

EAST TEXAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

February 27, 2015

Ms. Catherine E. Lhaman
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. S.W.
Washington, DC 20202-1100

Re: Claim of Title IX Religious Tenet Exemption

Dear Ms. Lhaman,

I am President of East Texas Baptist University. As such, I am the highest ranking official of this institution. I submit the following statement in order to claim on behalf of the University the religious tenet exemption from Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 which is provided for in 20 U.S.C. 1681, and which is the subject of 34 C.F.R. 106.12.

East Texas Baptist University is a Baptist institution of higher education. It is a Texas nonprofit corporation whose principal office address is One Tiger Drive, Marshall, Texas 75670. I enclose the Certificate of Formation and Bylaws of the University.

East Texas Baptist University is controlled by a religious organization, the Baptist General Convention of Texas. This Convention is a Baptist general body whose constituency is the cooperating Baptist churches of Texas. It is an "association of churches" in the terminology of the Internal Revenue Code. Pursuant to the University's Certificate of Formation and Bylaws, the Baptist General Convention of Texas controls the University in part by exercising its right to select a majority of the membership of the board of directors of the University, the governing body of the University.

This request for exemption is from provisions of Title IX to the extent application of those provisions would not be consistent with the Convention's religious tenets regarding marriage, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, and abortion. I identify those provisions to be:

Admissions:

34 C.F.R. § 106.21 including but not limited to (b)(iii) (governing differential treatment on the basis of sex in admissions); and (c) (governing admissions prohibition on the basis of marital or parental status).

Recruitment:

34 C.F.R. § 106.23 (governing nondiscriminatory recruitment).

Education Programs or Activities:

- 34 C.F.R. § 106.31(b)(4) (governing different rules of behavior or sanctions), and (b)(7) (otherwise limiting any person in the enjoyment of any right, etc);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.32 (governing housing);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.33 (governing comparable facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.40 (governing different rules based on marital or parental status of students); and 34 C.F.R. § 106.41 (governing athletics);

Employment:

- 34 C.F.R. § 106.51 (governing employment);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.52 (employment criteria);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.53 (recruitment);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.57 (governing the consideration of marital or parental status in employment decisions);
- and
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.60 (governing pre-employment inquires).

The mission of the University is stated as follows:

East Texas Baptist University is an institution affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas since 1912. Our purpose is the development of intellectual inquiry, social consciousness, wellness, skills for a contemporary society, global awareness, and Christian character, for we believe that these endeavors prepare students to accept the obligations and opportunities to serve humanity and the Kingdom of God. Our primary focus is on quality academic programs in the humanities, natural and social sciences, fine arts, and selected professional areas. We are committed to Christian stewardship and to providing and maintaining an environment conducive to learning, leadership development, and academic excellence. We affirm that the liberal arts form the surest foundation for education and that the Christian faith provides the surest foundation for life.

We strive to serve students of varied ages and of diverse socioeconomic, geographic, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. We seek students who demonstrate a potential for success in our supportive and challenging environment. We employ Christian faculty who are dedicated to teaching, scholarship, advising, and service as they model the principles of the Christian faith. As a Baptist university we are committed to the integration of learning and Christian faith in the pursuit of truth.

In regard to marriage, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy and abortion, the Convention has repeatedly spoken. For example, in 2009, the Convention adopted the attached resolution *On Sexual Ethics*. The Convention declares “. . . the Bible teaches that the ideal for sexual behavior is the marital union between husband and wife and that all other sexual relations - whether premarital, extramarital, or homosexual - are contrary to God’s purposes and thus sinful.” Since 1980, the

Convention has declared on six occasions its religious beliefs opposing abortion. The Convention has declared its religious belief that “gender is based on biological attributes and is seen as a gift from God and immutable.” That declaration is also attached.

In 1988 the Convention adopted an addition to its previously adopted statement of Baptist Faith and Message which includes the following expression of religious tenets of the Convention:

XVIII. THE FAMILY

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is Gods unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church, and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel for sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children Gods pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.

In 2015, the Executive Board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, which carries the authority of the Convention, adopted a resolution on Transgender Issues that affirms its position that “ in creation God made male and female as biological gender assignment.”

Application of a regulation would not be consistent with these tenets if the regulation prohibited the institution from following its policies, that is, if the regulation prohibited the University:

From engaging in recruiting and admissions under a policy which called for the consideration of an applicant for admission’s sexual orientation, gender identity (including but not limited to transgendered status), marital status, past and present practices regarding marriage, sex outside marriage, pregnancy, and abortion (these considerations collectively referred to hereafter as student and employee “behaviors”), and prohibited the institution from treating that person differently as a result of that consideration;

From subjecting students to rules of behavior, sanctions, or other treatment because of these student behaviors. Examples would be the institution’s rules regarding eligibility for employment of the student by the institution; the assignment of housing, restrooms and locker rooms, and restrictions to athletic activities by birth sex; rules prohibiting homosexual conduct including but not limited to a prohibition of a student’s engaging in sex with a person of his or her birth sex; prohibition of sex outside

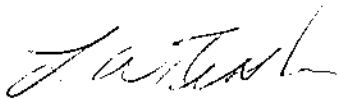
of marriage between a man and a woman; sanctions as the result of pregnancy and abortion; and

From making all employment decisions, including but not limited to selection criteria and pre-employment inquiries, recruitment, the decision to employ, retention decisions, and decisions regarding sanctions, in a manner which takes into consideration these employee behaviors.

Thus, this claim for exemption includes exemption from these specified regulations to the extent the regulation would require the institution to treat marriage, sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, gender identity, pregnancy and abortion in a manner that is inconsistent with the religious tenets of the Convention.

I trust this letter is sufficient, but if you have any questions, please let me know. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lawrence Ressler".

Lawrence Ressler, Ph.D.
Interim President



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

May 4, 2015

Lawrence Ressler, Ph.D.
Interim President
East Texas Baptist University
1 Tiger Drive
Marshall, TX 75670

Dear Dr. Ressler:

I write to respond to your February 27, 2015, letter to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), in which you requested a religious exemption for East Texas Baptist University (University) of Marshall, Texas, from Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), 20 U.S.C. § 1681. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity operated by a recipient of Federal financial assistance.

The implementing regulation at 34 C.F.R. § 106.12 provides that Title IX does not apply to an educational institution controlled by a religious organization to the extent that application of Title IX would be inconsistent with the controlling organization's religious tenets. Therefore, such educational institutions are allowed to request an exemption from Title IX by identifying the provisions of Title IX that conflict with a specific tenet of the religious organization. The request must identify the religious organization that controls the educational institution and specify the tenets of that organization and the provisions of the law or regulation that conflict with those tenets.

Your request explained that the University "is controlled by a religious organization. That organization is the Baptist General Convention of Texas." Your letter states that "[p]ursuant to the University's Certificate of Formation and Bylaws, the Baptist General Convention of Texas controls the University in part by exercising its right to select a majority of the membership of the board of directors of the University, the governing body of the University." Your letter sets forth the University's mission, which states in part that the University "is an institution affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas since 1912."

Your letter requests a religious exemption from the provisions of Title IX "to the extent application of those provisions would not be consistent with the Convention's religious tenets regarding marriage, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, and abortion." In support of this request, you cite to *On Sexual Ethics*, a resolution adopted by the Convention in 2009. According to your letter, that resolution states that "the Bible teaches that the ideal for sexual behavior is the marital union between husband and wife and that all other sexual relations – whether premarital, extramarital, or homosexual – are contrary to God's purposes and thus sinful." You further cite the Convention's religious belief that "gender is based on biological attributes and is seen as a gift from God and immutable." Your letter states that the "Convention has declared on six occasions its religious beliefs opposing abortion." Finally, you cite to the Baptist Faith and Message, which, according to your letter, states that "[m]arriage is the uniting of one man and one woman."

You explain that it would not be consistent with the Convention's religious tenets for the University to comply with Title IX to the extent that it prohibits the University from "engaging in recruiting and admissions under a policy which called for the consideration of an applicant for admission's sexual

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

orientation, gender identity (including but not limited to transgendered status), marital status, past and present practices regarding marriage, sex outside marriage, pregnancy, and abortion[; . . .] from subjecting students to rules of behavior, sanctions, or other treatment because of these student behaviors[; or from] making all employment decisions . . . in a manner which takes into consideration these employee behaviors.”

You state that, for these reasons, the University is requesting an exemption from the following regulatory provisions “to the extent the regulation would require the institution to treat marriage, sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, gender identity, pregnancy, and abortion in a manner that is inconsistent with the religious tenets of the Convention:”

- 34 C.F.R. § 106.21 (governing admission);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.23 (governing recruitment of students);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.31(b)(4) (governing different rules of behavior or sanctions);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.31(b)(7) (governing the limitation of rights, privileges, advantages, or opportunities);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.32 (governing housing);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.33 (governing comparable facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.40 (governing different rules based on marital or parental status of students);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.41 (governing athletics);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.51 (governing employment);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.52 (governing employment criteria);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.53 (governing recruitment of employees);
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.57 (governing the consideration of marital or parental status in employment decisions); and
- 34 C.F.R. § 106.60 (governing pre-employment inquiries).

The University is exempt from these provisions to the extent that they prohibit discrimination on the basis of marital status, sex outside of marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, or abortion and compliance would conflict with the controlling organization’s religious tenets.

Please note that this letter should not be construed to grant exemption from the requirements of Title IX and the regulation other than as stated above. In the event that OCR receives a complaint against your institution, we are obligated to determine initially whether the allegations fall within the exemption here granted. Also, in the unlikely event that a complainant alleges that the practices followed by the institution are not based on the religious tenets of the controlling organization, OCR is obligated to contact the controlling organization to verify those tenets. If the organization provides an interpretation of tenets that has a different practical impact than that described by the institution, or if the organization denies that it controls the institution, this exemption will be rescinded.

I hope this letter responds fully to your request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Catherine E. Lhamon
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Education

Based on the above principle, ETBU has requested and is granted by this letter, exemption to:

34 C.F.R. § 106.21(c)	Admission; prohibitions relating to marital or parental status
34 C.F.R. § 106.31	Education programs and activities
34 C.F.R. § 106.34	Access to course offerings
34 C.F.R. § 106.36	Counseling and use of appraisal and counseling materials
34 C.F.R. § 106.37	Financial assistance
34 C.F.R. § 106.38	Employment assistance to students
34 C.F.R. § 106.40	Marital or parental status

This letter should not be construed to grant exemption to any section of the Title IX regulation not specifically mentioned. If OCR receives a complaint on these issues against ETBU, we will be obligated to determine initially whether the allegations fall within the exemptions granted. Also, in the unlikely event that a complaint alleges that the practices followed by ETBU are not based on the religious tenets of the controlling organization, OCR may be obligated to contact the controlling organization to verify those tenets. If the organization provides an interpretation of tenets that has a different practical impact than that described by ETBU, or if the organization denies that it controls ETBU, this exemption will be rescinded.

I hope this letter responds fully to your request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Jeanette J. Lim
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Civil Rights

Enclosures