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Organization fights University's policy

By Brent Forgues
Summer Reporter

The women's Christian cooperative house at Purdue has been exempted from following the University's non-discrimination policy.

Kori Hurley, president of the board of directors of Stewart cooperative housing, said Purdue informed Stewart on Oct. 20 that they must add President Martin Jischke's new non-discrimination clause, which prohibited discrimination on matters of faith and sexual orientation, by Nov. 21.

"We immediately knew we would have a problem with it because of our faith," she said. Stewart is one of a few student organizations with rules and doctrines rooted in the dogma of Christianity.

"After contacting the Office of the Dean of Students about our problem with the clause," Hurley said, "they told us they make no exemptions for anyone."

Tamara Rice, assistant dean of students, said Purdue based its response on the knowledge it had concerning religious organizations at the time.

"They are a student organization," said Rice. "And in regards to religious organizations at Purdue, they weren't regarded as a church."

Hurley and her colleagues did not wish for any redirection.

"We had one month to find a solution," she said. "If we did not accept the ultimatum Purdue offered us, then they would revoke our student organization status and we would lose the house."

Hurley responded by calling a lawyer, who informed them to contact an organization known as the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education.

"(The foundation) had dealt with this kind of situation before and they knew exactly how to handle it," she said.

The foundation sent a letter directly to Jischke, informing him of potential legal action that the organization would take if Purdue did not allow religious exemption for Stewart. One week after the foundation sent the letter, Stewart

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received notification that the University would implement exemption "to bring the matter to closure."

Rice said that after further investigation, religious organizations could discriminate on grounds concerning only "religious tenants."

"They wanted to allow only Christian women," she said. "And because we determined they were a religious organization, they were allowed to do that. It turns out that freedom of religion trumps other freedoms."

Two years ago, Jischke mandated that any student organization that wished to update their constitution or any new developing student organization would have to implement the new non-discrimination clause.

Rice said the University let those student organizations that existed prior to the new clause update their constitutions on their own time

But by the second year, the University decided to require all student organizations to include the new rules.

"It was a pretty big task," said Rice. "Last summer we decided to go through some 640 student organizations files and we found that 330 had not implemented the new non-discrimination clause. All student organizations know they have a constitution, but most don't really look at it, and it's frequently ignored. This gave them the chance to look at their mission again and redirect them to what their original purposes were."

The situation between the co-op and Purdue ended almost within the same month it started, and following Stewart's example, Fairway and Beta Sigma Phi, both religious housing organizations, asked for and received religious exemptions from the new clause during the same semester as well.

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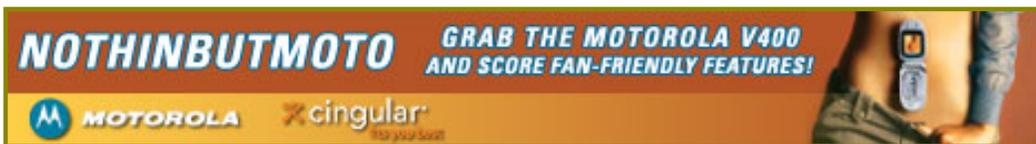
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