

Planned Parenthood council member invited to speak on campus

Irish 4 Reproductive Health plans to host pro-abortion event

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Irish 4 Reproductive Health, “an independent group advocating for reproductive justice” at Notre Dame, intends to host a lecture by Katherine Watson, a member of Planned Parenthood’s National Medical Council and a Professor of Medical Education at Northwestern

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University. The lecture, entitled “Ordinary Abortion,” is advertised to feature discussion on Watson’s book, *Scarlet A: The Ethics, Law and Politics of Ordinary Abortion*. The event is scheduled to take place at Corbett Family Hall at the University of Notre Dame on March 5.

In addition to her leadership with Planned Parenthood, Watson is currently on the Board of the National Abortion Federation, a group of independent abortion clinics. According to an interview with Rewire News, her current project is “an article about the argument for abortion as a moral good, as opposed to a necessary evil.” She has stated, “I refuse to

stop talking about abortion and stressing that it is a moral, political, and social good.”

According to Irish 4 Reproductive Health’s website, the group “believe[s] that access to safe and legal abortion is a right and a necessity for gender equality.” The group prefers to be known as “advocates for reproductive justice” rather than “pro-choice” because they believe the word “choice” emerges from a “perspective of race and

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class privilege” that does not recognize restrictions on the marginalized.

Abortion is not a topic of debate in the Catholic tradition. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life” (CCC 2270). Pope Francis has called abortion similar to “hiring a hitman” and the eugenics of the Nazis, but “with white gloves on.”

The question is: Should this University allow reproductive rights activists to use Notre Dame as a platform to advocate for the killing of unborn human beings in the name of discourse and free expression? Or should Notre Dame uphold their Catholic values by preventing advocacy for the killing of unborn children?

Notre Dame’s academic speech policy calls for speech to avoid undermining the mission of the University. According to the University of Notre Dame’s Academic Freedom and Associated Responsibilities policy in the Faculty Handbook, there is an obligation to have, “in the course of one’s utterances, work, and other conduct,

protection of the basic mission of the University.”

University President Father John Jenkins has spoken of cases in which speech would not be acceptable at Notre Dame. In 2006, Father Jenkins said, “As long as the Gospel message and the Catholic intellectual tradition are present, we can welcome any serious debate on any thoughtful position here at Notre Dame.” He also stated in this speech: “The only exception I can imagine would come in the case of expression that is overt and insistent in its contempt for the values and sensibilities of this University.”

The *Rover* asked Paul Browne, Vice President for Public Affairs and Communications for Notre Dame, if the University would allow Katherine Watson to deliver the “Ordinary Abortion” lecture on campus. Browne responded: “Irish 4 Reproductive Health is not a recognized student organization, and therefore cannot book space on campus or invite speakers.”

Irish 4 Reproductive Health has circumvented the rule that only recognized student groups can reserve space on campus and invite speakers by enlisting the help of allied academic departments. For their most recent on-campus event, “Reversing Roe,” the Gender Studies Department served as co-sponsor. For “Ordinary Abortion,” the group enlisted the help of the Department of Anthropology, who agreed to

co-sponsor and reserve space for the lecture. However, the day after Irish 4 Reproductive Health announced their co-sponsorship, the Department was informed by the University that they could not sponsor “Ordinary Abortion” as Irish 4 Reproductive Health is not a recognized student group.

According to Professor of Anthropology Agustin Fuentes, the department chair, “The Department of Anthropology cannot officially co-sponsor it [“Ordinary Abortion”] as the group [Irish 4 Reproductive Health] is not a recognized student group by the University.” He said any “language” of co-sponsorship had been removed from materials advertising the event.

Currently, space for the lecture will still be provided by the Department of Anthropology in Corbett Family Hall, despite the fact that the Department can no longer “officially co-sponsor” the lecture.

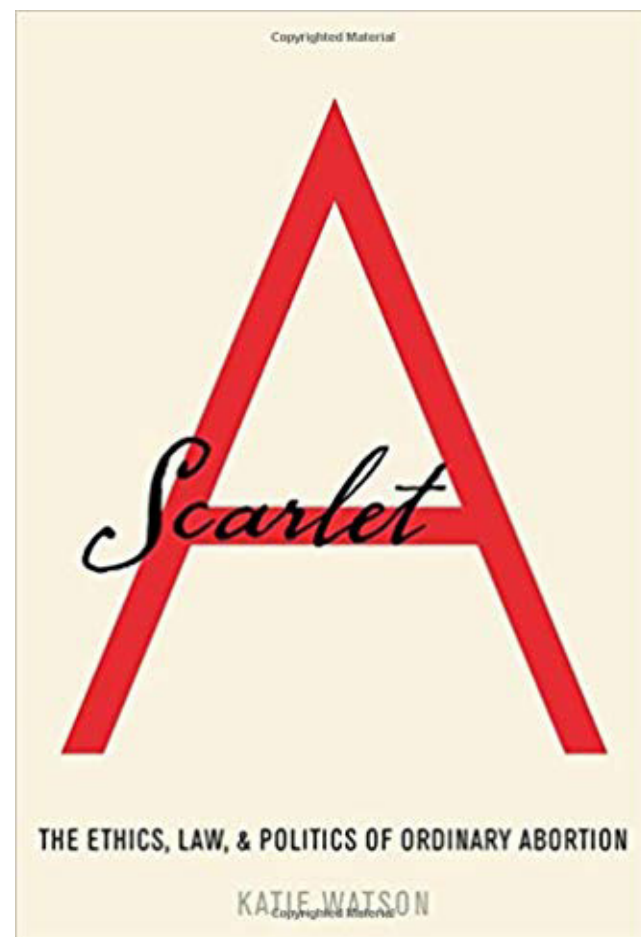
Fuentes told the *Rover*: “There is a broad anthropological engagement with issues of reproductive health and the book seems to be getting attention so we agreed they could use one of our spaces to hold the session.” When asked why he would provide a platform for an abortion advocate, Fuentes responded, “Are you asking me specifically why I would offer space for a presentation by a mainstream scholar that addresses support

for particular perspectives of women’s reproductive health (in this case access to abortion, currently a legal right in the USA)? ... I do think it is important for this, and multiple, perspectives on women’s reproductive health to be a part of the intellectual conversations on this, and any, campus.”

Irish 4 Reproductive Health spoke to the *Rover* regarding the difficulty of holding on-campus events as an unrecognized student group. They said, “The lack of SAO-approved status does create logistical challenges specifically with regard to holding events on campus. We want our public events to reach a diverse audience, not just a self-selecting group that might be willing to travel off campus to attend. So far, we have been able to find ways to do this and plan to continue doing so.”

The group said, “It’s unfortunate that the Department of Anthropology was informed that they needed to step down as co-sponsors for our event. Our understanding is that this policy would apply to any group that lacks official recognition by the University. We hope that standard is enforced fairly and equally. We also encourage the administration to reconsider this rule, which is an unnecessary limitation on the autonomy of academic departments.”

Irish 4 Reproductive Health hopes to use their on-campus venue to reach



a wider audience and contribute to the discourse surrounding abortion at Notre Dame. They said, “We are creating space for a position that is less audible on campus, thereby contributing to this dialogue. This builds on the mutual goal of a former [Right to Life] president and one of our founding members to foster an ongoing conversation about abortion that moves beyond tired shouting matches.”

It remains to be seen whether or not Irish 4 Reproductive Health will have the ability to hold their

“Ordinary Abortion” lecture at Notre Dame. Despite the enforcement of the rule that University departments cannot sponsor lectures by unrecognized student groups, Irish 4 Reproductive Health claims the lecture will occur as advertised at Notre Dame in the space obtained from the Department of Anthropology.

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