



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 26, 2019

Lesbian “Marries” Partner, Sues Seminary for Expelling Her

A student at California’s prestigious Fuller Theological Seminary has sued the school for expelling her after it was discovered that she had “married” her lesbian partner.

As reported by [NBC News](#), 53-year-old Joanna Maxon of Fort Worth, Texas, was close to completing her masters degree in theology when she received a letter from a Fuller official notifying her that she had violated the school’s biblical morality standards and was being expelled.



“I was approaching the end and looking forward to graduation and all that stuff,” Maxon told NBC News. “To have that taken away unexpectedly — I was a really good student — I was devastated by it.”

Maxon was apparently not involved in the lesbian relationship when she began taking online classes through Fuller in 2015. In 2016, however, she “married” partner Tonya Minton, and when the school discovered the relationship through Maxon’s 2016 tax returns, which were part of her financial aid application, she was confronted by school officials over the violation of Fuller’s morality standards.

In response, Maxon penned a letter to Marianne Meye Thompson, Dean of Fuller’s School of Theology, stating that she had made “a financial, emotional, and legal commitment to the person I love,” according to the lawsuit.

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In October 2018 Thompson expelled Maxon from the graduate program, citing Fuller’s “sexual standards,” which preclude homosexual relationships. “Whenever violations of our sexual standards are brought to Fuller’s leadership’s attention, we address them as dictated by our policies and procedures,” explained Thompson in the letter of expulsion. “I am instructing the registrar to dismiss you from the seminary, effective immediately.”

According to Maxon’s attorney, Paul Southwick, his client “did attempt to resolve this through the college and then we did try to negotiate with the school for several months before filing” the lawsuit against Fuller.

According to NBC News, the federal lawsuit, filed November 21 in Los Angeles, “alleges violation of federal and state civil rights laws as well as U.S. Department of Education Title IX rules, which generally prohibits gender identity discrimination at institutions that accept federal aid. Maxon was using federally backed student loans to finance her education.”

Fuller officials “discriminated against Mrs. Maxon based on her sexual orientation because it expelled Mrs. Maxon for entering into a civil same-sex marriage,” the lawsuit charges. “Defendants also discriminated against Mrs. Maxon based on her sex and sexual orientation by subjecting her to stricter disciplinary action than Fuller would have subjected a male, heterosexual student.”

The lawsuit insists that “Maxon is a Christian woman who took her studies seriously. She worked



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diligently on the courses in her program. Her peers and professors respected and admired her. She deserved more than a cold letter dismissing her.”

In the suit, Maxon claims “humiliation, emotional distress, and other damages” as a result of her expulsion, with a reported damage claim of \$500,000.

Southwick claimed to [Bloomberg Law](#) that Maxon “did not see her expulsion coming,” insisting that she “was authentic with the university and was accepted by students and professors after she married her wife. A publicly funded institution should not be allowed to suddenly expel a student because of her same-sex marriage, especially one who has invested over three years of time and money completing her degree.”

Southwick told the [ChristianPost.com](#) that Maxon’s is the first case he has represented in which a student “filed a Title IX lawsuit because they have been expelled for a same-sex marriage. The other cases I’ve taken on have dealt with gender identity discrimination or related to sexual conduct involving non-married LGBTQ students.”

He predicted that “with the legalization of same-sex marriage, institutions like Fuller will be encountering more and more students who are in same-sex marriages, particularly among graduate student populations.”

Maxon complained that she is now unsure if she’ll finish her graduate degree. “It took me a year just to get to the point where I was confident enough to talk about this out in the open,” she told NBC News. “I’d like to make this process easier for other students. I really hate the idea of someone else going through this.”

In a prepared statement Fuller noted that all students are required to sign and follow a statement of faith and biblically based standards — a procedure that Maxon no doubt understood and followed before enrolling at the institution.

“As a historically multi-denominational seminary and a convening place for civil dialogue — with a commitment to academic freedom — we strive to serve the global Christian church in its various perspectives,” reads the statement. “We remain committed to these relationships in all their complexities while maintaining community standards and a statement of faith that apply to various areas of beliefs and behavior. Students are informed of and explicitly agree to abide by these standards when applying to the institution.”

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