

Merrill gets Law petition

By AMY LEMLEY
and MARIE JOYCE

The Gay and Lesbian Law Students Association presented Law School Dean Richard Merrill with a petition yesterday asking the school's admissions committee to adopt a policy of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, member Kenneth Williams said, and make that policy known to applicants.

The petition, signed by 450 Law students, calls for the University to make such a policy "explicit to an applicant, like other policies of non-discrimination already specified in the admissions materials."

Merrill said he supports the principle of the petition, adding, "the application is the key document — many more people get that than any other document."

Merrill said he will propose the policy to Law School faculty members today, where he said he does not anticipate a conflict.

If there are no faculty objections, he said, "I have no other base that I have to touch" to make the policy official for applications starting in 1985.

"Because Virginia is a national law school, it should be at the forefront of the civil rights and gay rights movement," Williams said.

"The other top-ten law schools have statements similar to this on their admissions applications," he said. "We think it's noticeable that U.Va. doesn't."

They are presenting the petition during Gay Awareness Week because, "we wanted to do it when a lot of attention was focused on gay awareness," Williams said.

Williams said the group is not accusing the admissions committee of discrimination.

"We talked to the Assistant Dean of Admissions [Jerome Stokes], and he told us there is no overt discrimination against gay people at the Law School," he said.

But "there is some indication that a lot of gay people are apprehensive about coming to Virginia," Williams added, "I think that we have found that openly gay students often are very hesitant to come to the University Law School because of what they perceive as a conservative environment."

The apprehension stems from the fact that Charlottesville is a small southern town, GALLSA member Rob Berry noted.

But another member, Richard Avidon, said, "People here, however conservative, are pretty tolerant — they're Law students and they believe in civil rights and do not consider [sexual preference] a relevant reason to discriminate," noting the policy

GALLSA—

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change generated "broad support" from Law students.

One of GALLSA's goals is to "raise consciousness," Williams said. "That's the reason we got the petition instead of just approaching Dean Merrill; we wanted to make it a civil and human rights issue."

If the petition is accepted, the new policy will appear on the admissions application along with statements of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex and physical handicaps already on Law School applications, Williams said.

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