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Ignorance isn't bliss

To the Editor:

Once again, reactionaries rear their ugly heads. In the spirit of Jesse Helms, William Dannemeyer and John Cardinal O'Connor, Barnard administrators recently decided to muzzle the AIDS Peer Educators. Besides being blatantly unconstitutional, the decision is an ignorant health policy.

Instead of lauding these students for their life-saving work, the administration has chosen to deprive the Barnard community of vital information needed to halt the spread of AIDS, which is now the number-one killer of women between the ages of 18 and 34 in New York City. Dr. Harriet Mogul of Barnard Health Services claims that the group's information is unprofessional and outdated, yet by her own admission she has never seen the group's presentation. Worse, she has offered no alternative AIDS education programs to the community.

Mogul also asserts that the peer educators "promote" the use of condoms, implying that people are being misled as to condoms' efficacy in preventing AIDS. First of all, the group does not "promote" condoms; the purpose of AIDS education is to present **all** the alternatives for stopping HIV transmission, and it is the student who ultimately decides what action to take to protect him or herself. Secondly, nowhere in any safe sex literature does it say that condoms are 100 percent effective. Mogul knows this, yet she also knows that condoms are the best protection available for those who do choose to have intercourse.

Yes, AIDS is "much harder than just unrolling a condom," but education must start somewhere.

Finally, Barnard General Counsel Kathryn Rodgers's contention that "the information should be given by doctors, not undergraduates," is an insult to AIDS educators and any other student health volunteer. Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) holds AIDS education programs all over New York City. Their information is rarely presented by doctors, yet as a result of their work, HIV transmission rates in the gay community have plummeted. Furthermore, Barnard does not require that rape crisis counselors be psychiatrists, nor that information about other sexually transmitted diseases be disseminated by doctors. Why must there be a different standard for AIDS education?

Barnard may decide, as many colleges have, to ignore AIDS. If one single Barnard woman becomes infected this year, I hope that Rodgers and Mogul are prepared to face that student and her family and defend their decision.

Thaddeus Grimes-Gruczka, CC '90