



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 26, 2014

Maine's Bowdoin College Ousts Christian Group for Discrimination

A prestigious college in Maine is the latest higher education institution to target a Christian campus group for refusing to cave in to an “anti-discrimination” policy that would force the group to allow homosexuals and others with non-Christian behaviors and beliefs to serve in leadership positions.



The [New York Times](#) reported that for more than 40 years small Christian groups that hold weekly Bible studies and prayer meetings have been welcomed on the campus of Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. But beginning this fall, “The Bowdoin Christian Fellowship will no longer be recognized by the college,” reported the *Times*, noting that in “a collision between religious freedom and anti-discrimination policies, the student group, and its advisers, have refused to agree to the college’s demand that any student, regardless of his or her religious beliefs, should be able to run for election as a leader of any group, including the Christian association.”

The move at Bowdoin is part of a trend at both secular and marginally religious universities to try to force Christian groups to be “inclusive” of individuals who embrace attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that run counter to Scripture and classic Christian tenets. To their credit, most conservative Christian groups have resisted the pressure — which has resulted in many of them losing official recognition at the colleges and universities where they have been welcomed for years.

Most recently, reported the *New York Times*, at California State University (Cal State), “the nation’s largest university system with nearly 450,000 students on 23 campuses, the chancellor is preparing this summer to withdraw official recognition from evangelical groups that are refusing to pledge not to discriminate on the basis of religion in the selection of their leaders.”

Similarly, at Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tennessee, “more than a dozen groups, most of them evangelical but one of them Catholic, have already lost their official standing over the same issue,” continued the *Times*, recalling that “one Christian group balked after a university official asked the students to cut the words ‘personal commitment to Jesus Christ’ from their list of qualifications for leadership.”

The *Times* reported that while “Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and mainline Protestant groups have agreed, saying they do not discriminate and do not anticipate that the new policies will cause problems,” conservative evangelical groups — the type the *Times* said make many liberal academics



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“uncomfortable” — have resisted.

“The evangelical groups say they, too, welcome anyone to participate in their activities, including gay men and lesbians, as well as nonbelievers, seekers and adherents of other faiths,” reported the *Times*. “But they insist that, in choosing leaders, who often oversee Bible study and prayer services, it is only reasonable that they be allowed to require some basic Christian faith — in most cases, an explicit agreement that Jesus was divine and rose from the dead, and often an implicit expectation that unmarried student leaders, gay or straight, will abstain from sex.” In point of fact, nearly all such groups prohibit leaders who embrace homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle for Christians.

Explaining the refusal to buckle to the school’s demands, Zachary Suhr, a Bowdoin graduate and former leader of the Bowdoin Christian Fellowship, said that “it would compromise our ability to be who we are as Christians if we can’t hold our leaders to some sort of doctrinal standard.”

While groups such as the Bowdoin Christian Fellowship, which is part of a national Christian college group called InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, will still be able to meet informally on the Bowdoin campus, the group will “lose access to student activity fee money as well as first claim to low-cost or free university spaces for meetings and worship,” reported the *Times*.

Robert Gregory, an attorney and volunteer advisor for the Bowdoin InterVarsity group, said that Bowdoin officials claimed the group’s practice of selecting its leaders based on biblical standards violated state law. “We were told that state law would override biblical standards of leadership, so the non-discrimination policy prohibited the Bowdoin Christian Fellowship and InterVarsity from [discriminating against] any student,” Gregory told the *Christian Post*. “For example, whether they were Christian, whether they were serious about following Christian patterns of belief and practice as it related to sexuality and other matters, there could be no discrimination made.”

Gregory noted that making discriminating choices in lifestyle and behavior goes to the very heart of the Christian faith, and is not an issue on which InterVarsity is willing to compromise. “Isn’t that exactly what we are instructing our students every day in Christian discipleship,” he noted to the *Christian Post*, “to make discriminating judgments about their own life, about their own patterns and practices as Christian students on a college campus? So we can’t say ... we won’t be discriminating, or teach our students to be discriminating, on those matters that are central to Christians.”

He added, however, that the Bowdoin Christian Fellowship welcomes all individuals to come to its meeting, regardless of belief or lifestyle. “This fellowship doesn’t have formal admissions standards,” he emphasized to the *Christian Post*. “These are students who meet on a regular basis and invite all of the students who come. Students who lead, however, have to sign a charter that expects them to follow a set of Christian behavior.”

Another InterVarsity spokesman, Greg Jao, told the *Christian Post* that the increasing number of universities that are prepared to jettison Christian groups from their diverse mix of campus organizations represents a nation in conflict about its traditional religious worldview. He said that there are “just enough” universities like Bowdoin, Vanderbilt, and Cal State that have taken the issue of discrimination “to an illogical extreme; it’s an increasing number of schools that actually believe that the best way to avoid discrimination is to prevent religious groups from becoming authentically religious. There is enough of them that it is actually a trend.”

It is part of a more fundamental turn, Jao said, that finds the United States “reassessing what it thinks the role of religion should be in our society. Health and Human Service questions, denial of service



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questions, marriage equality — they are all different questions about religion and its role in society, but they are all being asked right now, and the U.S. is coming to a very different answer than it used to come up with.”



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