

Yeshiva University approves alternative LGBTQ group

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David H. Zysman Hall at Yeshiva University in New York City. (Photo by Gigi Altarejos used under Creative Commons license)

Yeshiva University announced Monday that it would recognize a new undergraduate LGBTQ student group grounded in “Halacha and Torah values,” according to a press release from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which represents the Orthodox Jewish university.

The group, called the Kol Yisrael Areivim Club, was approved by the university’s administration and, according to the press release, was informed by input from current and former LGBTQ students as well as Yeshiva’s educators and rabbis.

“The club will provide students with space to grow in their personal journeys, navigating the formidable challenges that they face in living a fully committed, uncompromisingly authentic halachic life within Orthodox communities,” the press release says.

The move comes as the university is embroiled in an ongoing court battle after it refused to recognize an LGBTQ campus group, the YU Pride Alliance. Four students representing the YU Pride Alliance initially sued the school for discrimination in April 2021.

In June, the New York State Supreme Court [decided](#) in favor of the students, ruling that Yeshiva’s amended 1967 charter declared the school’s primary purpose educational, rather than religious. An appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States [was returned to the state court](#) in September with a ruling that Yeshiva must recognize the group until then, prompting the university [to suspend all student groups](#) rather than recognize the pride alliance.

Kol Yisrael Areivim Club, the new group, will allow students to gather, host events and support one another within the context of Halacha, or Jewish law and jurisprudence, according to the press release, and will be given the full support and resources given to other student groups.

“We are eager to support and facilitate the religious growth and personal life journeys of all of our students to lead authentic Torah lives, and we hope that this Torah based initiative with a new student club tailored to Yeshiva’s undergraduate LGBTQ students will provide them with meaningful support to do so,” Ari Berman, president of Yeshiva University, said in the press release.

The release adds that the university is also committed to enhancing its support for LGBTQ students through its strict anti-harassment, anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies, sensitivity training for staff and, faculty and educational sessions for incoming students during orientation, among other offerings.

YU Pride Alliance, the LGBTQ student group that sued the school for discrimination in April 2021, decried the move in a statement.

“This is a desperate stunt by Yeshiva University to distract from the growing calls from its donors, alumni, faculty, policymakers, and the business community, who have stood alongside the YU Pride Alliance, as we continue to fight for our rights,”

the statement said. “The YU sham is not a club as it was not formed by students, is not led by students, and does not have members; rather, it is a feeble attempt by YU to continue denying LGBTQ students equal treatment as full members of the YU student community.”

Rachael Fried, executive director of JQY (Jewish Queer Youth), a nonprofit that supports Orthodox Jewish queer youth, said in a statement that to her knowledge, the YU Pride Alliance board and members as well as the school’s undergrad student councils didn’t know anything about the new group until the information was made public earlier today.

“This process violates one of our core queer Jewish values of ‘nothing about us without us.’ It would be problematic, and even potentially dangerous, for non-Jews to make policies and decisions about Jews without any Jewish involvement. Similarly, decisions made without LGBTQ+ individuals and queer voices at the table is concerning and can even be harmful to the very people it aims to support,” Fried said.

Yeshiva University did not offer additional comment before publication.

In an FAQ document, Yeshiva University said it chose to create an alternative student group because the YU Pride Alliance is part of a “recognized movement in colleges throughout the country” that, in addition to standing against anti-LGBTQ discrimination, “also promotes activities that conflict with Torah laws and values.” The school noted that other faith-based universities in the US have established their own LGBTQ clubs compliant with their faith traditions rather than hosting pride alliances.

The university said it will continue to defend itself in the lawsuit that YU Pride Alliance brought against the university. In doing so, Yeshiva hopes to confirm it is a religious institution and to “protect its ability to fulfill its mission and operate its undergraduate program consistent with Torah values,” according to the press release. —Religion News Service