

Gay-rights rally organizer strikes plea bargain with Baylor_53104

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WACO (ABP)—A recent Baylor University graduate says he signed, under protest, a statement admitting he violated the school's conduct code by organizing a gay-rights rally because he feared he wouldn't be allowed to graduate if he refused to sign.

Pawnee, Okla., native Darrin Adams graduated from the school May 15. In late April, school officials informed him he was being prosecuted under Baylor's student conduct code for his role in organizing the off-campus rally.

In a letter informing Adams of the charges, a school official said his involvement in planning the event made Adams “part of an advocacy group that promotes understandings of sexuality that are contrary” to traditional Christian beliefs.

The charge was a reference to a Baylor policy that reads: “The university

affirms the biblical understanding of sexuality as a gift from God. Christian churches across the ages and around the world have affirmed purity in singleness and fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman as the biblical norm. ... It is thus expected that Baylor students will not participate in advocacy groups which promote understandings of sexuality that are contrary to biblical teaching.”

Another part of Baylor's student policy says the school expects “that each Baylor student will conduct himself or herself in accordance with Christian principles as commonly perceived by Texas Baptists” and that students can be prosecuted for off-campus conduct that “interferes with Baylor's pursuit of its educational and Christian objectives.”

A group of gay and gay-friendly students, alumni and friends of the school sponsored the rally. According to an article in the campus newspaper, the Baylor Lariat, speakers at the event in downtown Waco “called for action in order to attain equality on campus (for homosexual students) and a non-discrimination clause in university policies.”

The 22-year-old Adams, who is gay, said an administrator informed him that if he signed a statement admitting wrongdoing, he would only receive a verbal warning.

However, if he refused, he would have gone through an appeals process in which a tribunal of students and faculty would decide his fate. After consulting with a civil-rights attorney, he reluctantly agreed to sign the statement, he said.

“It was either choosing a written warning—a punishment that I knew—or not signing it and having to go through two hearings and not knowing what the punishment would be,” he said. “I just wanted to graduate.”

Adams is the founder of two Baylor-related gay-rights groups, and in March spoke about the issue on national television. He was included in an on-air

discussion about homosexuality at Baylor on the Fox News Channel's "O'Reilly Factor" program.

Adams said school officials were aware of all those activities. He said he was informed that none of them were sufficient to prosecute him for violation of the policy barring student involvement in pro-gay advocacy groups.

In addition, Adams said Baylor officials informed him they would not seek to discipline other students who were present at the rally, but had singled him out for prosecution because of his role in organizing it. He said a fellow student had sent administrators an Internet article from a Houston gay community newspaper that mentioned his efforts to organize the event.

The rally took place in March, and was partially in response to another gay former Baylor student's situation. In December, officials at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary revoked Matt Bass' scholarship, apparently because he is gay and openly supported same-sex civil marriage and other gay rights.

School officials have refused to discuss the specifics of either case. However, responding to publicity about Bass' case in February, Truett Seminary Dean Paul Powell did tell an ABP reporter that he would not dismiss a student simply because they openly advocated gay rights. "We don't dismiss people for their opinion; it's for their lifestyle," he said.

Powell also said he wanted students to be free to discuss issues of difference in biblical interpretation. However, he went on to say homosexuality was plainly condemned in Scripture. "It's not up for debate with me," Powell said. "I mean, you can talk about it, but the issue's settled," Powell said. "The Bible consistently says (homosexuality) is wrong."

Besides Adams' and Bass' situations, the school was roiled by another

controversy over gay rights this year. The editors of the Lariat, which is run by students but published by the university, earned a stern rebuke from Baylor President Robert Sloan and the school's Student Publications Board for a staff editorial that appeared in the paper's Feb. 27 edition. The article endorsed expanding civil marriage rights to same-sex couples on constitutional grounds. It stopped short of a theological endorsement of same-sex marriage.

But, according to Lariat staffers, Baylor administrators in rebuking the paper cited the same "Statement on Human Sexuality" that they used with Adams.

Adams, who earned his degree in journalism, has moved to Washington to intern for a public-relations firm. He said it was ironic that Baylor is using the very freedoms guaranteed to it as a private religious institution to curtail its own students' freedom. "I think Baylor forgets that they're not a country in itself. The reason it exists is because of the Constitution," he said. "I just hate the fact that they use the heading 'Christian' while at the same time they practice bigotry against other people."

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