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BYU clarifies Honor Code about gay orientation

By **Tad Walch**

Deseret Morning News

Published: April 18, 2007 12:03 a.m. MDT

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PROVO — Brigham Young University modified text included with its Honor Code last week, a change that clarifies the university's policy against homosexual behavior among students rather than against homosexual orientation.

BYU didn't publicize the clarifications, which were under consideration before the protest last month by the Soulforce Equality Riders, and university spokeswoman Carri Jenkins said the process is continuing.

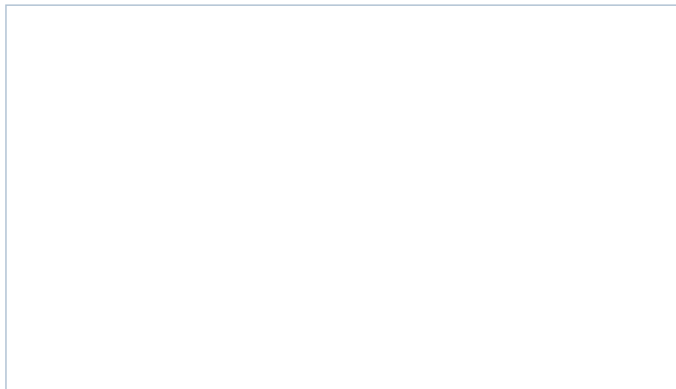
"Our Honor Code has not changed," Jenkins said, "but there has been a clarification. Some students have said some of the clarifications are confusing and we have begun the process of going through and clarifying just what is meant."

The effort was instigated by student Glade Bauman, who with other students drafted a letter to BYU President Cecil Samuelson. Samuelson forwarded the letter to Vice President of Student Life Jan Scharman, who met with the students in late February.

"We knew this group Soulforce was coming to protest at school," said Robby Pierce, a member of the group. "We felt they didn't represent the voice of actual students who deal with homosexuality on campus."

Pierce, who is working now but plans to return BYU, said Scharman was willing to help.

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"We were also surprised when in the next meeting with her she presented the new Honor Code clause," he said. "We hadn't expected anything that fast. We saw that as a goal for some time in the future."

Jenkins made it clear last year, when Soulforce first protested at BYU, that the university's policy was directed at homosexual behavior or advocacy of a homosexual lifestyle.

Now the written policy more clearly states that gays can attend BYU without concern that the Honor Code Office will take action against them because of

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their sexual orientation.

The altered text reads, "Brigham Young University will respond to homosexual behavior rather than to feelings or orientation and welcomes as full members of the university community all whose behavior meets university standards."

The clarification adds, "One's stated sexual orientation is not an Honor Code issue."

BYU students who joined a panel discussion organized by Soulforce last month called for clarification of the Honor Code and quoted language that now has been removed.

Members of the gay activist group criticized BYU in its two visits to Provo for allegedly blocking dialogue about homosexual issues and for a vague Honor Code.

Jenkins said Soulforce has sought media coverage, not dialogue, and was not the cause of the clarifications. Thirty-one people have been cited for trespassing the past two years while watched by camera crews, reporters and few others. Eight more Soulforce Equality Riders were cited for trespassing Monday at BYU-Idaho.

Jenkins said Soulforce never asked for a meeting with Scharman.

News of the clarifications spread late last week and Monday on blogs where there was some cheering about creating change where Soulforce didn't.

BYU's Honor Code Office punished five students for joining the Soulforce protest last year, when four of them participated in the die-in that was a violation of the university's rules about campus demonstrations. Those four were cited for trespassing. One other, who marched along the north edge of campus, also was put on probation.

Last month, three students joined the Soulforce panel discussion and at least the same three joined a six-hour march around campus. The Honor Code Office will not review their actions, Jenkins said.

The effort to clarify the Honor Code extends beyond the policy regarding homosexual orientation.

"We are getting feedback from several student groups," Jenkins said.

For example, in a section about abstinence from alcohol, the university is reviewing language that says a student is breaking the Honor Code if he or she is present when others are consuming alcohol. Students have raised the question about whether they could attend an awards banquet away from campus where alcohol is served.

The administration is also looking at sections about respecting others and about living a chaste and virtuous life.

Pierce said the group of eight sees the clarifications about same-sex behavior and orientation as part of an ongoing process that it hopes will include BYU making more resources about same-sex attraction available to students, faculty and staff.

"As long as there is misunderstanding among the students and intolerance about this issue," Pierce said, "we still have a road ahead of us that needs to be traveled."

E-mail: twalch@desnews.com

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