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THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Today's News

Wednesday, October 13, 2004

Catholic U. Reverses Ban on NAACP Chapter, Avoiding Threatened Lawsuit

By [DANIEL ENGBER](#)

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Washington

Catholic University of America has approved a request by students to form a campus chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, six months after turning them down.

When the university initially rejected the request, officials cited two reasons. First, they said the NAACP's support for abortion rights set it at odds with the Roman Catholic university's staunchly anti-abortion philosophy. The officials also said that the existence of two other black-student groups on the campus made an NAACP chapter redundant.

Only one other proposal for a new student group has been rejected in recent years, said Victor Nakas, a university spokesman. That was for a chapter of Falun Gong, the religious group that the Chinese government has sought to suppress.

According to William Jawando, the first-year law student who proposed the NAACP chapter when he was an undergraduate, the new student group would be the first to deal specifically with issues of civil rights. He also said that the group would not be involved in issues relating to abortion.

A university news release said that the NAACP chapter had agreed to a stipulation, demanded by the university, that the group not advocate on issues, like abortion rights, that run counter to Catholic's values and mission.

The students could have appealed the administrators' first decision, said Mr. Nakas. But "over the summer, someone went to the media, and it got quite a bit of public attention," he said. "The NAACP national organization was very unhappy."

Newspaper coverage in June led to the threat of a lawsuit from the NAACP's president, Kweisi Mfume (*The Chronicle*, June 18).

The Rev. David M. O'Connell, the university's president, promised at the time to revisit the issue when the students returned from the summer break. He met with

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about 20 of them, including Mr. Jawando, last week.

"The president concluded that the students had made a credible case," said Mr. Nakas. "They affirmed that they would respect the mission and policies of the university and the church, regardless of any position that the NAACP might take."

Following that meeting, Father O'Connell advised officials in the university's Office of University Center, Student Programs, and Events to reconsider their decision. Official approval for the new student group came on Tuesday.

Mr. Jawando said he was pleased with the result. "But am I pleased with the time period?" he said. "No."

The group had planned to register voters in advance of the presidential election. "There will be another election in four years," he said. "We are where we are."

Background article from *The Chronicle*:

- [Catholic U. Denies Student's Bid to Start NAACP Chapter](#) (6/18/2004)

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