

STATEMENT OF NO CONFIDENCE in the SPU Board of Trustees

April 2021

To the Board of Trustees of Seattle Pacific University,

The Board's decision to maintain SPU's discriminatory hiring policy related to human sexuality, as well as its manner of delivering that decision, have regrettably compelled the faculty of SPU to pass a vote of no confidence in the SPU Board of Trustees. We presume that each member of the Board—like each one of us—wants this institution to thrive. We are all motivated by those fundamental duties that each Board member is legally bound by: the "Duty of Care" that requires us to use our best judgment in making decisions on behalf of the organization, the "Duty of Loyalty" that attempts to discern what is in the best interests of the institution, and the "Duty of Obedience" that ensures we adhere to SPU's Christian mission as well as to civil law. But we fear that the Board's actions imperil the ability of SPU and its community to flourish.

I. Faculty Concerns

The faculty are deeply concerned by the following:

A. The Board's Lack of Engagement with the Community. Chair Davis has said the Board desires to be in dialog and in relationship with the SPU community. Yet this decision was presented with virtually no rationale or explanation and no opportunity for the community to ask questions or approach mutual understanding. The students, staff, and faculty provided the Board with voluminous testimonies and arguments from a range of perspectives. But the Board's terse monologue was entirely incommensurate with the spirit of "agreeing to submit our teachings and pronouncements to one another as followers of Christ," as the Statement on Human Sexuality puts it.

B. The Decision's Misalignment with the Perspective of the Community Majority. Seventy-five percent of surveyed faculty and 68% of surveyed staff object to the discriminatory hiring policy. Substantial majorities also disagree with the Statement on Human Sexuality and would like to see the statement eliminated. Even many who agree with the Statement feel that eliminating the hiring policy is compatible with SPU's Statement of Faith. As an ecumenical educational institution, we value diversity of opinion and disagreement, and those can persist under many conditions. But in binding the institution to a policy that a robust majority of the community objects to on theological, missional and pragmatic grounds, the Board makes it extremely difficult to hold this community together, let alone steer it in a productive direction. As many have stated, the Board's decision undercuts the commitment to equity we market to prospective students, undermines the ethos of

inclusion we aspire to establish in our classrooms, and violates the ethical standards our professional guilds demand of us.

C. The Apparent Dismissal of Harm. Chair Davis has said that the Board heard and carefully considered the concerns of faculty and staff about the many ways that the hiring policy and Statement on Human Sexuality are causing harm to individuals in the community, particularly students—our primary charges. Yet the Board has provided no explanation of how such harms might be ameliorated by holding to the policy (or to the university's affiliation with the Free Methodist Church); it merely thanks faculty for performing the agonizing labor of making students and others feel respected in spite of a policy that LGBTQ+ persons and their allies find fundamentally dehumanizing.

D. Legal, Financial, & Psychological Ramifications. As many faculty, staff, and students have testified, maintaining the discriminatory hiring policy jeopardizes

1. The accreditation of multiple academic programs, such as the clinical psychology doctoral program
2. The ability to secure and retain federal funding for research
3. The ability to secure state and federal funding for student financial aid
4. The ability to recruit and retain diverse, high-quality faculty
5. The ability to recruit and retain diverse, high-quality students
6. The ability to attract high-quality candidates for president, as few will be tempted to step into a position where the vision of the Board is so diametrically opposed to the vision of the faculty majority
7. The integrity and security of search committees forced to discriminate against candidates in violation of their conscience, their Christian conviction, their training in equitable practices, and Washington state law
8. The mental health (and in some cases survival) of students and employees who identify as LGBTQ+
9. SPU's marketing strategies and reputation as an institution that champions Christ's radically inclusive love

II. Steps the Board Should Take to Help Restore Faculty Confidence

This statement of “no confidence” is not a declaration of antagonism. On the contrary, it is a call to the Board to engage faculty, staff, and students in deep, good faith discussion so that we may better understand one another and find a path forward that we can all walk together. To that end, as the first steps toward restoring faculty faith in the Board's stewardship, we ask the Board to enact the following before the end of the 2020-2021 academic year:

- A. Establish multiple opportunities for faculty and the full Board (not just representatives) to engage in meaningful back-and-forth dialogue—over Zoom or (preferably) in person.
- B. Provide within these dialogues a detailed rationale for the board's current decision.
- C. Re-establish the former practice of having faculty representatives participate in regular board deliberations.
- D. Propose a solution that eliminates the discriminatory hiring policy and more faithfully reflects and respects the full range of concerns represented by SPU's ecumenically diverse community.