



FIRE: California School Curtails Christian Students' First Amendment Rights

By Jim Brown
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(AgapePress) - A spokesman for the advocacy group known as the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE) says California State University at San Bernardino is discriminating against a Christian student group in a way that has become all too common on college campuses across the United States.

California State University - San Bernardino is refusing to recognize a campus Christian Student Association (CSA) for requiring that its members be Christians and adhere to the group's statements of faith and sexual morality. The university claims that by trying to maintain its evangelical identity, the CSA is discriminating against non-Christians.

However, FIRE's legal director, Greg Lukianoff, calls the university's argument absurd. "If you do not share the core beliefs of the group, you do not have the right to join it," he asserts. "Freedom of association means nothing if you don't have the right to exclude people who don't agree with you on the fundamental reason why you associate in the first place."

Lukianoff says CSU-San Bernardino's position "just completely turns the idea of discrimination on its head." And if the CSA sues, he adds, a California court may allow the school to continue misusing its nondiscrimination policy, but federal courts will not.

The CSU-San Bernardino administration is ignoring legal precedents and trampling the CSA members' constitutional rights, the FIRE spokesman insists. "[T]he university is actually ... denying students' First Amendment freedom of association rights," he says. "University after university has done this; FIRE has fought cases all over the country."

Some of FIRE's more prominent victories in this area, Lukianoff points out, include wins at "Tufts University in 2000; Rutgers University in 2003; the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where we had two cases over the course of two years." Also, he notes, FIRE succeeded in securing victories at "Purdue University; Ohio State University; Louisiana State University, where we were defending a Muslim group; and Milwaukee School of Engineering."

A legal challenge to the California State University system's policy of denying student religious organizations the right to govern themselves according to their own religious principles has already been filed by the [Alliance Defense Fund](#) (ADF), a nonprofit legal defense and policy organization. Nevertheless, CSU-San Bernardino, which is a member of the California State system, is standing by its policies and continuing to deny CSA official recognition, despite the ongoing legal challenge.

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