

OHIO UNIVERSITY

Forum on porn seeks to strip away myths

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BY **ENCARNACION PYLE**
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On the one side will be Ron Jeremy, a.k.a. "the Hedgehog."

The gold-chain wearing, hairy-backed porn king claims to have made nearly 2,000 movies and had more than 4,000 sexual partners during the past three decades.

His sparring partner will be Craig Gross, better known as the "Porn Pastor" for his anti-porn Web site XXXchurch.com.

An ordained minister, Gross passes out Bibles that say "Jesus Loves Porn Stars" on the cover while preaching that pornography sets up unrealistic expectations in relationships and sex.

It might sound like a gimmicky match-up created for the *Jerry Springer* show, but their debate is one of the most anticipated forums planned at Ohio University.

Instead of avoiding controversy, colleges nationwide are taking them on.

Ohio University, for example, is paying \$40,000 from student fees to host four debates about sensitive topics this quarter. The forums, at the Athens campus, are not open to the public unless members of the university community do not use all of the seats.

"These are difficult conversations -- that's the point," said Chad Barnhardt, assistant director of OU's student union. "Ignoring these subjects doesn't make them go away; it just makes it more likely for people to fall for the myths and misconceptions."

The university's first debate, on legalizing marijuana, was held Jan. 24. It drew about 1,000 students, professors and staff members and sparked conversations in dozens of classrooms, from criminology to health and human services.

Ohio University hosted a music-piracy discussion last week, a topic chosen in part because 50 OU students had been sent letters

accusing them of illegally downloading songs. The pornography showdown is scheduled for Feb. 21, followed by a March 6 conversation about whether God exists.

Ohio State University held a debate on pornography in November featuring Jeremy, Gross and two other speakers. Questions raised included whether it is degrading or empowering to women and whether porn is addictive and destructive or a fun window into a fantasy world.

"By talking about things that are controversial, you force yourself to consider why you believe what you do and to think about the opinions of others," said Matt Stegman, 22, an English and political science senior who is chairman of OSU's lectures committee.

There might be some people who question the value of bringing a porn star to campus, but the more provocative the speaker, the more likely students will attend, he said.

"Ron Jeremy can really be out there, but he has a master's degree in special education and is an incredibly smart guy," he said. "He and Pastor Gross have checked their facts. Both are funny and engaging."

College campuses have been a hotbed for heated discussion since their beginnings.

"It makes sense when you're 18 to 22 years old; that's the time to examine all possibilities and explore all belief systems," said Scott Wolfman, president of Wolfman Productions, a Connecticut-based speakers bureau that represents Jeremy and Gross.

Aaron White, a 2006 OU grad who ministers to students there with Campus Crusade for Christ, says he's always worried about "liberal agendas being attached to these types of dialogues."

But the 24-year-old Hilliard native is looking forward to the pornography discussion.

"I think this debate series sounds like one of the most fair fights I've seen," he said. "People should walk away well-informed and well-balanced."

To find out more about Ohio University's debate series, call 740-593-4020 or go to www.ohio.edu/center/events/index.cfm

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