Abortion rocks the boat on RU's campus

On the first Wednesday of classes, students were faced with stacks of books, confusing buildings and abortion.

An anti-abortion group from the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform was invited to the school by the College Republicans, and set themselves up just outside the Bonnie Hurlburt Student Center with a large picture display of dead fetuses and signs that said, "Warning Genocide Photos Ahead." In the morning, students passed the display with sideways glances of confusion and disgust.

"I think that it's good to publicly tell people about this, but not to put it near food, because it makes me not want to eat," said Resident Assistant Jakob Harris.

A representative of the group, Nicole W. Cooley, wore a shirt saying she regretted her abortion.

"When I was in my early 20's, I was raped and advised to have an abortion, which was the most regrettable decision of my entire life," Cooley said. "For me, having an abortion felt like being raped again, but worse, because this time I had consented."

Cooley has been working with the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform since 2002. She said the point of their presence on college campuses is to educate people about abortion. The center gets their operation plan from the family of Martin Luther King Jr., and his niece, Dr. Alveda King, who is a pro-life supporter and supports the use of graphic images to make a point.

"When we look at other social reformers through history, the use of images has always been a key component such as successful campaigns," Cooley said. "For example, Martin Luther King Jr. used images to end segregation."

As time passed, more students started to stop and look at the picture display and talk to their peers about how they felt.

"I think it's kind of pointless to put this all around campus, just because it's something everyone feels strongly about, and it's not something you're going to change your mind on," Fionna Surette said.

"I feel like it's a personal choice, an issue that's really personal to people, so putting up a picture of like, dead babies, is depressing and you're just going to look at it and get grossed out," Danie Curtis-Williams said.

However, the group feels that the pictures are necessary to attract attention. Dr. C. Fletcher Armstrong, the southeast region director of the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform, joined this cause in 1999 and brings this display to colleges all over the country. They visited Liberty University in the same week as RU, but were denied access to the campus.

"The reason there's a backlash is because when people see this, instinctively they're uncomfortable; it's horrifying, they don't like to look at it," Armstrong said. "It makes us feel guilty this is going on all around us. Many others have participated either by being complicit or just complacent, and it makes us all uncomfortable. But it's that discomfort that's a necessary first step in changing society."

Armstrong said that he wants to get two facts across during this demonstration: first, that a fetus is a baby and second, that abortion is an act of violence. He sees abortion as a form of genocide in the way the Holocaust was, and he compares his movement to the Civil Rights movement.

As the day wore on, another group set themselves up across from the anti-abortion movement. Radford University's Women's Studies club wanted their voices to be heard as a counter to the Bio-Ethical Reform movement.

English teacher and Director of Women's Studies, Dr. Moira Baker, said when she heard about the anti-abortion demonstration on campus at 9:48 a.m., she immediately began working to have her own table opposite of them. She wasn't upset that the group was visiting RU and acknowledged their right to free speech, but she didn't feel their argument was appropriate.

"A number of students, and myself, find the analogy between lynching in the United States’ south, genocide in Rwanda and the Holocaust, and really Nazi Germany, we find the analogy between those things and abortion, utterly, utterly offensive," Baker said. "And utterly, utterly misleading to people who haven't really thought about the issue yet. The problem with that kind of discourse is that it shuts down intellectual thought, and it makes inflammatory claims; it churns up people's emotions."