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## NU STANDING FIRM AGAINST SOCIETAL SHIFT ON GAY MARRIAGE

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By Meredith Tillery



With same-sex marriage now legal in 32 states, nationwide opinion is changing while Northwest University's stance on LGBT issues remains firm in its evangelical, Bible based roots.

"We've always had homosexual students at Northwest since 1934," said NU President Joseph Castleberry in a face-to-face interview with *The Talon*. "Gay people have made huge strides towards greater acceptance in society and I think churches in general are trying to be more respectful than they have been in the past."

On July 21 of this year, President Obama issued an executive order for equal employment opportunities. The order states that no institution receiving federal funding may discriminate. NU's students are reliant on federal funds for financial aid. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) grants accreditation to NU, which ultimately allows the university to use federal funds.

NU is one of 162 institutions accredited through NWCCU. Schools are eligible for accreditation if they meet all 24 eligibility requirements set by the NWCCU.

One of those requirements is on non-discrimination which states, "The institution is governed and administered with respect for the individual in a nondiscriminatory manner while responding to the educational needs and legitimate claims of the constituencies it serves as determined by its charter, its mission, and its core themes."

In referencing Title IX, which grants universities religious exemptions, Castleberry said, "We are not currently disobeying the law in any way."

President George W. Bush put an executive order in place in 2002 to protect religious institutions. Section 2, Part d. of that executive order states, "No organization should be discriminated against on the basis of religion or religious belief in the administration or distribution of federal financial assistance under social service programs."

In a seven-year period, there are five accreditation standards every school under the NWCCU is required to meet. As of this past spring, NU restarted that cycle at standard one. "A lot of what they do actually gives space for an institution like Northwest to define core values, to define mission and then demonstrate that we're meeting that," said Vice Provost Ben Thomas of Northwest University.

"The fact that someone feels they have been treated hostile does not mean that the university is guilty [of any violation]. Feelings are not the same as facts," said Castleberry.

Despite all the publicity surrounding Gordon College, Castleberry believes the new executive order will become an issue "only if the government gets a lot more aggressive in asserting a broader meaning of the 14th Amendment than is currently in effect."

The only accreditor thus far to raise any potential red flag on the issue has been the New England Association of Schools and Colleges through whom Gordon College receives accreditation.

"I think that's kind of a case test to what happens because that's the only region, only accreditor that has raised the issue around how an institution NWCCU or similar to other institutions might be impacted by a stance on homosexuality" said Thomas

Even upon arriving at Northwest, Kevin Botterbusch knew he had an attraction toward other men. Botterbusch, who graduated from NU in 2009, feared he would have to remain celibate the rest of his life, but he engaged with Scripture and theology in a way that made him feel otherwise.

During his freshman year he came to realize that regardless of the amount of prayer, his sexual orientation wasn't changing.

After reading last week's Talon article, *NU Leaders Distinguish Between Homosexual Thoughts and Behavior Amid National Controversy*, Botterbusch wrote that's "[a]n interesting shift in tone" on the Facebook page, OneNU.

In a phone interview with *The Talon*, Botterbusch described two developments in this shift. "I think there's a shift in recognition that being more open to the fact that there are definitely students who on campus are identifying this way, who identify as queer or questioning who they are, that this is a journey they're on."

The second movement Botterbusch described as a "change within a lot more conservative evangelical organizations and a shift realizing that gay people can't really change their sexual orientation; like this is something that you can't just pray away."

Castleberry also referenced a change in tone in churches due to strong feelings about their relationship with the LGBT community. "We are going to figure out a way to get through this situation as a society," he told *The Talon*.

The heart of NU is in the love for its students, Castleberry said. "We love our students. We want every one of them to succeed. We want every one of them to graduate. We want every one of our students to leave here with a strong faith in Jesus Christ and a commitment to him as their Savior."

Botterbusch's final thought was simple. "If you could actually ask students at Northwest what they thought it was like to be, y'know, to read what it's like for them each day to be gay on campus? Maybe they'll tell you the things that they're afraid of, maybe they'll tell you the things that they feel proud of, or the positives from their roommate who really cared about them, or a professor who spoke into their life and really changed their perspective. Like *those* are the kind of things that are really powerful."