

# Christian organizations under fire

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## The Associated Press

Dozens of colleges have scrutinized how on-campus Christian groups operate after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowed a law school to deny funding to a Christian group that would not admit gays.

The 2010 ruling touched on gay and religious rights on campus, and the tension is now at the center of a handful of disputes at colleges.

A chapter of the Christian group InterVarsity at the University of Buffalo was temporarily suspended. The student government is evaluating its groups after a treasurer, who is gay, felt pressured to step down.

The University of North Carolina is reviewing its student organizations after a Christian singing group expelled a gay member. And at Vanderbilt University, a private college in Tennessee, Christian groups were asked to change requirements that their leaders also be Christian.

Administrators say that requirement is discriminatory.

Kim Colby, senior counsel for the Christian Legal Society, said Christian groups shouldn't be asked, and the ruling doesn't require them, to essentially erase their religious identities to comply with nondiscrimination codes.

College administrators may not agree with conservative Christian views that homosexual acts are sinful, but that's not a reason to remove all official support, she said.

"Pluralism says the government is supposed to be letting groups form around their beliefs, whether it agrees with them or not," she said.

Susan Sommer of Lambda Legal, a gay rights group, said no one is trying to stop students from forming groups around their beliefs. But she said the Supreme Court ruling has now clarified that public colleges don't have to support groups that discriminate.

If such groups see it as

a repudiation of what they believe, "that is something they have to live with," Sommer said.

The 5-4 court ruling backed a policy at California's Hastings College of the Law that denied the Christian Legal Society's attempts to win official recognition — including funding and other assistance — because the group violated the school's nondiscrimination policies by not admitting gays.

The decision dealt strictly with the constitu-

tionality of so-called all comers policies, which require every student group to keep membership and leadership open to any person who wants to join.

True all comers policies are rare because they're often impractical and can lead to absurd results, said Robert Shibley of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which monitors free speech issues on campuses and has criticized Vanderbilt.

For instance, such policies stop a campus Christian group from ousting its president if he converts to Islam, Shibley said.

They also raise the prospect of mischief: in theory, the College Republicans could join the College Democrats en masse, take over the leadership and disband the group, he said.

Sommer said such things never happen, and

all comers policies are straightforward and just.

"The position of the university is, 'We really don't need to know the basis of your desire to exclude people, we have a policy that simply says you can't exclude people,' she said.

The Supreme Court decision applies at public colleges, but the decision has had a broader influence.

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