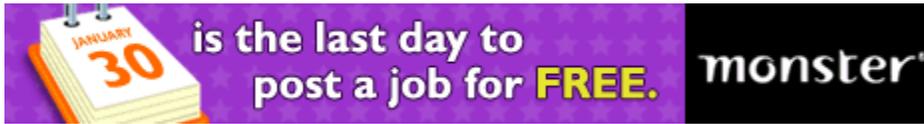


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## BRAVE NEW SCHOOLS

# Catholic school rejects Christian group

Students consider faith-based leadership requirement 'discriminatory'

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A private Catholic law school's Student Bar Association has rejected two Christian groups on campus because it considers a requirement that leadership be Christian "discriminatory."

The Spokane, Wash., Jesuit school's SBA won't recognize the local chapter of the Christian Legal Society and last fall it also rejected the Christian Pro-Life Caucus, according to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE, a group promoting religious liberty on campuses.

FIRE says Gonzaga University's president, the Rev. Robert J. Spitzer, has not intervened on behalf of either group despite the law school's promise to be a "welcoming environment for students of all religious backgrounds or secular moral traditions."

"Gonzaga owes its very existence to the constitutionally guaranteed right to organize around its religious identity, but it is allowing the SBA to deny these same fundamental rights

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to its students," said Greg Lukianoff, FIRE's director of legal and public advocacy.

Christian Legal Society leaders said the university's vice president for student affairs, Sue Weitz, assured the group in an e-mail message it had "university recognition." But the group argues this is not the same as SBA recognition, which would have conferred a set of important benefits, including university funding.

Even the one benefit conferred by "university recognition" was lost in February, according to CLS leaders, when the group's SBA account was closed.

The CLS said it was informed the SBA no longer would manage the funds of "unrecognized" clubs.

The Christian Pro-Life Law Caucus had similar difficulties last fall, said FIRE, when SBA leaders ruled the Christian leadership requirement was improperly "discriminatory."

That determination was made despite the advice of the law school's dean, Daniel Morrissey, professor David DeWolf and university counsel Mike Casey, who determined the requirement was permissible.

In a letter last November, FIRE asked Spitzer to overrule the SBA's decision.

"The great irony here is that by denying the caucus the right to be led by Christians, the SBA is engaging in – not preventing – religious discrimination," FIRE said. "The school of law's SBA both shows contempt for basic freedoms any public university would have to recognize under the Constitution of the United States and exhibits fundamental intolerance towards Catholic doctrine itself."

Gonzaga issued a statement claiming "the

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administration is not willing to force the SBA to restrict the promise of participation to all students in SBA-sponsored activities."

That policy differs from the leadership requirements of other Catholic schools, such as Boston College and Notre Dame, which have officially recognized CLS chapters.

"If the SBA were truly opposed to discrimination, it would welcome a wide variety of religious and political groups and let students choose which ones to be part of," said FIRE's Lukianoff. "If students find no groups that suit them, they should be free to start their own organizations without being subject to intrusive SBA interference with their beliefs."

FIRE said last October it convinced the university to reverse a decision to censor a student flier as "hate speech" because it contained the word "hate."

The said such misunderstandings of religious liberty are commonly held by students and officials on campuses across the nation, citing its Religious Liberty on Campus Survey.

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