



July 27, 2012

The Honorable Jeff Landry  
House of Representatives  
206 Cannon HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Landry:

Thank you for your most recent letter that followed a meeting that I had with local state senators who asked to meet with me to discuss the LGBT minor. I appreciate your offer of assistance through relief from “onerous federal regulations” that “prohibit the university from both discontinuing the LGBT minor and refocusing these resources towards educational activities that provide participants better job prospects upon completion.”

I do not recall that I described federal regulations, accreditation standards, or my professional responsibilities and obligations in this manner when I met with these legislators. What we discussed was the connection between federal regulations governing access to federal student financial aid, accreditation standards, and institutional responsibility that I believe prescribe my administrative posture. Please allow me to repeat the basic points of my comments to them in the hope of providing greater clarity for you.

The U. S. Secretary of Education is required by statute to publish a list of recognized accrediting agencies that the secretary determines to be reliable authorities on the quality of education and training provided by the institutions of higher education that they accredit. Higher education institutions must attain accreditation by one of these recognized accrediting agencies in order for their students to be eligible to participate in the federal student financial assistance programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended.

The nationally recognized regional accreditor for Louisiana, thus UL Lafayette’s accreditor, is the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and its Commission on Colleges (SACS COC). Founded in 1895 and headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, SACS COC accredits higher education degree-granting institutions in 11 southern states as well as Mexico, Dubai and Trinidad.

The commission evaluates an institution and makes accreditation decisions based on the following:

- Compliance with the Principle of Integrity.
- Compliance with Core Requirements.
- Compliance with Comprehensive Standards.
- Compliance with additional Federal Requirements.
- Compliance with the policies of the Commission on Colleges.

There are several Comprehensive Standards that are relevant to the current circumstance. They are:

- CS 3.2.4 “The governing board is free from undue influence from political, religious, or other external bodies and protects the institution from such influence.”
- CS 3.2.7 “The institution has a clearly defined and published organizational structure that delineates responsibility for the administration of policies.”
- CS 3.4.1 “The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded is approved by the faculty and the administration.”
- CS 3.4.10 “The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty.”
- CS.3.4.11 “For each major in a degree program, the institution assigns responsibility for program coordination as well as for curriculum development and review, to persons academically qualified in the field. In those degree programs for which the institution does not identify a major, this requirement applies to a curricular area or concentration.”

I provide this detail so that you might gain a clearer understanding of my position. The LGBT minor was proposed by faculty in the Department of Sociology (CS 3.4.10 and CS 3.4.11). The proposal was approved according to established policy (CS 3.2.7 and CS 3.4.1).

As the board-selected chief executive of the institution, I have the professional responsibility to fulfill the Board’s obligations in this case, which is to assure that the institution is protected from political, religious, or other external undue influence (CS 3.2.4).

The principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy from undue outside pressure and influence espoused in these Comprehensive Standards are not unique to SACS and in fact reflect principles that were established nearly 1,000 years ago by the Church as the papacy played a

central role in the establishment and encouragement of universities. It was Pope Gregory IX, who in 1231 issued the bull *Parens Scientiarum* on behalf of the faculty at the University of Paris. In this document, the Pope effectively granted the University of Paris the right to self government and to make its own rules pertaining to courses and studies. These principles have been a part of Western Civilization since that time.

An American element added to this tradition is tying access to federal funds to its enforcement. Thus failure to uphold these SACS Comprehensive Standards puts the university's accreditation at risk. Loss of accreditation would disallow our students' access to federal student financial aid.

The issue of access to federal student financial aid is not a trivial matter. Federal student financial aid programs include Pell Grants, Teach Grants, Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grants, Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans, PLUS Loans, Perkins Loans, and Work Study jobs. In 2009-10, 104,346 students attending Louisiana colleges and universities received Pell Grants. The value of Pell Grants alone to Louisiana students was \$406,083,000. In 2010-11, 10,336 students in Louisiana's new 3rd Congressional District (UL Lafayette, McNeese State University, South Louisiana Community College, and LSU-Eunice) received \$100,841,508 in federal student financial aid.

Again, the LGBT minor was approved by the university according to established policy. To arbitrarily overrule that policy could place the institution in violation of accreditation standards. Violation of accreditation standards would put our students' access to federal student aid programs at risk.

As I have previously stated, the university's responsibility is to be neither advocate nor adversary on controversial social issues. Our responsibility is to provide, in an impartial manner, an opportunity for investigation, analysis, and discernment. To that end, I have met with the provost and academic deans to remind them of the university's expectation that when faculty explore controversial subjects in their classes, professional ethics require that those subjects be presented and discussed in a balanced way, giving voice to multiple points of view.

The dean of the college in which the LGBT minor resides has met with faculty members who oversee the LGBT minor and discussed the need for maintaining impartiality on this subject matter, emphasizing that any advocacy for or against a particular position on social or religious issues in the classroom is incompatible with the university's mission. All curricula, particularly those that are new, will be reviewed and evaluated according to university standards.

Finally, allow me to comment on the repeated assertion that the university should focus its resources "towards educational activities that provide participants better job prospects upon completion." Certainly proper preparation of our students for the current and projected job

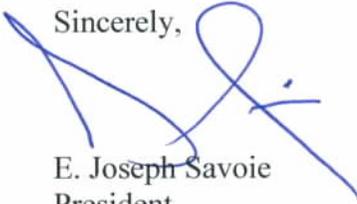
The Honorable Jeff Landry  
Page 4  
July 27, 2012

market is a responsibility and a priority of the university. But we are living in a world where nine-to-five jobs are declining, careers with one company over a lifetime are uncommon, and economic risk has shifted from large institutions to individuals. Our students will know and must be prepared for a world that is much more unstable and fluid than the one of just a generation ago.

That is why we strive to create a learning environment that produces not only a highly skilled, but also a broadly educated, self-motivated graduate, with a passion for life-long learning, aware of their civic obligations and ethically responsible in their careers.

To succeed, graduates will need to have a broad breadth of knowledge, flexibility, drive, and compassion. They will need to be able to think across platforms, understand society and culture and see technology and training as tools rather than an end in themselves. Universities support student learning and produce new knowledge, educated leaders, informed citizens, and expert professional skills and training. These university functions are essential contributions to a free society. And to survive, they must have a reasonable level of autonomy and scholarly freedom.

I hope that these responses adequately address the questions you raised.

Sincerely,  
  
E. Joseph Savoie  
President

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