David Gerbie attended Oak Park/River Forest High School and graduated from New Trier, where he was involved in volleyball. At NIU, David's major is psychology, and his interests are politics and weather. In fact, David would like to become an influential figure in politics. David feels that his essay, "The Importance of Comprehensive Sex Education," demonstrates his ability to construct a sound argument.
The Importance of Comprehensive Sex Education

David Gerbie

Sex education is one of the most important issues facing today’s society. The high number of unintended pregnancies and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases and infections should be of major concern to the U.S. Government. The two most prevalent programs concerning sex education are the comprehensive sex education program and the abstinence only program. The only way to decrease unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases is through increasing the amount and quality of sex education in public schools and teaching methods of safe sex. The best way to achieve these outcomes is through comprehensive sex education.

The teaching of abstinence is not sex education; it is denying students information that could save their lives. The abstinence only program promotes abstinence from sex until marriage. It excludes the teaching of methods of contraception and the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. This method teaches that sex out of marriage is not only immoral but also emotionally damaging. The proponents of this the abstinence program argue that comprehensive sex education increases the likelihood of teens engaging in premarital sex, thereby increasing their odds of contracting a disease or becoming pregnant. The abstinence only program does not teach students about forms of contraception or birth control because those who expound it believe that this information undermines the impact of its message. Nor does this problem acknowledge the fact that sex is a normal part of life for many teens. While there is some evidence to support that abstinence programs may affect some teens’ intentions to abstain, there is no proven correlation between participation in the program and remaining celibate.

Abstinence only turns a blind eye to the fact that many unwanted pregnancies could be prevented and that many sexually transmitted diseases could be avoided if all students were educated in
Many critics of the abstinence only program believe that the program is based on religious beliefs, which do not belong in public schools. Many of the advocates for abstinence are religious leaders who believe in abstinence because premarital sex is a sin. Due to the separation between church and state, it is wrong to base a curriculum on the morals of a certain person or religion. In the same way it would be wrong to take pork out of school food because Judaism and Islam believe eating pork is a sin, it is wrong to teach abstinence because Christianity believes pre-marital sex is a sin. These same religious leaders believe deeply that abortion is a sin on par with murder. While nearly 1/3 of all teen pregnancies end in abortion, religious groups fail to realize that many of these could be prevented by encouraging contraceptive use. One may wonder if they view contraceptive use and abortion as being equally sinful.

Comprehensive sex education is superior to the abstinence only method of education for several reasons. First, it teaches science, not morality. Instead of learning why it is bad to have sex, students in a comprehensive program learn appropriate methods of contraception. They also learn about alternatives to sex including abstinence. The comprehensive program focuses on keeping students informed with facts and trusts that these will help them decide if and when it is appropriate to engage in sexual intercourse. In addition, it teaches them how to have safe sex if they choose to become sexually active. Comprehensive sex education is the best method of sex education because it encourages abstinence while it also acknowledges that some teens choose to have sex and provides them with information about the risks involved and necessary precautions regarding STD’s and pregnancy.

Both methods of sex education make assumptions about the sexual behavior of students. The abstinence only program assumes that premarital sex is bad and if safe sex is taught to students, it will lead to them having more sex. The comprehensive program correctly assumes that some students will have sex no matter what program they are exposed to; this is the correct assumption, as there are numerous studies that show significant sexual activity among teens, regardless of their sexual education. One example is a study completed in September 2006 by the Guttmacher Institute, which shows that 46% of all fifteen-nineteen year olds in the United States have had sex at least once. This same study showed that sexually active female teens that do not use
contraceptives have a ninety percent chance of becoming pregnant. Every year, fifteen-nineteen year olds contract 9.1 million sexually transmitted infections. These are facts; while abstinence would halt these alarming numbers, it is simply unreasonable and irresponsible to assume that so many people would change their sexual behavior, which means that the only way to bring down the number of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases is to promote safe sex practices. These practices are taught only in comprehensive sex education. Proof of this is the fact that every year 750,000 women ages fifteen-nineteen become pregnant, and a shocking eighty-two percent of these are unplanned. Despite these staggering numbers the number of teen pregnancies has decreased by thirty-six percent since its peak in 1990. This great drop in pregnancies is attributed to the increase in consistent contraceptive use, proving that comprehensive sex education is the most effective program at reducing teen pregnancy. Contrary to the abstinence program, which illustrates a particular judgment regarding premarital sex, the comprehensive program allows for a more neutral opinion.

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**Instructor Clare Foland's comments:** David's writing was sound, clear, and easy to read throughout our English 103 class (Rhetoric and Composition I) assignments. David chose an alternative assignment with this argument paper, which did not require citations (though he did turn in a list of sources consulted at the time). This paper exemplifies a fair comparison between two viewpoints and a reasonable argumentative tone. "The Importance of Comprehensive Sex Education" shows how to eloquently and effectively argue for one's thesis.