La Sierra students criticize core classes

The six courses misrepresent the Christian God, say the students, who want them discontinued or at least reviewed.

03:43 PM PDT on Monday, May 2, 2011

By KAREN JOSEPH
The Press-Enterprise

Editor's note: Story originally published 05/22/1999

A group of La Sierra University students complained to the board of trustees Friday that certain required courses lack appropriate emphasis on Jesus and the Bible.

A petition signed by 300 of La Sierra’s 1,400 students said the six core courses were unacceptable because they misrepresent the Christian God, and contain subversive attacks on Christianity and one-god beliefs.

“Our biggest opposition is that it attacks what the school was founded on, which is the Bible,” said Monte Bridges, a senior from Oregon. “It says, in essence, that all religions are paths to the same truths. The problem is that Christ said ‘I’m the truth; I’m the way; I’m the life.’ ” (Read more)
Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
La Sierra students criticize core classes

The six courses misrepresent the Christian God, say the students, who want them discontinued or at least reviewed.

03:43 PM PDT on Monday, May 2, 2011

By KAREN JOSEPH
The Press-Enterprise

Editor's note: Story originally published 05/22/1999

A group of La Sierra University students complained to the board of trustees Friday that certain required courses lack appropriate emphasis on Jesus and the Bible.

A petition signed by 300 of La Sierra's 1,400 students said the six core courses were unacceptable because they misrepresent the Christian God, and contain subversive attacks on Christianity and one-god beliefs.

"Our biggest opposition is that it attacks what the school was founded on, which is the Bible," said Monte Bridges, a senior from Oregon. "It says, in essence, that all religions are paths to the same truths. The problem is that Christ said `I'm the truth; I'm the way; I'm the life.' "

All students regardless of their major must take the six core courses to graduate. The multi-subject classes mix critical thinking, coping with multicultural settings in the workplace, writing and religious ethics. While the university is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the student body represents more than 35 religious faiths.

The students asked that the core classes be discontinued or at minimum reviewed. LSU President Larry Geraty said he plans to meet with some of the key students next week but he said the core curriculum will remain.

Some students said the core curriculum, which was designed in part to attract more students, is to blame for the 100-student enrollment drop this past year.

While he does not dismiss their theory entirely, Geraty pointed out that the relationship is pretty tough to quantify.

The core curriculum was established three years ago. It replaced the cafeteria-style approach to general subject courses that students are required to take in addition to the classes in their majors. Under the old system, students would choose six classes from several subject areas to meet their graduation requirements.

Geraty said the change gave the university greater control over the kinds of classes students took. Under the new system, every base is covered, he said.

"Before, when the students could choose their own courses, it was harder for us to make sure that the students got each of the points that we wanted them to have," said Adeny Schmidt, vice president for academic administration.

Each of the core classes contains elements of religion. Previously, students were required to take four intensive religion courses.

According to a survey by the LSU student newspaper, 93 percent of the students oppose the core program of course requirements.

Some think the desire for more students has driven the university to play down the Seventh-day Adventist content of the instruction and opt for a more globally inclusive platform.

"We pay a lot of money for a Christian education and we're not being given it," Bridges said.

Geraty said that although the university has students from more than 35 religions, its focus will always be in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition. The approach, he said, is
"It's not like Sunday school," said Geraty. "It's not like family worship. I think it's just a question of growing up. And that's the whole reason why you come to college."

Seventh-day Adventists are Protestant Christians who consider Saturday, not Sunday, the holy day of the week. They expect Jesus to return to Earth soon.

Geraty said the school dropped its Bible school approach in the 1940s and '50s.

"La Sierra University is not going to be a Bible college. If it was, that's what we would be," he said.

The students say they do not want a Bible school. They said they want to feel that their faith is given equal time with others, and that theories like evolution are taught alongside other theories, like creationism, as believed by Seventh-day Adventists.

The university's enrollment push has been fueled by a building and expansion program paid for with money from a commercial development deal that will bring family housing, businesses and a public elementary school near campus. The development will reroute Pierce Street, create a grand entrance to the university and allow the campus to expand to eventually accommodate 5,000 students.

Geraty said next year's core courses will have more emphasis on the Seventh-day Adventist viewpoint but the course topics won't change.

"Anytime you introduce a new program, there are criticisms," he said. "But we will take seriously the concerns of students.

Steve Daily, the campus chaplain, said administrators have not paid attention to the students' complaints about core since it was imposed three years ago.

"The students haven't been listened to," he said. "They've been ignored."

"I think when that happens, there's a problem," said Daily, who has been a chaplain and instructor at La Sierra for 20 years.

COURSEWORK COMPLAINTS

Students at La Sierra University, a Seventh-day Adventist school in Riverside, are challenging the core educational program that all students are required to complete as "unacceptable" for the following reasons:

Its misrepresentation of the Christian God, and total lack of emphasis on Christ and the Bible.
Its underlying humanistic (versus Christian) values and foundation.
Its emphasis that "all religions are different paths leading to the same truth."
The general inconsistency, unfairness and incompetence of team teaching.
The general inability of credits to transfer in and out of the program.
The superficial and liberal political content of the classes.
Subtle subversive attacks on Christianity and monotheism.
The total unwillingness of the administration to evaluate the program or survey student opinion, and the suppression of dissenting views relating to CORE.

Source: La Sierra University student petition