

FL University Shuts Down Christian Student Group

✖ Commissioned 2 Love has been ordered to cease operations on the campus of Florida A&M University. Florida A&M officials revoked the Christian student group's active status based on a finding that the club violated what the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) calls a "constitutionally problematic" rule that prohibits student groups from meeting, holding events, and hosting functions unless a university-appointed advisor is present at all times.

In a January e-mail to Commissioned 2 Love, the university advised the club that it had been deactivated for violating the university's advisor policy and ordered that "no meetings, events, activities, or gatherings of any type take place prior to Fall 2011 semester certification period." As a result, Commissioned 2 Love has ceased to exist in any meaningful way on campus. ADF officials sent the university a letter Tuesday urging them to reinstate a Christian student group they de-recognized in January.

"Christian student clubs shouldn't be kicked off campus because of a public university policy that imposes such a severe restriction on the right of students to speak or even meet on campus," says ADF Legal Counsel Jeremy Tedesco. "There is simply no constitutionally valid justification for a policy that bans student meetings and speech unless a government employee is present the entire time the meeting or speech occurs."

According to the ADF letter, this requirement is unconstitutional because it gives university employees complete and unbridled discretion over whether a student group's meeting or speech will occur.

The letter also points out that the university's policies violate the Constitution because they "compel student organizations to associate with government employees who they may not want to associate with, and who in fact may be adverse to the group's mission and expression. Even worse, the students are not given the authority to select their own advisors, but rather the Associate Vice President for Student Life appoints advisors for student organizations... FAMU's policies are particularly egregious violations of the right to association, since they require the government employee with whom student organizations must associate to...'[p]rovide counseling, leadership and direction regarding...the mission of the club or organization.'"

"This means that the university can appoint an atheist to oversee a Christian group, a meat-eater to advise a vegetarian group, or a Republican to provide direction to the College Democrats," Tedesco explains. "The policy is both unconstitutional and absurd."

In its letter, ADF urges Florida A&M to immediately reinstate the club as a recognized student organization and to amend or eliminate their unconstitutional policies.