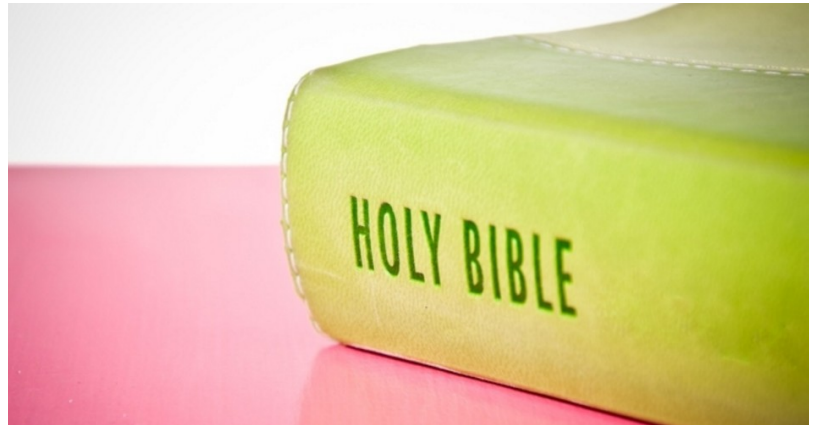




Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 7, 2013

Florida College Closes Down Bible Study in Dormitory

A college in Florida shut down an informal Bible study at one of its dorms hosted by a student leader with [InterVarsity Christian Fellowship](#), the same group that the school “de-recognized” in late February for running afoul of the its non-discrimination policy. A student leader for InterVarsity, which has had a presence on the campus of Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, for nearly four decades, was meeting quietly with three students in a commons area of Ward Hall when he was informed by one of the dorm’s resident assistants that he would no longer be allowed in the dorm to conduct Bible studies.



Greg Jao, InterVarsity’s national field director, said the student leader was called outside, where he was told that the Christian group’s representatives “were no longer allowed inside the dorm — even with the express consent of the students to do Bible studies. They said it was because InterVarsity was no longer a registered student group on campus.”

InterVarsity recently lost its official campus recognition because Rollins officials said the group violated the school’s non-discrimination policy by requiring its leaders to embrace biblical Christianity. Such a stand would require the leaders to reject certain personal behaviors, such as homosexuality.

InterVarsity asked the school for an exemption to the policy because of its unique religious mission, but was denied.

Rollins officials insist that leadership positions in campus organizations must be open to all students — an absurd policy when it comes to religious groups that embrace certain convictions that are crucial to their existence. InterVarsity “exists to promote a religious viewpoint,” explained Jao to Fox News. “To say, ‘Well, any student, in theory, should be eligible to lead that religious group,’ makes no sense whatsoever.”

He added that “when you create a non-discrimination policy that effectively excludes students from campus — marginalizes the Christian students — the policy is failing to accomplish what Rollins itself wants to do. We hope that will become clear to the administration and they’ll reconsider.”

Rollins officials responded that that is unlikely, saying in a statement that such an exception “would be inconsistent with the process of learning and growth that the college seeks to foster.”

Jao told Fox that the school’s actions “suggest that if you have strongly held religious beliefs you are not welcome on the campus, particularly if you have any intention of living them out. It suggests religion is an impermissible or a disfavored category that’s not worthy of the same protections as gender or sexual orientation.”

While InterVarsity welcomes all students and faculty members to participate in the group’s meetings and activities, it requires leaders to sign a statement of faith. “As a religious student group,” Jao explained, “it is incumbent upon us to require that our leaders affirm a very simple statement of faith.” A spokesperson for Rollins insisted that barring the Bible study in the dorm had nothing to do with the fact that it was part of InterVarsity, but was a policy that affects all groups on campus. “No group is



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allowed to hold meetings in the common space of residence halls,” the spokesperson said. “A fraternity was recently in violation of this as well, and they were asked to meet elsewhere — so it was not just InterVarsity.”

But Rollins’ director for public affairs, Lauren Bradley, told Fox that because InterVarsity is no longer recognized as an approved Rollins campus group, the school will not provide meeting space for InterVarsity members — a policy that appears to square with the decision to shut down the informal Bible study.

One of the students involved in the Bible study incident said that the entire situation “was really sad. One of the students in our group called it frightening.” The student added that “we do love this campus. That’s why we are involved in student ministry here. There’s a great feeling of disappointment because we do feel like this decision is not in the spirit of open dialogue and diversity that we know Rollins upholds as a core belief.”

Jao said that students involved in InterVarsity “are feeling somewhat targeted in ways that no other religious group would be. You don’t get much more quiet than four students meeting together to study the Bible.” He added that other campus groups are growing concerned as well. “Christian students certainly feel marginalized and unwelcome,” Jao told Fox News. “Whether it’s intended or not, that’s the message the students have received.” He added that Rollins’ non-discrimination policy “is turning into an exclusionary policy in their hands, and we’re hoping the college will see the irony in what’s happening.”

Rollins is not the only college to harass InterVarsity for its Christian beliefs. As reported by [The New American](#), last month the University of Michigan booted its [Asian InterVarsity](#) chapter off campus after the student outreach refused to drop its biblically based requirements for leadership.

Observers say such discrimination against Christian groups has increased at universities in the wake of a 2010 Supreme Court decision [Christian Legal Society v. Martinez](#), in which the High Court ruled that a public university may implement a policy effectively requiring religious groups to receive “all comers” as long as it applies the same rule to all campus groups.

In 2012, 14 Christian groups were forced off the campus of Vanderbilt University in Nashville after they refused to submit to Vanderbilt’s non-discrimination policy. One of the groups to lose its recognition was InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Jao said that Vanderbilt officials went as far as prohibiting other registered student organizations from co-sponsoring events with banned Christian groups such as InterVarsity, causing Christian students at the school to “feel disenfranchised, distinctly unwelcome.”

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