

Campus Access: Responding to Challenges

Talking points for staff facing campus access challenges

Abstract: *This document was written as a response to the U.S. Supreme Court's 5-4 decision in the case of [Christian Legal Society v. Martinez](#) on June 28, 2010. Since then, InterVarsity's right to require that the leaders of our campus chapters affirm the basic Christian doctrines of our Statement of Beliefs is frequently being questioned on a number of other campuses. This paper contains advice and talking points for staff who face campus access issues.*

BIBLICAL GUIDELINES

What should be our approach when InterVarsity faces potential challenges to our right to full recognition as a campus organization? Let's determine to take the moral high road in all of our conversations and remember this biblical admonition:

"Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:1-2).

In keeping with Paul's description of his own ministry, let us not resort to political maneuvering, guilt manipulation, threats, deception, or adopting a victim mentality. Rather we should be fully transparent and forthright in our communication. We need not appear desperate in our attempts to retain our official recognition on campus. As Jim Lundgren has reminded us, God is not wringing his hand over this Supreme Court ruling (*CLS v. Martinez*), wondering what he is going to do. Neither should we.

PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKING

We need to be careful to avoid "charming" the university officials now that our recognition as a student organization may be more precarious. They will see through this kind of maneuver and it is unworthy of our calling. We should be transparent and consistent in our public and private communication. Our first encounter with these administrative people should not be when we have a problem.

However, the current challenges to InterVarsity's campus access at several universities reminds us that it is always wise and good practice to have healthy and active communication with college administrators. We would do well to arrange a meeting with the VP of student life, residence hall directors, chaplains or religious life directors at private colleges, and in some cases the president or provost. Our approach is to be respectful and authentic. It is a good idea to "interview" university administrators, to learn what is important to them and to the university. Asking good questions will help prevent InterVarsity from making unintentional mistakes or having misunderstandings in the future. It can also be helpful to participate in the university interfaith association, or similar organization on campus. Groups are most vulnerable when they are isolated from a community of

shared concern. You may also try to enlist a friend in the administration to serve as an advocate and “listening ear” if complaints should arise.

Bob Trube (GFM) describes a successful negotiation with university administrators at Ohio State. “In 2004, we discovered that key administrators were actually looking for a way out of controversy as much as we were and, rather than being one more problem, we became collaborators on a solution that served as the basis for settling CLS's lawsuit with the university.”

We need to recognize that university administrators operate in a context that is highly politically charged. If we can approach them in a spirit of understanding, bringing grace and truth together, we can serve them well, as good citizens of the university. An additional opportunity to actively serve the university administration is to proactively offer the strengths of InterVarsity to the administration. For example, we’ve had success on certain campuses offering cross-cultural training for residence hall directors, or providing rides and welcoming international students at the airport, or giving orientation training for freshmen.

TALKING POINTS

- “InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is a recognized, registered student organization on this campus, in good standing. We have been here for ___ years (find out how long InterVarsity has been at your campus). We have not changed our policies or practices. We have benefited the student life on this campus in numerous ways (list some, such as welcoming freshmen, supporting justice concerns, sponsoring service projects, campus-wide events). We are known nationally on this campus for our commitment to ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation. We have contributed to the spiritual lives of hundreds (thousands?) of alumni from this university.”
- “InterVarsity Christians Fellowship/USA has 866 chapters on 557 campuses, with 36,670 students and faculty participating. We have been ministering at colleges and universities since 1941. Some campuses have separate outreaches to international students, sororities and fraternities, and ethnic minority groups, as well as career-specific graduate student chapters. One of our hallmarks is student leadership. Our goal is that students will be leaders in their professions, demonstrating servant leadership with high moral standards. We are also committed to take the university seriously as a place of learning and to enter into the world of ideas with a Christian voice.”
- “It is our understanding that the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in the Hastings case (CLS vs. Martinez) applies to a very narrow set of circumstances, particularly where the Hastings Law School had adopted an “all-comers” policy (see Chronicle of Higher Education, July 11, 2010, by Peter Schmidt). Very few universities in the country are known to have this policy. The Martinez case does not apply universally, but only in cases where an “all-comers” policy is being equally applied to all student groups without discrimination. It is our understanding that this university does not have an all-comers policy, but rather has a non-discrimination policy. We are in compliance with the non-discrimination policy. I am not a legal expert, but I would be happy to put you in contact with our legal counsel if this would be helpful.”

- “As a Christian student organization, we welcome anyone to fully participate in group activities, not discriminating on the basis of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, or religious preference. Indeed, many of our regular attendees are not necessarily in agreement with our purposes. However, the stated purpose of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed on campus. We expect our leaders to be fully committed to this purpose. Our leaders also submit to the Bible as our authority for matters of faith and practice. [InterVarsity](#) has official statements of Purpose, Vision, Values, and Doctrine which form the foundation of our organization.”
- “We believe that InterVarsity students are the type of students you want to have on this campus. InterVarsity students want to care for and serve the campus. As students, they want to model the type of service on campus that we hope the university graduates will have in the greater society. They take their studies seriously, they work hard, they are trained as leaders, and they are committed to high moral standards. ” (Give examples of model students or activities; cite any special recognition or acknowledgements your group may have received.)
- “InterVarsity provides a home for students who share a concern for Christian values and for those seeking spiritual realities. The UCLA survey of our nation’s incoming students (236 campuses, 112,000 respondents) consistently shows that 79% of students believe in God, 76% are searching for meaning/purpose in life, 80% are interested in spirituality, 81% attend religious services, 80% discuss religion or spirituality with friends, and 69% pray. These are the types of students that would be attracted to a vibrant, spiritually-minded student organization like InterVarsity. We have found that Christian high school seniors and their parents will often inquire as to whether there is an active InterVarsity chapter at a campus when making their decision about which college to attend.”
- “While we are a distinctly Christian organization, we practice respect for the rights and privileges of different faith traditions and viewpoints. We value the dignity of the individual and do not engage in methods which would de-value the person. In our written ‘[Code of Ethics for Christian Witness](#),’ we state that ‘we disavow the use of any coercive techniques or manipulative appeals which bypass a person’s critical faculties, play on psychological weaknesses, undermine relationship with family or religious institutions, or mask the true nature of Christian conversion.’ We are advocates for civility and honesty in all dialogue, including religious discussions. We encourage InterVarsity groups to be honest in their advertising and the manner in which they present their identity and purpose on campus.”

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