

You're invited: The Boston Globe Book Club's summer meet-ups. Click here to find out more information.

The Boston Globe

TEXT SIZE | MANAGE ACCOUNT | LOG OUT

Metro

		SECTIONS ▾	▾
NEWS ▶		METRO	Q
ARTS ▶		BUSINESS ▶	
SPORTS ▶		OPINION ▶	
POLITICS ▶		LIFESTYLE ▶	
MAGAZINE ▶		INSIDERS ▶	
TODAY'S PAPER ▶			
LOTTERY ▶		OBITUARIES ▶	
GLOBE NORTH ▶		GLOBE SOUTH ▶	
GLOBE WEST ▶		GETTING IN ▶	



REAL ESTATE
Noisy neighbors?
You're on your own.



OPINION
Changing the dialogue
about work



METRO
A summons that
haunts

Accrediting agency to review Gordon College

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 11, 2014



REPRINTS PRINT

ARTICLE COMMENTS (48) BACK TO TOP



GLOBE FILE PHOTO

Gordon president D. Michael Lindsay was among 14 religious leaders who wrote to the White House requesting an exemption to an executive order prohibiting federal contractors from discriminating in their hiring based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

The region's higher education accrediting agency will review whether its standards are being violated by Gordon College after the Christian school's public opposition to hiring protections for gays and lesbians shed light on its longstanding policies prohibiting gay activities among students, faculty, and staff.

While it is not unusual for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges' Commission on Institutions of Higher Education to review schools in light of news reports and other "unsolicited information," the body has never dealt with a case involving potential sexual orientation-related discrimination, said the commission's director, Barbara E. Brittingham



“There’s considerable publicity about the whole issue, and it’s been getting a lot of attention,” Brittingham said in a phone interview Friday. “It’s a matter of looking at the information we have and deciding if the institution is meeting our standards.”

Brittingham declined to predict what the commission members may ultimately decide at their next meeting in September, when they are scheduled to discuss the controversy over Gordon.

Revoking accreditation is a “very drastic” and rare step, Brittingham said. The US Education Department typically pulls federal financial aid funding from schools that lose accreditation.

The Boston Business Journal first reported Thursday night about the accrediting agency’s plan to review the Gordon controversy.

Last week, Gordon president D. Michael Lindsay was among 14 religious leaders who wrote to the White House requesting an exemption to an upcoming executive order prohibiting federal contractors from discriminating in their hiring based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Related

- **Walker: Pleading for right to discriminate**
- **Gordon leader joins request for exemption**
- **Salem ends Gordon College's use of town hall**



The letter upset dozens of students and faculty at the college in Wenham and alumni, including more than 100 who signed a letter to the White House in support of the rules banning discrimination. An [online petition](#) calling for Lindsay to reverse the college's position had received more than 3,300 signatures by Friday.

Lindsay [defended](#) his position in a statement posted to the school's website Monday, saying his request for an exemption is about supporting religious freedom.

But the fallout continued through the week.

Salem officials [declared](#) Wednesday that they will end a contract allowing Gordon College to use the city-owned Old Town Hall because Lindsay's stance and the school's policies violate a municipal ordinance prohibiting Salem from contracting with entities that discriminate.

Mayor Kimberley Driscoll and other Salem leaders, including Michael Alexander, president of Lasell College in Newton, have sharply criticized Gordon over the issue.

"The clear message is that homosexuals are not worthy of employment, or even recognition of their existence, in the Gordon community," Alexander wrote in a statement to the Globe this week. "It is a slap in the face of every gay and lesbian person, particularly every gay and lesbian Christian, that says you are somehow less of a human being, you do not belong in the embrace of God's merciful arms."

Gordon spokesman Rick Sweeney said Friday that Lindsay was not available to comment, but that college administrators "look forward to the meeting in September and continuing our longstanding relationship with NEASC."

Brittingham said that she has spoken with Lindsay and that he has agreed to help provide the accrediting agency with information it will want to review at its September meeting.

"The president has been very forthcoming in providing information, and that is always helpful," she said.

The college's website lists policies for students, faculty, and staff that ban them from engaging in "homosexual practice" on or off campus. The standards also forbid sex outside marriage, drunkenness, blasphemy, profanity, theft, and dishonesty.

Meanwhile, NEASC's accreditation standards specify that each "institution adheres to nondiscriminatory policies and practices in recruitment, admissions, employment, evaluation, disciplinary action, and advancement" and that each school "fosters an atmosphere within the institutional community that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds."

If the accrediting agency were to find that a college is violating its standards, the school would be given a chance to respond and to try to rectify the problem, Brittingham said. Rather than revoke accreditation, the agency could implement a less severe measure, including probation, to encourage changes.

She said that only once in recent memory has the body revoked an institution's accreditation.

In 2010, the agency terminated accreditation for Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, which had repeatedly been put on probation due to alleged mismanagement that led to deep financial troubles. The college closed a year later.

Before that, the last college accreditation withdrawn by NEASC was in 1988, when the agency rescinded its accreditation of Hawthorne College in New Hampshire, according to records on the agency's website.

The commission, which accredits about 240 colleges in the region, is composed of 27 members: five are individuals who do not work directly for a member college or university, but have expertise in higher education; two are trustees at member institutions; and the rest are faculty and senior administrators, including campus presidents, from member institutions.

The group meets four times a year to review institutional reports and make accreditation decisions.

Gordon received its initial accreditation in 1961, according to NEASC's online records.

The accrediting agency last reviewed Gordon in 2012 as part of a routine check the agency does at every school at least once each decade

"The process was very thorough and very positive," said Sweeney, the campus spokesman.

The next scheduled review of the college is set for 2022.

Juwan Campbell, a Gordon senior who writes for a blog called "Student Inqueery" about sexual identity and Christianity, said he wants the school to remain true to its religious identity and hopes it will update its nondiscrimination policies to include protections based on sexual orientation.

"I would love to see Gordon more fully embrace diversity," said Campbell. "I think it can hold to its Christian roots while still having a neutral standpoint on homosexual activity and behavior."

He said that if the college's accreditation were revoked "that would really be really devastating to students who are currently enrolled and those who have gone here."

He also lamented that the city of Salem cut ties with the college this week.

It was not the first time that Gordon's policies prohibiting gay activities among students, faculty, and staff have caused a partnership to end.

Tim Averill, former chairman of the English department at Manchester Essex Regional High School, recalled how his department ended a partnership it had to train Gordon students to teach, about two decades ago.

"We became aware that they either added, or became more explicit about, their rule that they would not allow gays and lesbians as [student-teacher] candidates," said Averill, who worked at the school for more than three decades and now chairs the writing department at the Waring School in Beverly.

"It was a shame, because the student teachers from Gordon were some of the best we had," he said.

Related:

- [Adrian Walker: Gordon College's disorienting decision](#)
- [Gordon College president defends call for religious exemption](#)
- [Gordon College leader joins request for exemption to hiring rule](#)
- [Salem ends Gordon College's use of town hall](#)

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](#).



REPRINTS PRINT

ARTICLE COMMENTS (48)

BACK TO TOP

Learn more

SUBSCRIBE BOSTON GLOBE INSIDERS EPAPER EDITION NEWS IN EDUCATION

MY ACCOUNT

LOGOUT

MY SAVED LIST

MANAGE HOME DELIVERY

MANAGE ON IPHONE

CONTACT

HELP

FAQS

GLOBE NEWSROOM

ADVERTISE

SOCIAL

[FACEBOOK](#)

[TWITTER](#)

[GOOGLE+](#)

MORE

[ARCHIVES](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[TERMS OF SERVICE](#)

[TERMS OF PURCHASE](#)

[YOUR AD CHOICES](#)

[WORK HERE](#)

© 2014 BOSTON GLOBE MEDIA PARTNERS, LLC
