Not what they said they would do - would they commit themselves on paper? With an article featuring Mary Calderone, a Quaker grandmother heading up SIECUS - The Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (of which I am a charter member) a questionnaire was provided in the next issue asking students whether or not they felt the Human Sexuality course should be offered, and if they would enroll, should it be included in the curriculum. The following issue of the URBAN WORD (March 9, 1972) reported that of 143 replies, 137 were in favor of offering the course, but the number of those indicating willingness to sign up was not reported. Also appearing in that issue were two letters commending the students for promoting this needed service for the well-being of the student body from two leading teachers of already successful courses of this type - one from Chapel Hill and the other from Michigan State University. Nothing but compliments now from those who formerly had so opposed my proposals such a short time ago. It appeared the strategy of gathering about us the strength and support of a national character was paying off.

In March of 1972 I attended my usual annual meeting of the AASEC - The American Association of Sex Educators and Counselors, and reported the meeting in a rather lengthy article in the April 19, 1972 URBAN WORD. Again, no adverse

that the students would now have greater access to such factual information in a positive academic setting. (I was personally elated!) I didn't understand though, exactly why we couldn't begin the coming fall semester of 1972; but then I was so grateful just to get the course started at all for the Spring 1973 semester that I offered no objection. I worked hard at refining the course offerings during the following summer. In the Oct. 6, 1972 URBAN WORD the administratively determined qualifications for those students enrolling in the course were printed. Again, I felt most of the restrictions were unnecessarily harsh, but didn't question them for fear of jeopardizing the course. After all, this was a pioneering effort that was finally paying off and I wasn't about to do anything to upset the applecart! To be limited to 15 students maximum, sociology majors were required to have taken Introductory Sociology, Social Problems, and Marriage & the Family. Psychology majors had to have previously taken General Abnormal and Development Psychology. Presumably no other students could enroll at this time. Perhaps, I reasoned, things would loosen up a bit later as the course gained greater acceptance.

Soon after that article appeared, I was informed by a Downtown Campus official that the course was cancelled. ZAP! Just like that. Gone. Out. Damn near like all that had gone before had never

happened, had never really made a difference, I expect that all the emotions you would expect me to have surely did run through my mind. Then I sat down to find out what had happened this time

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