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Gay Leader Awaits Action

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When Robert Elkins' parents discovered he was president of the Gay Student Union at the University of Virginia, they threatened to cut off his financial support and disown him.

"It will take six months, maybe a year to clear up that situation," the second-year student from Silver Springs, Md. said.

But Elkins has more to worry about than his parents. He also must concern himself with a committee which began meeting this week to determine whether he will be permitted to retain his position as resident advisor in Hancock dormitory at the University and his leadership of UVA's gay students.

"What I think we will be looking into is the possible conflict of interest which might develop

with Bob being both a resident advisor and president of the GSU (Gay Student Union)," Resident Staff co-Chairman Mark Giles said. Giles is one of eight members of the ad hoc committee which will send a recommendation on whether Elkins will retain his dormitory job to University President Frank L. Hereford, the initiator of the inquiry.

Hereford, whose membership in racially segregated Farmington Country Club was successfully challenged last year because of its possible conflict with stated affirmative action objectives of UVA, has refused comment on the Elkins case.

Elkins says he is uncertain how Hereford learned of his GSU presidency.

"I just know he only found out a couple of weeks ago and became concerned with its effect on alumni and the Board of

Visitors," Elkins said.

The GSU president's performance as resident advisor, however, is not in question, according to students in Hancock dorm, resident advisors, the University's dean of students and even members of Hereford's committee.

"He has been under a magnifying glass since the beginning of the year," Giles said. "He has done well and has proven himself many times over.

"If the issue were only over the situation at Hancock dorm, there probably wouldn't even be a committee," he added.

But there is a bigger issue—the issue of Elkins' homosexuality and his role as promoter and supporter of the gay cause as GSU president.

A statement issued today by the GSU discounts allusions that Elkins might proselytize.

"The purpose of the GSU is to promote an understanding of gay people; it is not to convert anyone to homosexuality," the written statement explained. "There is no conflict between our purpose and Mr. Elkins' position as resident advisor."

This is not, however, the first time the question of how his homosexuality would affect his performance as an advisor was posed to Elkins. In fact, according to the second-year student, it was the main theme of an interview he had prior to being selected as a resident advisor and a subsequent interview with Asst. Dean of Students Chester Titus.

"I was asked time and again if I thought there would be any conflict and I believed that my explanations of my own attitude satisfied the resident staff in-

See GAY, Page B12

★Gay

Continued from Page B1
interviewers and administrators," Elkins said.

At the time of the interviews, Elkins held the post of vice president of the union.

Resident advisors at the University are picked on the basis of results from written tests and several interviews. They are scored quantitatively and those with the highest scores are selected. According to one member of the resident staff committee, there are seven students seeking each advisor position open each year.

Elkins has retained Charlottesville attorney John Lowe who says no definite decision to sue the University will be made until after a recommendation is made by the committee.

Lowe said recently he is "confident" the committee will decide in favor of Elkins, "judging him fully qualified to be a resident advisor."

"The thing which is most dismaying about this," the lawyer said, "is the fact that Bob made a full disclosure to everyone about his position with the GSU. Now President Hereford comes around and subjects this young man and his family to national publicity and attempts to second guess the people who made the original decision that Bob was competent and

qualified."

As Lowe sees it, "being a gay RA is no different than being one who is black or Jewish or Republican."

One New York American Civil Liberties attorney told The Daily Progress that Elkins would have a viable suit if his advisor post is taken away from him.

According to Carrington Boggan, who has done extensive research for the ACLU in the area of sexual privacy, precedents are "mostly in Elkins' favor."

Elkins has received support from other student organizations including the Black Student Alliance and two women's groups. The University's Student Council has also considered passing a motion in his favor.

But this will not be the first time the Gay Student Union has contemplated going to court because of the actions of UVA administrators. According to GSU officers, a defense fund has been raised to challenge the denial by the Board of Visitors to allow the Student Council to allocate funds to the GSU.

They see the creation of the committee and the denial for funding as "undermining student self-government at the University."