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Christian group denied Cal State charter

RULING: The university says the group cannot form because it would exclude some students.

12:34 AM PST on Tuesday, December 20, 2005

By **DUANE W. GANG** / The Press-Enterprise

Cal State San Bernardino has denied a Christian student group's request to organize on campus, saying the organization would have discriminated against non-Christians and homosexuals.

"For us, this has nothing to do with discrimination," Ryan Sorba, who worked to organize the Christian Student Association, said Monday.

"This has to do with people being in the club who are Christian."

Every student group organized at Cal State San Bernardino must meet certain requirements, said Christine Hansen, director of student leadership and development. According to state law, student groups at public universities cannot exclude members based on religion or sexual orientation.

The Christian Student Association's constitution included provisions pledging not to discriminate against anyone based on "race, color, national origin, gender, or physical disability." But the student group's constitution also included a statement on sexual morality and a detailed statement of faith, requiring members and officers to be Christian.

The November decision to bar the group from operating on campus caught the attention of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit foundation advocating freedom of speech and religion on college campuses. The foundation is now working with the Cal State students.

"Our hope is that the university will come to its senses through open debate and dialogue," said Greg Lukianoff, the foundation's director of legal and public advocacy.

Colleges and universities across the country increasingly are barring Christian groups from organizing, Lukianoff said.

Sorba, 23, a senior psychology major and president of the College Republicans, said the university in its zeal to prevent discrimination is doing just that -- discriminating against Christians.

The Christian Student Association would not have blocked anyone from attending meetings or group functions, Sorba said. But to be a voting

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member or a officer, a student must be a Christian, he said.

He said the association is not sure of its next move. Much will depend on the outcome of a lawsuit filed last month against Cal State Long Beach and San Diego State University by the Alliance Defense Fund, Sorba said.

The group filed the federal lawsuit on the behalf of four student Christian groups, saying the universitywide Cal State policy forces students to abandon their Christian beliefs in order to gain the benefits other organizations enjoy.

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