



University Targets Christian Groups With “Non-Discrimination” Policy

Following complaints by a homosexual student who was allegedly dismissed from a Christian fraternity at the school, Vanderbilt University has launched a crusade aimed at forcing Christian groups that receive school funding to follow an official policy that conflicts with some of the groups’ own faith-based bylaws and policies.



“Last academic year, an undergraduate made an allegation of discrimination against a student organization,” the university said in a [statement](#) on September 15. “As a result of that allegation, we sought to ensure that the more than 300 student organizations were aware of their need to comply with the university’s longstanding nondiscrimination policy.”

The university’s policy is a model of political correctness, stating that in addition to all of the other ways in which it does not discriminate against individuals (“on the basis of their race, sex, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, disability...”), the university also “does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression....”

That addendum was the sticking point with a handful of Christian groups. Noting that a “dozen or so” organizations, “including five religious organizations,” had not officially complied with the policy, the university decided “to give those groups “provisional status, allowing us to continue to work with them to achieve compliance....”

Among the groups that are on probation because of their policies are the Graduate Christian Fellowship, the Christian Legal Society, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Sigma Phi Lambda.

While university officials insisted that they are “committed to making our campus a welcoming environment for all of our students,” members of some Christian organizations were left wondering how their groups would survive under a policy that prohibited them from using a Christian litmus test for group leadership.

For example, reported the [Associated Press](#), the university’s [Christian Legal Society](#) (CLS) chapter “has rewritten its bylaws to include language that supports the university’s diversity policies. But the group balked when Vanderbilt asked it to remove a requirement that the group president lead Bible studies. ‘Our group will no longer be able to exist,’ said law student Justin Gunter, one of the chapter’s leaders.”

CLS bylaws state that chapter officers “must subscribe to the Christian Legal Society Statement of Faith,” and that each officer “is expected to lead Bible studies, prayer and worship at Chapter meetings as tasked by the President.”



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 30, 2011

Vanderbilt's Director of Religious Life, the Rev. Gretchen Person, argued that both requirements clash with the school's "non-discrimination" policy. "Vanderbilt's policies do not allow any student organization to preclude someone from a leadership position based on religious belief," she said to the first rule. As for the requirement that officers lead the group in spiritual devotions, she noted, "This would seem to indicate that officers are expected to hold certain beliefs. Again, Vanderbilt policies do not allow this expectation/qualification for officers."

According to the [Tennessean](#) newspaper, the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE), which is representing the university's CLS chapter in the dispute, penned a letter to the school's chancellor, noting that the Rev. Person's office appeared to have particular problem with the CLS' take on sexuality, which lines up with the New Testament's admonition against homosexual behavior.

"The message here is clear, wrote FIRE's senior vice president Robert Shibley of the schools' intransigent policy: "Vanderbilt believes that its institutional ideological beliefs should take precedence over students' own beliefs or consciences, particularly when it comes to its students' attitudes towards sexual activity."

Gunter pointed out that if there are no distinctive beliefs and principles which CLS leaders and members are expected to uphold, the purpose of the organization is lost. "We welcome everybody to be a member," he said, but "we only have 20 or 25 members. All it would take is 26 people [with conflicting beliefs] to join and undermine our purpose."

Carol Swain, a professor at Vanderbilt's law school and an advisor to the school's CLS chapter, told [Fox News](#): "It seems reasonable to require that leaders share the beliefs of the organizations that they seek to lead." She added that she saw the school's campaign of political correctness as "part of a larger attack on religious freedom that's taking place across the country — particularly when it comes to conservative groups."

This is not the first time the Christian Legal Society has clashed with a university's "non-discrimination" policies. As reported by [The New American](#), In June 2010 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the CLS chapter at the Hastings College of Law in San Francisco, deciding that the school could refuse to recognize the student group because it barred membership to homosexuals.

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Photo: The Commons, located on Vanderbilt's Peabody campus, is part of the university's College Halls system.



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