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Catholic school has no decision on gay marriage course

by Kelly Heyboer by Religion News Service

SOUTH ORANGE, N.J. -- No decision was reached June 3 by a committee studying whether Seton Hall University should cancel a course on gay marriage after the local Roman Catholic bishop objected.

The fate of the undergraduate class, which is scheduled for the fall, has been in question since Newark Archbishop John J. Myers issued a statement last month saying the course "is not in sync with Catholic teaching."

The Seton Hall Board of Regents asked its Mission and Identity Committee to evaluate the course, said Thomas White, a Seton Hall spokesman. The committee's dozen or so members has met behind closed doors on the South Orange campus, though it is unclear how they will proceed or how long they will take to make their recommendation.

"It's rather fluid and rather undefined at this point," White said.

The elective course was designed to explore the social and political issues surrounding gay marriage, without advocating for either side. So far, 20 students are registered for the 25-seat class, campus officials said.

The course is scheduled to be taught by W. King Mott, a Seton Hall associate professor of political science and one of the few openly gay teachers on campus.

Mott said he is hopeful the regents will uphold the university's initial decision to offer the course. To cancel a class because of its subject matter would be inappropriate at an academic institution, he said.

"It would be a horrible thing for this university," Mott said.

Seton Hall officials asked Mott to turn over his syllabus for the class after the archbishop -- who serves as a member of the university's board -- raised objections. But Mott said he declined because e he had not yet created a syllabus.

This isn't the first time Mott has clashed with university officials. He was demoted from his post as associate dean of Seton Hall's College of Arts and Sciences in 2005 after Newark's Star-Ledger printed his letter challenging the church's view on homosexuality.

The American Association of University Professors issued a statement questioning whether Seton Hall was stifling academic freedom by discouraging professors from challenging church doctrine in the classroom.

?The AAUP would support that instructor's right to express his or her own views, and the right of the students to do so as well,? said Cary Nelson, the association's president.

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