



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

May 23, 2014

Robin Keith Dummer, Ed.D.  
Interim President  
Simpson University  
2211 University View Drive  
Redding, California 96003

Dear Dr. Dummer:

The purpose of this letter is to respond to your letter to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), in which you requested a religious exemption for Simpson University (University) of Redding, California 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 educational institutions controlled by religious organizations to the extent application of Title IX would be inconsistent with the institution'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 and/or regulation that conflict.

Your request explained that the University, which is owned by and affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination, is a Christ-centered learning community and that its identity as a Christian institution is central to all its programs. You state that the University's biblical beliefs allow only for heterosexual, biologically determined male and female identities and that the University rejects any attempt by an individual to change his or her gender identity as immoral and sinful.

You supplied information explaining that any individual who violates campus standards regarding gender identity would be subject to discipline, including expulsion. Your exemption request points to a recent OCR resolution agreement in which a school district agreed to allow a transgender male student to use the restroom, locker room, and living facilities consistent with the student's gender identity, and to play on boys' athletic teams. You explain that the University "would not be able to make similar

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Dr. Robin Keith Dummer, Simpson University  
May 23, 2014  
Page 2 of 2

accommodations consistent with [your] religious beliefs.” You further state that, for these reasons, the University is requesting an exemption from Title IX and its implementing regulation to the extent that they prohibit discrimination based on gender identity. We interpret these statements as a request for exemption from provisions 34 C.F.R. §§ 106.31(b)(4) (governing different rules of behavior or sanctions), 106.32 (governing housing), 106.33 (governing comparable facilities such as restrooms and locker rooms), and 106.41 (governing athletics). The University is exempt from these provisions to the extent that they require a recipient to treat students consistent with their gender identity, but doing so 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. I regret the delay in responding to your original request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



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