

Louisiana College restricts textbooks_122203

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PINEVILLE, La. (ABP)-In a move that already has generated considerable outcry, Louisiana College trustees will now require college administrators to approve textbooks for classes at the Baptist school.

Previously the selection of textbooks and other classroom materials was at the sole discretion of faculty members. Trustees said the change will bring accountability to the process.

Under the new policy, approved by trustees after a lengthy executive session, all materials used at the school must be approved by department chairs and the vice president for academic affairs.

One trustee said the new policy brings the school in line with the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, the Southern Baptist Convention's new doctrinal statement.

Two days after the trustee action, the school's faculty approved a statement warning the new policy will damage the college's reputation, devalue degree programs and hinder recruitment and fund-raising efforts.

Trustees took action after a student complained about "A Road Less Traveled" by Scott Peck and "A Lesson Before Dying" by Ernest Gaines.

The new policy is “manifestly impossible,” said Thomas Howell, chair of the history department. “There is no conceivable way to review all the materials. There is no other way but to trust our faculty members to use good professional judgment on these kinds of things.”

Meanwhile, opponents of the new policy organized a candlelight vigil near the Pineville campus.

The issue of textbook approval surfaced in September when university President Rory Lee removed two books from the college bookstore after complaints from a student. The books—“A Road Less Traveled” by Scott Peck and “A Lesson Before Dying” by Ernest Gaines—are considered modern classics in many circles and had been used for several years in a values class. The complaining student noted the Peck book contains profane words and the Gaines novel includes a love scene.

A single complaint should not be enough to get a book pulled, one student told the local newspaper. “Only one student had a problem with the book out of all the years they’ve used it,” Dale de Perrodil said. “‘The Road Less Traveled’ is an excellent text.”

Lee acknowledged he ordered the removal of the books without following the established procedure, which provides for students to be assigned alternative readings for materials they find objectionable.

The incident prompted a trustee review of the textbook-selection process.

Fred Malone, chair of the trustee academic affairs committee, said the old policy provided “literally no academic governance or oversight” in the selection of materials. As established, faculty members do not have to submit textbooks or materials for review by anyone, he said.

The changes, which took effect immediately, assign “primary” responsibility to faculty members but require additional approval farther up the academic and administrative ladder. Malone said the new policy falls in line with the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message because it provides the balance of academic freedom and academic responsibility called for in the doctrinal statement.

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