

Trustee Talking Points

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS and TALKING POINTS

Bottom Line: As a private organization, Shorter has the right to set its core values and to require employees to adhere to those core values. Don't get pulled into arguments around specific elements of our policies. Be brief and consistent.

There are many examples of Christian colleges and universities who have undergone necessary transformation to be more closely aligned with their missions and denominations. Wheaton College, Union University, and College of the Ozarks are but three stellar examples. Other denominations have done it, too. (Lee University – Church of God)

See the story linked below as published on the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities website. It is story we may write about Shorter one day.

<http://www.cccu.org/news/advance/fall-2011/complete-qa-with-father-michael-scanlan>

Responses to Questions

1. Will a tenured faculty member be fired if he/she doesn't sign the documents?

- **Tenure does not preclude faculty from abiding by employment policies.**

2. In this economy, how can you let people go? Fire them? That isn't Christ-like.

• **It is not a right to be employed by Shorter University. It is a privilege. Georgia is an "employ-at-will" state. If one does not agree with the Georgia Baptist Convention core values, then all the Personal Lifestyle documents do is require one refrain from acting in ways that could be interpreted as conflicting or disrespecting those values because he/she is a representative of the organization. It is the employee's choice to support these values or not. Private organizations such as Chick-fil-A, Coca-Cola, and Microsoft all have employee requirements that reflect their organizational values. In the same way, Shorter is instituting policies that accord with our values as a Christian institution.**

• **These values are not new: President Newman in 2008 held a meeting with all vice presidents, deans, program directors, and department chairs to review these values and explain their implications. He instructed these administrators to go back to their departments and clearly share them with faculty and staff.**

3. Why require faculty and staff to sign an agreement to live a Christian lifestyle in accordance with Scripture and Georgia Baptist Convention core values? What instigated it?

- Since our founding in 1873, Shorter has been a Christian college. Throughout our history, we have considered what it means to be a Christ-centered academic institution. Recent policy changes have been a continuation of this process.

- Since 2005, Shorter has been in the process of defining what it means to be a Christ-centered institution. In the past administration, one of the steps taken was affiliation with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. This is another step. In an age of increasing postmodern relativism, it becomes necessary to explicitly articulate our core values. Successful organizations have clearly identified core values, such as Chick-fil-A, Coca-Cola, Apple, as well as most private colleges and universities. Scholarly research finds that successful organizations have clearly identified core values and articulate these values both internally and externally (see sample of classic references below). Shorter is one of the few Christian colleges that has not required a statement of faith or lifestyle document. Shorter is one the last schools belonging to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities to require such a statement.

- Examples of statements from other CCCU-member organizations:

Union University's Statement of Purpose:

<http://www.uu.edu/about/statement.cfm>

Wheaton College's Statement of Faith and Educational Purpose:

<http://www.wheaton.edu/About-Wheaton/Statement-of-Faith-and-Educational-Purpose>

Huntington University's Statement of Faith:

<http://www.huntington.edu/About/Statement-of-Faith/>

Geneva College's Mission Statement, Doctrinal Statement, and Foundational Concepts:

http://www.geneva.edu/page/mission_statement

http://www.geneva.edu/page/doctrinal_statement

http://www.geneva.edu/page/foundational_concepts

References:

Deal, T. E., and A. A. Kennedy. (1982). *Corporate Cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Shockely-Zalabak, P.S. (2012, 8th edition). Fundamentals of Organizational Communication: Knowledge, Sensitive, Skills, and Values. New York: Allyn & Bacon.

Peters, T. J., & Waterman, R. H. (1982). In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies. New York: Harper & Row.

4. Why single out homosexuality? Why not gluttony, slothfulness, or other sins?

- **As a Christian university, we view higher education as a ministry. Our faculty and staff are in positions of responsibility in relation to our students. Having an effective witness means that there are certain expectations that are made related to the personal behavior of our faculty and staff. Shorter expects faculty and staff to live a sexually moral life. That means fidelity in a biblical marriage between a man and a woman and abstinence outside of a biblical union.**

- **The Personal Lifestyle Statement says "I reject as acceptable all sexual activity not in agreement with the Bible, including, but not limited to, premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality." Sexually immoral behaviors by those in authority over young men and women is particularly troubling on a Christian college campus. It is akin to the understandable concern in professional sports around the use of performance enhancing drugs – the behavior is particularly relevant in the given context. Every sin or every standard cannot be listed, but the most relevant ones should be.**

5. Will students have to sign any documents?

- **This Personal Lifestyle Statement is only for faculty and staff. To live out our mission and core values, as well as to meet the requirements for CCCU membership, they must be Christians. However, we see Shorter as a mission field and welcome students of all faiths, all denominations, and even atheists. Our goal is to expose every student to Jesus Christ while being educated to become well-rounded, engaged citizens. Our mission is to promote academic excellence that is fully integrated with the Christian faith.**

6. Isn't it judgmental to require this? You aren't supposed to judge others.

- **The recent actions of Shorter University leadership are not aimed at any one employee of the university as a citizen or believer. Rather, they apply to all employees in their roles as educators, who should serve and represent, the university in a manner that is doctrinally consistent with the denomination with which it is affiliated.**

- **(Rebuttal to Dr. Rob Nash's R N-T article, 11-6-11) That Christians differ on many issues is evidenced by the existence of many denominations. To argue that all colleges should act, teach, and govern in the same fashion and have the identical missions is to, in fact, contend that all Christian believers are from the same mold with respect to their faith. But we know that we are not all**

cookie cutter Christians. We do agree on a great number of things, but where we differ, what should we use as the standard? The question is, the, what is the right standard for us as a Christian institution? The Georgia Baptist Convention believes the Bible, as God's holy word, is the standard by which we should, to our very best ability, live a Christian life and, as Christians, conduct a Christian institution.

7. Won't this jeopardize SACS reaffirmation? Accreditation?

• Shorter University is fully accredited by The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. We do not believe our internal hiring practices violate the requirements of SACS. Many other accredited institutions have policies similar to those that have been enacted here.

8. Won't this jeopardize students' financial aid?

• No, state and federal financial aid is issued to students to spend at the institution of their choosing. Again, many institutions have similar, or even more exacting, policies, and students attending those institutions receive state and federal financial aid.

9. What if's? (Ex. An employee drinks alcohol in communion? An employee is seen buying alcohol in the grocery store for home use?)

• We could play "what if?" all day, such as, "If someone walked out with post-it notes as opposed to embezzling \$50,000, would he/she be stealing?" Personnel decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and are private between supervisors and subordinates.

10. Will the Board of Trustees sign on to the new lifestyle guidelines?

• Of course!

11. Won't this cause a mass exodus of talented, qualified faculty?

• There may be some who choose not to support our core values and will not sign these documents. President Dowless has invited faculty and staff to meet with him personally to discuss the matter if they desire. Dr. Dowless is very sensitive to the weight of the decision and wants to help clarify the university's position as needed. He wants to help reconcile their thoughts, feelings, or concerns with the position of the university. While we value our faculty staff and would hate to lose any talented member of this community, we recognize that each individual has to follow his or her convictions. To those who choose to leave Shorter, we will wish them well and thank them sincerely for their contributions to the university.

• There is a faulty assumption implied by this question. It is incorrect to assume that talented, qualified faculty will automatically want to leave because of these values. While some will choose to leave, many will choose to stay. There are several world-class universities with faith and lifestyle statements similar to the one adopted by Shorter University, such as Wheaton College, Huntington University, that are thriving.

Wheaton College's Community Covenant:

<http://www.wheaton.edu/About-Wheaton/Community-Covenant>

Huntington University's Community Life Agreement:

<http://www.huntington.edu/About/Community-Life-Agreement/>

Louisiana College's Christian Commitment:

<http://www.lacollege.edu/about/christian-commitment>

• Shorter has been blessed with outstanding members of our faculty. Examples include:

• Dr. Carmen Acevedo Butcher, our Scholar-in-Residence, has published 11 books in 8 years and has received awards for the quality of her books such as Georgia Author of the Year. She writes for Christianity Today and serves as the plenary speaker at major conferences across the US. She was a Fulbright Scholar (twice!) and is regularly on Moody and Nelle Reagan. She was Carnegie Teacher of the Year for Georgia, beating all public and private institutions.

• Dr. Ben McFry, Chair of the Department of English and Modern Languages, corrected the Merriam-Webster's Dictionary as an undergraduate at Shorter and also reads in 6 languages.

• Dr. Sabrena Parton, Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, has published in scholarly journals, served as a Governor's Teaching Fellow for the state of Georgia, was Outstanding Graduate Student at both her masters and doctoral institutions, and was a leader in writing an op-ed piece that resulted in a misogynistic wrestling toy being pulled from the major retailers. She has also received "Top Paper" awards for her scholarly presentations at professional conferences. (All three vita's/resume's are attached for review). Each of these faculty, and more, are in full support of Shorter's core values and choose to be here as opposed to any other institution.

• There is also a faulty assumption that to be a devout, Bible-believing Christian, one must be anti-intellectual. That is not the case. Shorter believes in its mission to promote academic excellence. The integration of our values with learning is not mutually exclusive, but mutually inclusive! Dr. Dowless has articulated well Shorter's mission by reminding everyone that Christians have a higher calling to be the best in their field because they are working for the Lord and using our minds honors Him. We are not called to be lazy, mediocre, or good. We are called to work as hard as we can and to learn all that we can because that honors God. Perhaps Dr. David Dockery, President of Union University said it best in his book, *Renewing Minds*: "There is no sphere of humanity to which Jesus Christ is irrelevant." To say that you can't have qualified academic faculty because you have these core values is erroneous.

12. Won't this affect the integrity of Shorter degrees? Won't students be unable to find jobs? Internships?

- No, just like the integrity of degrees from other religiously affiliated schools are not affected by their core values.
- It may be that some organizations will not use students graduating from certain religiously affiliated colleges, but, generally, this is rare. There may be some initial backlash, but, in most cases, employers will not question applicants' degrees.

13. Aren't you turning Shorter into a Bible college?

- Shorter will continue to be an excellent liberal arts university with a strong Christian identity. While Bible colleges have an important mission, it is not the mission of Shorter. Shorter's goal is to remain a Christ-centered University committed to academic excellence. This is a rumor that resurfaces anytime there is a change at Shorter. Dr. David Dockery, President of Union University, wrote in his book, *Renewing Minds* that "There is no sphere of humanity to which Jesus Christ is irrelevant." We continue to embrace an academic setting that prepares students to be the best in their fields of study by teaching them to critically examine all aspects and theories within their disciplines. As a Christ-centered university, we also allow students the opportunity to explore how faith informs how we view the world and how we interact with it.

14. The GBC contributes too small a percentage (rebuttal to Betty Zane Morris article in the RNT, date?), 4.2%, to dictate rules and regulations.

- The Board did not decide these core values because of financial obligation. The Board chose to articulate and enforce these core values because they are integral to the future of Shorter. Shorter is a Georgia Baptist Institution and is proud to be fulfilling the mission to educate all of our students from a Christian worldview.
- That said, 4.2% is not minimal in actual dollars. If it were, many more groups would be starting their own colleges. Each year, every student attending a GBC school receives \$5,322 from the GBC Cooperative Program. The GBC offers other forms of support, too. They send students from their churches, members give monies directly to the college (above what is given through the Cooperative Program), internships are provided, and missions opportunities abound.

15. Does everyone have to be a Baptist to work at Shorter or study at Shorter?

- No, all employees must be Christian and support our core values. No such requirement is made for students.

16. Won't donors withdraw their contributions?

- Some may, but most will not. We understand donors not wanting to financially support what they do not believe in. In fact, we admire those who take a stand for what they believe just as we are doing with our statement of

faith and lifestyle documents. We will lose some donors and we will gain others.

Quick points to keep focused on:

- **Separation of church and state: Private, religiously-affiliated organizations have the legal right to employ persons that fit with their core values. Notre Dame, Brigham-Young, Union University, Shawnee State, Lee University, Hope College, and Huntington University are all examples of schools with values-based employment policies.**
- **Shorter University expects faculty/staff to serve as role models for students on how to live a Christ-centered life as defined by the core values. Written core values clarify these expectations.**
- **These documents are similar to other religiously-affiliated schools.**
- **This effort to clarify Shorter's core values started years earlier when, in 2008, President Harold Newman instructed vice presidents, deans, program directors and department chairs to teach and behave in ways consistent with our denomination's values. Since our founding, the school has considered what it means to exist as a Christian academic institution. This effort is not new.**
- **Being a Southern Baptist should not be equated with anti-intellectualism. In fact, the opposite is true. Christians are called to rigorously pursue truth and engage their intellect as a demonstration love and respect for the Lord.**
- **Our Christ-centered mission and core values differentiate us from state schools and other private schools..**
- **Other private colleges have core values and provide for consequences if those are violated.**
- **There are those who with excellent academic qualifications that want these core values enforced or they will withdraw.**
- **Freedom of speech and freedom to protest are rights we respect. We have allowed peaceable protests and civil debate, but that does not mean we concede or must change our core values.**

Rebuttal to Betty Zane Morris' article in RNT, 11-6-11. Her claims in bold. Answers to questions above can be added, but are not repeated here.

Fit your definition of Christian?

Colleges affiliated with other denominations hire employees who behave consistently with their core values. Why expect any different for Shorter?

Compromise integrity . . . infringe on personal liberty?

It is not a right or an obligation to work for Shorter University. We are not requiring anyone work for Shorter University.

Alumni feeling as they try to understand and explain . . .

A misinformation and fear-mongering campaign started from a select group who, through the ease and convenience of social media, seem to be bent on

smearing the reputation of Shorter. It saddens me to see some groups more willing to bring down the entire school than to allow Shorter to carry out its mission.

Risk financial wellbeing by . . . withdrawal of support . . .

There is no evidence that Shorter's support has been or will be negatively impacted the personal lifestyle policies. While we have heard some expressing concern about the policies, we have also received a great deal of support.

4.2% is not enough of a contribution from GBC to . . .

The assumption is made that these core values are tied only to money. The decision to enact a personal lifestyles policies for employees is driving by conviction and not dollars.

Newman . . . premature retirement . . . best president . . . another flagrant mistreatment . . .

Dr. Newman did ask faculty and staff to support and enforce the core values, especially in a special meeting called to discuss the matter in 2008. Later that year, under Dr. Newman's leadership, Shorter joined the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities to further solidify commitment to Christ-centered education. Again, we are simply being consistent with our denomination.

. . . only answer to what is Christian behavior . . . ?

We are confident we will have the same success story to share over the years as we have had over the past few years. Our commitment to educating students, to giving them a quality education will be as strong as ever. Our positive influence will continue.

. . . fear for survival . . . ?

It is faulty to assume any SBC or GBC supporter is an anti-intellectual and that those providing academic excellence will not stay. Some will not. More will stay, such as Dr. Carmen Butcher, Dr. Ben McFry, Dr. Sabrena Parton, Dr. Barsha Pickell (PHD from University of Virginia in the area of political science), and more . .