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THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Today's News

Thursday, October 10, 2002

Anti-Abortion Group Fights for Official Status at Washington U. in St. Louis Law School

By [LINDSAY BOSSLETT](#)

Members of a law-student anti-abortion group at Washington University in St. Louis, joined by a national advocacy group, are protesting a decision last month by the law school's Student Bar Association (SBA) to deny the organization's application to be an officially recognized group on that campus. The organization, known as Law Students Pro-Life, is trying to be recognized by the university in order to receive funds. The SBA has denied the group's application twice, asserting that the organization's focus is "too narrow."

In its rejection letter to Jordan Siverd, chairman of Law Students Pro-Life, the bar association said that in order to be considered a true "pro-life" organization, the group must include an anti-death-penalty provision in its constitution, or consider changing its name.

"If your group truly has the purpose they claim, they need to consider revamping the organization to encourage and facilitate discussion of the issues as a whole, and not simply the pro-life side of certain issues," Elliott Friedman, the SBA president, wrote in the letter.

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But David Hacker, a member of Law Students Pro-Life, said the group does not plan either to change its name or to add an anti-death-penalty provision to its constitution. "We're comfortable with our name," he said. "The SBA and the administration's suggestion that we change our name is circumventing the real issue."

"Our denial was based on the fact that our group supports pro-life views," continued Mr. Hacker. "Our rights are being denied because people do not agree with our issues. They're violating our free-speech rights."

Another reason that the SBA cited for the denial was the failure of the constitution of Law Students Pro-Life to allow people not agreeing with the group's ideology to join. Mr. Hacker said that the group had already made its constitution "more facially open" after the first denial, and that the group has always been open to members of different beliefs.

The dean of the School of Law, Joel Seligman, said that after he became aware that the bar association had turned down the anti-abortion group's application, he met with members of both groups to discuss the issue. "The aspiration of the SBA is that all organizations are open to all members," he said.

Mr. Seligman, who recommended to the anti-abortion group that it indicate a willingness to include other members, said that initially the group had no female members, but that it had added a few recently.

He also said that other student organizations on the campus usually send e-mail messages asking new members to join. Although Law Students Pro-Life did this at the beginning of the academic year, it did not receive much response and was "quite reluctant" to try again, he said.

Mr. Seligman said that members of the student group had met with university administrators on Tuesday night and were now sending out more e-mail messages. He expects the group's next application to be approved, he said.

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Meanwhile, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a nonprofit educational foundation that focuses on civil liberties, has jumped into the fray, supporting Law Students Pro-Life's efforts to be recognized. The foundation sent the university's chancellor, Mark S. Wrighton, a letter last month protesting the bar association's decision, and imploring the administration to engage in "immediate self-corrective measures."

Background articles from *The Chronicle*:

- [Religious-Freedom Center Set Up to Focus on Discrimination on Campuses](#) (8/22/2001)
- [New Group Founded by Alan Kors Aims to Combat Political Correctness](#) (11/12/1999)



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