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UIS alternative prom provides option for gay students

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Springfield-area high school students uncomfortable with bringing dates of the same gender to their own schools' proms have another option — an "Alternative Prom" at the University of Illinois Springfield.

Today's event, which runs from 8:30 p.m. to midnight in the student center at the UIS Student Life Building, will be the sixth annual alternative prom sponsored by the UIS Queer-Straight Alliance, according to Jessica Enock, 22, a UIS junior from Buffalo Grove and chair of the event's planning committee.

She said she doesn't know whether there will be more interest in the event in the wake of a Mississippi school board's decision to cancel this year's prom rather than accommodate a female student's wish to bring her girlfriend as her date.

Enock, a member of the student-run alliance who is straight, said the Mississippi board's decision was a tragedy for the student body there.

She said the UIS event, which has no admission charge, is open to any area high school or college-age students — gay or straight — and is geared toward young people who want to attend a dance where they will not be judged based on their sexual orientation.

"Our idea is for people to have fun and for people to be comfortable with being themselves," she said.

Most people who attend dress casually, but some show up in fancy gowns and tuxedos, Enock said, adding that the turnout each year has ranged from 130 to 200 people.

Anyone attending must show a photo identification card and sign in.

The alcohol-free event will be chaperoned by UIS faculty members, and UIS police will provide security as part of a new policy governing all dances on campus.

The student center will be decorated in the theme of "Alice in Wonderland," Enock said. There will be snacks and recorded music played by a DJ.

Alliance chairman Bret Tate, 22, a UIS junior from Mount Vernon, said some gay high school students who have attended the alternative prom in the past told him they didn't go to their high school proms or went with someone of the opposite sex to avoid being harassed.

"This gives us a chance to go into the local community and be there for students who may not have any other outlet," said Tate, who is gay.

The event costs \$500 to \$600 to hold. The cost is paid with donations and UIS student fees, he said.

Dean Olsen can be reached at 788-1543.

UIS Alternative Prom

8:30 p.m. to midnight today at the UIS Student Life Building

Bring a photo ID

For more information, send e-mail to qsa@uis.edu

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