

# The Northern Star

Volume 85 Number 141

Wednesday, July 10, 1985

DeKalb, Illinois 60115

20 pages

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## Professor suing U.S. to change drug's rating

by Maureen Campbell

NIU Professor Thomas Roberts is one of four people suing the U.S. government to change the rating for the controversial drug MDMA.

The Drug Enforcement Administration has placed the drug in Schedule I under the Controlled Substances Act. This rating means MDMA has a high potential for street use and/or abuse, and has little or no medical value.

Although temporary, this rating will last for one year while public hearings are held in Kansas, Washington D.C. and Los Angeles. Roberts will be a witness in the July 10 Kansas hearing.

In order to place MDMA into Schedule I, the DEA was required to prove the drug posed an "imminent hazard to the public safety." The DEA based this claim on research they believe suggests neurotoxic properties in MDMA, Roberts said.

He said this finding was based on an unpublished study of a different drug, MDA, which has mild psychedelic effects. However, this study, which was conducted on animals, states there is insufficient evidence to relate

these effects to humans.

Roberts said he, another professor and two psychiatrists involved in the suit strongly believe further research is necessary to determine MDMA's therapeutic value.

Although Roberts said MDMA is not a cure, it can help therapy if used in the presence of qualified medical professionals. As far as potential medical uses, Roberts sees a focus on psychotherapy, particularly in areas such as, "unpleasant experiences blocked in the unconscious, severe depressives, and also family therapy and interpersonal relations."

"It is tragic because many people could benefit by MDMA," Roberts said, adding that because of the new scheduling, special permission will be required to use the drug in any capacity.

MDMA was patented in 1914 and the patents have run out. According to Roberts, "new patents will cost millions of dollars ... If it is Schedule I no one will finance and research (MDMA)" as long as it is in the public domain. He also said "the DEA didn't even know it was being used and you can't help wonder how thorough their knowledge was about the drug."

MDMA has been touted as the "Yuppie drug of the late 1980s." Roberts participated in the only human study done on MDMA. He said, "It generally promotes feelings of strong brotherly love, or it puts one in touch with the underlying family love part of one's life."

Roberts said part of the attraction for users is that they can maintain their sense of control while on MDMA and still experience a high. The MDMA experience is viewed by some as the opposite of a traumatic experience that can positively affect one's life, he added.

Roberts stressed the danger of buying MDMA or any other drug on the streets. He said MDMA could be especially harmful because so little is known about it.

Because only a small amount of MDMA is available for medical use, Roberts said it is not possible to determine if a street-purchased drug is really MDMA.

If Roberts is successful in his suit, MDMA will be placed into Schedule III, meaning the drug has low abuse potential and some medical uses. Roberts said the new scheduling might prompt pharmaceutical manufacturers to fund research and patents for MDMA.