

August 28, 2017

Sharon Berry, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Board of Educational Affairs
American Psychological Association
Washington, DC 20010

Dear Dr. Berry and Board of Educational Affairs:

Widespread concerns have been noted by [media sources](#), emerging research, and several [U.S. Senators](#) over sex and gender discrimination toward members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community who attend non-affirming faith-based colleges and universities (referred to here as NFBCUs). We are writing to implore the Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) to initiate a working group to develop guidelines addressing these and related concerns in psychology programs that, due to religious convictions, explicitly or tacitly discriminate against students, faculty, and staff on the basis of sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or religion.

There exists a very real possibility (derived from many anecdotal reports) that students, faculty, and staff at some NFBCUs could be or have been reprimanded, dismissed, or terminated on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and/or religion. That is, policies and practices at NFBCUs may create hostile environments which can lead to *unsafe circumstances* for LGBTQ individuals, an assertion which is supported by emerging psychological research (Craig, Austin, Rashidi, & Adams, 2017; Wolff, Himes, Soares, & Miller Kwon, 2016). Both studies provide evidence that some LGBTQ students who attended NFBCUs were bullied due to their sexual orientation or gender expression, had undergone sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) and/or gender identity change efforts (GICE), and experienced significant isolation and psychological distress related to the campus climate. Further, concerns aired in media sources have also drawn attention to policies at NFBCUs which may deter LGBTQ and [female students](#) from reporting sexual assault and victimization.

In the recent past, the BEA gathered a diverse group of psychologists from both NFBCUs and non-religious (secular) training programs to address concerns regarding “conscience clause” conflicts that arise between student’s religious beliefs and APA standards (Wise et al., 2015). In 2015, BEA released its recommendations, which were widely distributed and lauded by many across ideological and political divides (BEA Virtual Working group, 2015). We see many similarities between BEA’s previous work on how doctoral training programs can address conscience clauses and our current concerns regarding LGBTQ discrimination in NFBCUs. The BEA is uniquely positioned to initiate a similar working group to address concerns regarding institutional religious discrimination toward groups of students and employees based on the categories listed above. Further, this falls within the scope of BEA’s [mission](#), which is to “ensure importance and commitment to diversity in education and training in all of its activities and initiatives.”

We recognize and affirm NFBCU’s legally protected rights as private, faith-based institutions to express and maintain religious views which are central to their values and mission. Further, we

affirm religion and spirituality as essential parts of human diversity which must continue to be respected by APA. Accordingly, we believe that NFBCUs should continue to remain accredited by APA, if they are in compliance with APA's Standards of Accreditation and ethics code. Similarly, we recognize these institutions, their faculty, and students as important members who contribute to APA as valued colleagues and peers. With this letter, we do not intend to single out faith-based institutions since we are committed to advocating for the well-being of students, faculty, and staff in *all* learning environments, regardless of the type of institution (e.g., non-religious, public, private, etc.). Also, we note that many faith-based colleges and universities are welcoming and affirming to LGBTQ students and other faith groups, and therefore some aspects of this letter may not apply to all faith-based programs.

In view of the above, we respectfully request that BEA respond to these concerns, in deference to APA's ethical guidelines (e.g., Principles A and E and Standard 3.01-04), accreditation standards (e.g., Doctoral SoA I.B.2 and III.B), various APA resolutions (e.g., Resolution on Religious, Religion-Based and/or Religion-Derived Prejudice), and psychological research by developing clear guidelines regarding the welfare of students, faculty, and staff in educational institutions that may discriminate against members of certain marginalized groups because of the institution's religious affiliation. **Specifically, we ask for the formation of a BEA working group to address the following questions/concerns:**

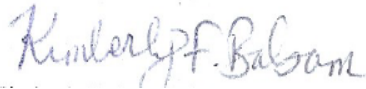
1. How can NFBCUs (or their psychology programs in particular) best support, with dignity and respect, the continuing academic pursuit of the LGBTQ student, staff, or faculty member who has come out, has been found out, has transitioned, is transitioning, or who does not conform to binary gender norms/roles and, at the same time, adhere to the religious convictions of the academic institution in these situations?
2. What responsibilities do NFBCUs (or their psychology programs in particular) have to protect marginalized students, staff, and faculty from retaliation if these individuals were to experience and report harassment, bullying, assault, or other forms of victimization? For example, would a student who is harassed by their same-sex partner and decides to report the harassment be penalized for violating the school's behavior code that prohibits same-sex intimate relationships? Or, would the student be protected as other victims of harassment would be?
3. How can NFBCUs (or their psychology programs in particular) provide supports to LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty on campus that reflect adherence to or appreciation of APA guidelines, policies, standards, and ethics code, while at the same time conform to the religious convictions of the institution?
4. In reference to APA accreditation standards, and in the spirit of academic integrity, how can NFBCUs (or their psychology programs in particular) allow various viewpoints to be discussed in classroom and campus settings which may be opposed to, or contradict, the official stated policies and positions of the institution?
5. What role might psychology programs at NFBCUs play in using psychological science and practice to improve campus climate and increase awareness for marginalized LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty?
6. What forms of internal review might an NFBCU's psychology program undergo to determine whether they are as supportive of marginalized individuals as could be possible?

7. Conversely, what tools might accrediting bodies or peer-reviewers use to independently assess and support inclusion of all individuals, especially those with marginalized identities, at NFBCUs?

Clear guidelines that address these questions could be of great help to marginalized students, staff, and faculty on campus—who currently lack virtually any form of protection from discrimination—as well as assist NFBCUs (or their psychology programs in particular) that are struggling to address these concerns successfully. Further, BEA guidelines for institutions to address conflicts between their mission and individual beliefs and identities could extend to other groups who may be subject to marginalization in such settings (e.g., a student attending a Christian college who converts to Islam while attending the program). We also request that, should the BEA working group be formed, it include stakeholders with expertise relevant to this request (e.g., NFBCU faculty, LGBTQ scholars, etc.) This is no easy task; hence, we also wish to *extend an offer to assist you* with this working group from our various Divisions and Committees.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to assisting you.

Respectfully signed,



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Past President, APA Division 44
LGBT Issues (SPSLGBTI)



David Pantalone, Ph.D.
President, APA Division 44
LGBT Issues (SPSLGBTI)



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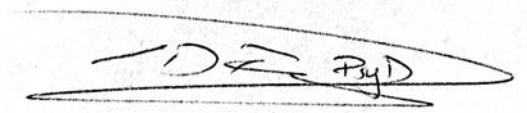
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Seth T. Pardo, Ph.D.
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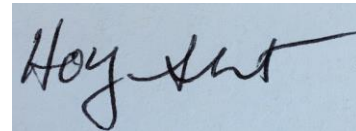
Julie Radico, Psy.D.
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Crystal Collier, Psy.D.
President, National Council of Schools of Professional Psychology (NCSPP)

The following individuals are also represented by Dr. Collier's signature above:

Megan O'Banion, Psy.D., President-elect, NCSPP
Lavita Nadkarni, Ph.D., Past-president, NCSPP
Gary Howell, Psy.D., Chair, Sexual Orientation & Gender Diversity Committee
Kelli Johnson, Ph.D., Chair, Ethnic Racial Diversity Committee, NCSPP
Radhika Krishnamurthy, Psy.D., Chair, Women's Issues Committee, NCSPP
Bhupin Butaney, Ph.D., Secretary/Treasurer, NCSPP

References

- BEA Virtual Working Group on Restrictions Affecting Diversity Training in Graduate Education. (2015). Preparing professional psychologists to serve a diverse public: A core requirement in doctoral education and training a pedagogical statement. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 9*, 269–270. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tep0000093>.
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- Wise, E. H., Bieschke, K. J., Forrest, L., Cohen-Filipic, J., Hathaway, W. L., & Douce, L. A. (2015). Psychology's proactive approach to conscience clause court cases and legislation. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 9*, 259–268. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tep0000092>.
- Wolff, J., Himes, H. L., Soares, S., & Miller Kwon, E. (2016). Sexual minority student experiences in non-affirming religious higher education: Mental health, outness and identity. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 3(2)*, 201-212. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000162>

Note – web-based media citations have hyperlinks inserted in the text of the letter above.