

Decision of the Tufts University Committee on Student Life on Recognition of Student Religious Groups

December 5, 2012

This Fall, the decision of the Tufts Community Union Judiciary (TCUJ) to de-recognize the Tufts Christian Fellowship (TCF) was appealed to the Committee on Student Life (CSL). As expected, this matter has received significant attention. The CSL has considered the issues seriously and has reached a unanimous decision.

Regarding the specific question of whether the TCUJ acted inappropriately, we find no significant fault with the TCUJ. No human process is perfect, and while variation across decision processes should be minimized, it is our finding that the TCUJ followed its policy correctly in de-recognizing the TCF. As such, TCF's appeal is declined.

TCF's appeal, however, has demonstrated that the TCUJ process for student group recognition has not previously addressed the issue of leadership characteristics for student religious groups (SRGs). Accordingly, the CSL is filling this policy void. These changes are made in the context of TCF's appeal, but will impact all student religious groups within the jurisdiction of the TCUJ seeking recognition and re-recognition from this point forward.

The CSL Ruling:

Membership: SRGs must uphold and adhere to the University's full nondiscrimination policy (sometimes referred to as an "all comers" policy) with respect to group membership. This reflects no change in current policy.

Leadership: It is reasonable to expect that leaders within individual SRGs be exemplars of that particular religion. Therefore, an "all comers" policy for group leadership may not be appropriate for all SRGs. Justified departures from the Tufts nondiscrimination policy in SRG criteria for leadership will no longer present grounds for de-recognition. This reflects a policy change.

Transparency: To ensure that all potential SRG members are aware of specific requirements for leadership, all SRGs must explicitly state and justify any leadership criteria that are in conflict with Tufts' nondiscrimination policy, the relevant portion of which reads as follows:

"Tufts prohibits discrimination against and harassment of any [individual] because of race, color, national or ethnic origin, age, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and expression, including a transgender identity, genetics, veteran status...and any other characteristic protected...under applicable federal or state law."

If adherence to a particular set of religious beliefs is to be a criterion for leadership, this must be clearly stated. Additionally, if religious doctrine specifically requires any further leadership criteria that necessitate one or more exceptions to Tufts' nondiscrimination policy—such as ones that might be based on gender, sexual orientation or other categories—they must be explicitly stated and justified in SRG constitutions and applications for recognition (and re-recognition) by the TCUJ. Furthermore, this information must be

easily obtained by any interested community members (e.g., summarized on the Chaplain's official web site). This reflects a policy change.

Oversight: To ensure transparency, the University Chaplaincy will review for accuracy and appropriate doctrinal justification all departures from the Tufts nondiscrimination policy required for any SRG leadership positions. The TCUJ will not review applications for recognition or re-recognition until after the University Chaplain has ensured complete and accurate doctrinal justification. This reflects a policy change.

De-recognition: De-recognition of a SRG is an appropriate response by the TCUJ if a religious group violates the nondiscrimination policy when an exception has not previously been approved on doctrinal grounds by the University Chaplain and/or if the student group has not been fully transparent (e.g., by using vague language instead of explicit statements). The University Chaplain should be consulted in SRG de-recognition decisions. This reflects a policy change.