Tufts Students March On Washington

by BRETT THORN

An estimated 35 students from Tufts participated in the National Lesbian and Gay March on Washington on Sunday, October 11, according to Tufts Lesbian and Gay Community member Peter Dunn.

Dunn said that the march, which was the largest demonstration in Washington since the 1969 march in protest of the Vietnam War, was an attempt to raise the consciousness of the Lesbian and Gay community and to increase its visibility in society.

Participants estimate that 6 to 7 hundred thousand people marched from behind the White House to the capitol building, a distance of about six blocks. It took six hours for everyone participating to complete the march.

Though the vast majority of media coverage focused on issues concerning AIDS, the main thrust of the march, as far as participants were concerned, was involved with issues concerning Gay and Lesbian civil rights.

"We have no rights, can be fired from our jobs...kicked out of our house with no legal recourse.... In 25 out of 50 states our being is illegal," said Dunn, noting that homosexuals are one of the largest minorities in the United States but have no representative rights.

Civil rights issues covered, according to TLGC-leader John Orcutt, included the rights of Gays and Lesbians to adopt children and to marry. In line with this, a mass wedding was held on the steps of the Internal Revenue Service building. This was in protest of the government's refusal to allow Gays and Lesbians to marry, preventing them from receiving the tax breaks available to married couples. "The government doesn't consider homosexual relationships legal," he said.

Though not its central focus, some of the most emotional moments of the march occurred while AIDS-related issues were raised, particularly during the presentation of the "Names Project." The project manifested itself in a giant quilt, made as a memorial to victims of AIDS.

The quilt was made of nearly 2,000 3 by 6 foot panels, each dedicated to a victim of AIDS. Each panel was decorated by the family, lover, or friends of the victim. One was dedicated to a former Tufts faculty member who died of AIDS, Orcutt said.

Dunn described the "Names Project" ceremony, saying that "with the exception of the sound of sobbing, 600,000 people stood silently."

The issue of the low priority that the US government has given to AIDS was also raised. "We spend more money on one [nuclear] sub than has been spent on all AIDS research," said Dunn.

Despite the importance that they place on AIDS research, TLGC members were disappointed that it was the only issue upon which the "heterosexual press" focused. They also felt that the march was given an inadequate amount of media coverage, and that the importance of the march was played down. Orcutt noted that most media grossly underestimated the number of participants in the march (some claiming that as few as 100,000 participants were involved). He also noted that heterosexual speakers at the march such as Whoopi Goldberg limited their discussions to AIDS-related issues.

Overall, though, participants from Tufts were pleased with the March. Dunn said that is was worthwhile simply in that "when you have 600,000 people gather in one area, you tend to be more involved." He said that the march was positive in that it stressed the positive aspects of homosexuality. "Being gay is not a tragedy...it is a positive and upbeat experience," he said.

Orcutt was particularly pleased with the fact that many heterosexuals from Tufts participated in the march, noting that some of them are now attending TLGC meetings regularly. He also commented on the fact that a heterosexual in one of his classes who went to the march was wearing a pin that read "I support Lesbian and Gay Rights."

Another Tufts participant in the march, Max Niedzwiecki, summed up the overall experience by saying that, while the march was often depressing because of all the problems raised, "I am very glad I went. It was a wonderful thing to do."