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THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Students

From the issue dated May 26, 2000

Tufts U. Restores Status of Christian Student Group Accused of Anti-Gay Bias

By BETH McMURTRIE

Tufts University last week welcomed back a Christian organization that had been stripped of its campus financial support after a student charged that it discriminates against homosexuals. But that decision could change next fall, when the issue will once again come before a student judiciary panel.

"It's not just a victory for us, I feel like it's actually a victory for Tufts," said Curtis Chang, campus minister to the Tufts Christian Fellowship, an evangelical student organization that views homosexuality as a sin. "It has declared it will uphold religious liberty for all groups."

Last month, the student judiciary panel stripped the Christian fellowship of its status as a university-recognized organization, deciding that the group had violated the campus nondiscrimination policy by refusing to allow a gay student to run for a leadership position.

The fellowship's leaders maintained that they had rejected the student not because she is gay, but because she does not believe homosexuality is a sin ([The Chronicle, May 12](#)).

Last week, the Committee on Student Life, a panel of students and faculty members, ruled that the student panel had failed to follow its own procedures in the case, because it had met without the knowledge of the fellowship's leaders and had suspended the group's privileges before it had a chance to appeal.

"Ultimately at stake in this appeal is a need to balance religious and

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associational freedom with a prohibition against unlawful discrimination," the committee wrote in its eight-page ruling. "There are persuasive arguments, and perhaps even stronger passions, on each side of the dispute. That the tension is profound is all the more reason for ensuring that appropriate process is followed and the underlying facts are well established."

The committee ordered the judiciary panel to rehear the complaint next fall. A Tufts spokeswoman, Christen Graham, noted that the composition of the panel will have changed by then, as members are elected each year.

The controversy has attracted national attention. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a nonprofit, Philadelphia-based organization, gathered more than 150 signatures from professors across the country, demanding that the university restore the fellowship's status.

Thor L. Halvorsen, the organization's executive director, said it planned to keep monitoring events at Tufts. "If this were to happen again in September," he said, "you can be assured FIRE will be there."

Gay-rights advocates also promise to watch the case closely.

"We need to put our heads together to think about how to get more-solid support behind the nondiscrimination policy," said Judith Brown, director of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Center at Tufts.

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