

# Gay-rights group targets Baptist colleges, including DBU

October 1, 2008

AUSTIN (ABP)—A group that promotes equal rights for homosexuals in religious organizations appears to be targeting Baptist schools in its third annual tour of faith-based educational institutions.

Most of the stops scheduled on Soulforce Q's Equality Ride are Baptist-affiliated schools, including [Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary](#) in Fort Worth and Dallas Baptist University.

Others include Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.; Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, Fla.; Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark.; Union University in Jackson, Tenn.; Mississippi College, Clinton, Miss.; and Central Baptist College, Conway, Ark.; along with Columbia International University, Columbia, S.C.; Morehouse College and Spelman College in Atlanta; Heritage Christian University, Florence, Ala.; Southwestern Assemblies of God University in Waxahachie; and Simmons College of Kentucky, Louisville, Ky.

Louisiana College, a Baptist school in Pineville, La., also was originally included. But Soulforce Q canceled the visit because the area is still recovering from Hurricane Gustav, according to college spokesperson Amy Robertson.

Soulforce Q is the young-adult division of [Soulforce](#), an interfaith organization that "works to end political and religious oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people through relentless nonviolent resistance," according to a press release.

"As young people and students ourselves, we understand that it's very

difficult to learn in an environment where you don't feel safe," Equality Ride co-director Jarrett Lucas said. "And students who face harassment or expulsion can't always speak up for themselves.

Soulforce Q sends requests for meetings with administrators and students to the schools several months in advance of the ride. A negative response doesn't mean the institution will be dropped from the tour list. "The colleges' responses shape the itinerary," the release noted. "The Equality Ride strives to visit a mix of schools that are open to collaboration and schools that are not yet willing to make a place at the table for affirming viewpoints."

"A lot of schools will let students know we are coming," ride co-director Katie Higgins said in a telephone interview. "And we tend to get a flood of e-mail from students, mostly positive.

"We get contacts from students who say they are not safe," even at institutions with safety policies in place, Higgins said. "The fact of the matter is that every college in this country could benefit from the Equality Ride."

Palm Beach Atlantic University, a Florida Baptist school, will not meet with ride participants. A "visit by Equality Ride would fail to meaningfully further the mission of either organization," Palm Beach Atlantic president David Clark said in a prepared statement released to faculty, staff and students.

"As we have explained to them, our campus is already a safe place for all students. The university does not tolerate harassment of any individual. We believe we have a welcoming campus for all students," he added.

Palm Beach Atlantic does not ban students with same-sex orientation from enrolling, but it does require students to follow its behavior policies, which prohibit homosexual behavior.

At least one Baptist school will welcome Equality Ride participants. Student affairs leaders and administrators at [Dallas Baptist University](#) will meet them for lunch when the tour stops Oct. 24. Dialogue sessions are scheduled for the afternoon.

“We had been aware of what the Equality Ride was,” DBU Dean of Student Life Jay Harley said in a telephone interview. “We anticipated receiving an invitation from them.

“After a lot of prayer and discussion among the administration,” administrators at Dallas Baptist decided to allow the ride organizers to lead a discussion, “but with the understanding that we disagree with where they stand,” Harley said. “It is a part of higher education to have discussions, even about topics about which we disagree.”

Students had input into the decision as well. University administrators “explained why they wanted to pursue a discussion (with Soulforce Q) and asked how we would respond to that,” DBU Student Government Association president Leigha Caron said.

“Our students have a strong commitment to good character and morals. We as Christians ... can show the selfless love that Christ would have us show.”

Harley emphasized that Dallas Baptist already has safety policies in place. “We regard the safety of all students—for all students to be safe, to not be discriminated against or to experience hatred from other students ... that includes those who may be dealing with homosexual issues or students dealing with other issues or students who are not Christians,” he said.