

Davidson College News

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TRUSTEES REAFFIRM CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT, VOTE TO CHANGE CONTROVERSIAL BY-LAW

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DAVIDSON, N.C.—The trustees of Davidson College have ended an intense controversy by reaffirming the college's Christian commitment while voting to change the procedures for expressing that commitment in faculty appointments and tenure.

The controversy arose in late April after the college withdrew an offer of a political science position to a Jewish professor, Ronald Linden. Linden wrote, in what he later termed "a qualified acceptance," that the college's hiring policies were "repugnant" and that he would work to eliminate them if hired. On the advice of legal counsel, Linden was informed that his letter did not constitute acceptance of the position as offered, and the college withdrew its offer.

The trustees noted in a statement May 6 that they had modified the by-laws two years ago "with the expectation that it would serve to add to the faculty men and women who hold beliefs other than the Christian faith. It is now increasingly clear that it will be impossible for the administration of the college to apply the provisions of this by-law without the implications of discrimination."

The trustees kept virtually intact the three initial sentences of the by-law which read: "It is natural and desirable that the educational service

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of a church-related College should be carried forward from one generation to another by persons committed to the faith of its founders. The Christian commitment of a church-related College is reflected not only in its corporate policies, programs, and stewardship of resources, but especially in the lives of the individuals who make up its community. For that reason, the President is directed to seek out and secure as officers and faculty members Christian men and women who are not only highly competent but who understand and respond to the implications of their commitment as Christians."

At that point, the old by-law provided that the trustees may "in special circumstances" grant tenure to a person of non-Christian beliefs and require that each person employed be "prepared conscientiously to uphold and seek to increase its (Davidson's) effectiveness as a church-related college."

Instead, the new by-law states, "The President is also directed to seek out and secure as officers and faculty members non-Christian persons who profess a genuine spirituality, who can work with respect for the Christian tradition even if they cannot conscientiously join it, and who can conscientiously support the purpose of the College as set forth in the Davidson College Constitution."

The trustees also said, in their public statement accompanying the new by-law, "The Board of Trustees affirms again the commitment of this institution to the Christian faith as well as to the open search for truth. We believe that neither that faith nor that search will allow for discriminatory regulations."

The new by-law was given a first reading at the May 6 meeting and will be up for final approval at the trustees' October meeting.