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2005

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University rejects Christian student group

Association can't exclude homosexuals, non-believers as members

Posted: December 20, 2005
1:00 a.m. Eastern

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A state university in California refuses to recognize a Christian student organization because it requires members to live according to the group's religious faith.

The Christian Student Association at California State University at San Bernardino submitted a constitution pledging it will not discriminate on the basis of "race, color, national origin, gender, or physical disability" but reserve the right to restrict membership based on religious beliefs and sexual orientation, according to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE.

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In October, however, a university administrator said although the group "would not be required to admit members who did not support the purpose of the organization," it could not exclude students "because of their status as a non-Christian or as a homosexual."

The student group then contacted FIRE for help.

"Time after time, college administrators have robbed students of their fundamental freedoms of association and religion, so CSA's situation sadly comes as no surprise," said FIRE Director of Legal and Public Advocacy Greg Lukianoff.

Lukianoff asserts the university, like so many others, "is misusing nondiscrimination policies to tell Christian students that they cannot associate based upon the dictates of their faith."

FIRE says it has defeated similar treatment of Christian and Muslim student groups at Tufts University, Rutgers University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Purdue University, The Ohio State University, Louisiana State University, Milwaukee School of Engineering and other institutions.

"CSA is not discriminating based on students' status but trying to express its religious faith and adhere to its beliefs regarding sexual morality," said Lukianoff.

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universities have a right to ensure that their members "share their central beliefs."

The California State University system's policy denying student religious organizations the right to govern themselves according to their own religious principles is under challenge in a lawsuit filed by the Arizona-based Alliance Defense Fund.

Nevertheless, California State University at San Bernardino stands by its policies, refusing official recognition to the Christian group, FIRE says.

But Lukianoff argues the Constitution ensures "Muslim groups are free to be Muslim, Buddhist groups are free to be Buddhist, and Christian groups are free to be Christian, even if the principles they express run counter to the official viewpoints or unconstitutional policies of state universities."

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