



Dear Faculty Colleagues,

Please do not forward this email or the attached document to anyone. I want to make you aware of two important things:

1. There are at least two undergrad students who are circulating a petition intended to demand a change to NU's biblical lifestyle standards around sexual orientation and gender identity. They are also bringing up questions about these issues with faculty members in a way that appears to be an attempt to find faculty support for their views. Apparently the effort isn't gaining a lot of traction with other students and may be losing momentum. Nevertheless, do be aware and please be careful not to allow yourself to be inadvertently coopted into this endeavor. We all need to be conscious that in this and similar situations, adding one's name to a petition wouldn't be interpreted as simply showing support for students or encouraging open discussion, it would be interpreted as agreement with the beliefs behind the petition and what it is calling for.
2. You recall the [Race FAQ](#) that was developed a couple years ago. A team of people wrote the first draft, we gathered feedback from a Faculty Forum, and then a final draft was approved by the Faculty Council and published on the Operations Dashboard. In the same way, a team of faculty members has developed a Sexuality FAQ (see attached). We know what we believe in terms of biblical morality. This FAQ, when finished, is intended to help faculty and staff to understand the approach we take in applying our belief to real life situations with our students. We will have a Faculty Forum to discuss this document. You'll receive an invitation soon.

If you have any questions, let me know.

Sexuality FAQ

Purpose:

- To address practical questions based on the theological perspective provided in our statements on sexual orientation, identity, and morality.
- To delineate a common terminology for related discussions of sexuality.
- To provide a basis for discussions and best practices around sexuality in and outside the classroom.
- To bring clarity around institutional policies around gay and transgender students.

A Very Short Christian Theology of Sexuality

Sexuality has its roots in human embodiment. It encompasses the way one experiences sexual pleasure and desire. From a Christian perspective, the Bible as one's "norming norm" becomes the starting point for making sense of these experiences. This does not negate the influence of theological reflections that have continued through differing times and places. Furthermore, cultural understandings of virtues and norms inevitably assist in establishing a robust Christian theology of sexuality. In other words, the Bible offers principles but does not answer all questions about sexuality as people experience it in different times, places, and cultures.

The beginning chapters of the book of Genesis provide several important insights into human sexuality embedded within the larger panorama of God's creative activities. The revelation of humanity as created in the image and likeness of God as male and female, lays the foundation for a positive view of human sexuality (Genesis 1:26-27). The *imago Dei* here cloaks humanity with royal dignity and presents embodied humans as God's representatives on earth. As Imagers of God, humans have received from God the "breath of life," making them whole beings. Yet this individual wholeness was not meant for isolation. The LORD God forms humanity as man and woman and the two become one flesh. Although naked they feel no shame (Genesis 2:25). Contrary to some early interpreters, human sexual relationship does not constitute the so-called "original sin" in these early biblical narratives. The disobedience in the garden and human violence that continues in the narrative contributes to a larger picture of sin-stained humanity (Genesis 3-11). Sexuality neither stands at the epicenter of sin nor does God condemn it. Instead, God's blessing of human fruitfulness weaves its way through the genealogies of the nations and the Abrahamic peoples.

The divine blessing of Biblical sexuality extends beyond reproduction. The Song of Songs celebrates human sexuality unashamedly without reproduction of the species as its goal. In beautiful lyric poetry the woman and the man mutually express love. Although interpreters have historically tended to allegorize this erotic dialogue, the consistent sexual imagery makes it impossible to es to brush the aside the clear sexual meaning of the book. Its theology culminates with the phrase "for love is strong as death." (Song 8:6) Sexuality thus emerges in this portion of the Bible as an integral part of humanity's embodied existence and an expression of love.

The Bible recognizes not only sexual love between a man and a woman, but also non-sexual/non-romantic same-sex friendships. The covenantal relationship between David and Jonathan offers a case-in-point (1 Samuel 18-20). Their brotherly affection depicts a love not quenched when death separated them (2 Samuel 1).

In the Gospels, Jesus does not deliver long diatribes on human sexuality. Perhaps the full hearing given in the Scriptures that Jesus affirmed made further exposition unnecessary. However, Jesus addresses topics such as marriage and celibacy positively, while treating divorce, adultery, and lust negatively. At the same time, an important dimension to Jesus's life and teaching involved his emphasis on forgiveness that extended to a real-life tragedy of adultery.

With a pastoral heart, Paul shouldered the responsibilities of articulating the importance of a believer's life of holiness in contrast to sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). Paul faced both gay and straight immoral behavior proscribed in the teachings of the book of Leviticus. For Paul, sexual sins were not just sins of the body, but rather, affected the whole person.

The book of Leviticus that Paul seems to rely on focuses on how the Ancient Israelite should worship the LORD. Chapters 18-20 contrast two major categories of vice with two virtues. They present sexual immorality and idolatry and/or the worshipping of other gods in contrast to holiness and loving the alien. They contrast prohibited sexual behaviors with a worshipper who set apart to God and away from the common life. Human sexuality then s integrates into a worshipper's life and requires no separation from one's relationship with God.

Idolatry and/or the worship of other gods lies is at the core of the theological concept of biblical sin r in the Old Testament

as well as in the writings of Paul (Romans 1). A relationship with God equals loyalty to God.

In the context of establishing a Christian theology of sexuality a foundational pillar of Christian life requires confession with our lips that Jesus is Lord and belief in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 10:9-10). Reconciliation to God implies the normativity of both justification and sanctification issues. Sexuality thus belongs to the sphere of sanctification.

Definitions:

What are some of the basic terms involved in discussions of sexuality, including definitions and appropriate use?

The terminology applied to the discussion of homosexuality offers a veritable minefield of possible offenses. Because of the controversies implied by Christian rejection of the morality same-sex sexual activity, and because the LGBTQIA+ community understands the polemical nature of any dialogue between those who accept the moral acceptability such behaviors and those who do not accept it, the terms of discussion will always present possible conflicts and offenses. Those who wish to engage in dialogue should choose their vocabulary very carefully and realize that those who set the terms of discussion have an enormous rhetorical advantage. At the same time, using terms deemed as offensive by ones interlocutors guarantees offense and foreclosed conversations.

- The term **homosexual** refers as a noun to people and to behavior as an adjective signifying sexual attraction or activity with persons of the same sex. Some persons in the LGBTQIA+ community take offense to the use of the term, so we recommend the avoidance of the term wherever possible. If one chooses to employ it, we recommend a clearly clinical use.
- The acronym **LGBTQIA+** refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual or Ally, with the “+” standing in for any other designation.
- The adjective **gay** describes people whose enduring physical, romantic, and/ or emotional attractions primarily focus on people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay woman, gay people). It also refers to a lifestyle of same-sex sexual activity, whether promiscuous or in committed relationships. The adjective also refers to the community of persons who engage in gay sexual behavior.
- The noun and the adjective **lesbian** refer to same-sex attracted women, especially those engaged in female homosexual behavior.
- The concept of **identity** occupies important ground in any discussion of LGBTQIA+ issues. As defined in cultural psychology and anthropology, *identity* involves a self-concept based in location, gender, race, history, nationality, language, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, aesthetics, body type, and even food preferences. Many psychological theories of identity development posit sequential stages of identity through which one arrives at a sense of belonging to a group or living out their sexual orientation. Such theories have played a foundational part in LGBTQIA+ issues, describing a process by which an individual develops an identity as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or other personal definition. Christians disagree about the validity or universal applicability of such developmental theories. An example might involve a Christian who identifies as “gay” because of a consistent attraction to same-sex persons. Some Christians would counsel such persons to avoid basing their sense of identity on their sexual orientation, while others would accept the idea that a Christian can identify as gay. We hold that Christians find their primary and ultimate identity in Jesus and His people and should not accept their sexual orientation as their primary identity.
- To some people, identifying as gay implies participation in the gay **lifestyle**. Inevitably, individuals will choose for themselves how they will identify and what terms they will use to express their identity. Refusing to accept their chosen identity terminology will sometimes result in offense and a foreclosed conversation.

- The term **sexual preference** has lost favor and has largely given way to the term **sexual orientation**. Originally, that change of terminology referred to the insistence that people do not experience same-sex attraction as a chosen preference but rather as an inborn orientation. Currently, the debate within the LGBTQIA+ admits such identity as either inborn or chosen, but the issue remains controversial. We recommend the use of *sexual orientation* rather than *sexual preference* in order to avoid offence.

- The term **sin** refers to behavior contrary to God’s will. Northwest University holds that a student can experience sexual attraction to persons of the same sex and not be guilty of sin if that attraction does not result in sexual behavior or sustained sexual fantasies. Students who experience same-sex attraction but choose not to engage in sinful behavior remain in good standing with the University. We do not, in other words, morally equate sexual orientation or attraction with sexual practice.

- The term **community** can refer, among other things, to a group that shares a common identity or lifestyle, such as gay community, lesbian community, bisexual community, transgender community, LGBTQIA+ community, etc. We hold that Christians find their primary community as members of the body of Christ. While identification with LGBTQIA+ communities offers particular comfort to persons who experience same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria or other related issues, Christians should exercise caution in embracing such communities because of the inherent temptations implied. Nevertheless, some may embrace such membership for missional purposes. Such identifications should involve significant prayer and counsel from other Christians.

As detailed in our “Policy on Sexual Morality & Identity” in the Employee Manual as well the Student Handbook, Northwest University affirms that Biblical morality limits the practice and expression of sexuality to those who have entered the covenant of marriage between a man and woman unmarried students are called to live within that sexual ethic.

Accordingly, we expect students who identify as “gay” because of their sexual orientation to reject the gay lifestyle.

Transgender can refer to any individual whose gender identity (culturally defined as an internal sense of gender) differs in some way from their birth or biological sex. The term “transsexual” is typically used for those who seek medical assistance to change their biological or birth sex. The theoretical separation of gender as a social construct from biological sex as a given at birth resulted in a significant step in the modern conception of transgenderism.

Regardless of their inclusion within the LGBTQIA+ initialism, shared political benefits, and the overlap between the transgender and gay communities, transgenderism remains culturally distinguishable from homosexuality, as the former deals with gender identity (identifying as male, female, or other) while the latter deals with sexual orientation (sexual attraction to the same sex). While an overlap exists between the transgender and homosexual community, those who identify as transgender do not necessarily identify as gay.

Today “transgender” serves as the umbrella term for the myriad of ways in which individuals can experience and express incongruence between their birth sex and their gender identity. “Transgender” has been applied to individuals as varied as children struggling with their sense of gender, drag queens, and intersex individuals born with both male and female traits that do not allow easy identification (though for the reason that they were born without a clear birth sex, many intersex individuals will not accept the “trans” label). Cross-gender behavior may also cover a variety of expressions ranging from secretly cross-dressing to undergoing sex reassignment surgery. There is no one-size-fits-all explanation of transgenderism, nor a one-size-fits-all response to the pain experienced by transgender individuals.

The Assemblies of God has an excellent statement on the topic of [Transgenderism, Transsexuality and Gender Identity](#).

What is the best language to use when talking about people who identify as gay, lesbian, and bisexual?

According to GLAAD *homosexual* is an outdated, offensive, and derogatory term.

Working with a new generation, we should acknowledge that “Gen Z” Christians rarely come to us with a fully developed biblical worldview. The term *homosexual*, to their ears, posits an aggressive posture that may not provide a helpful starting point for conversation. Same-sex attraction (SSA) is currently a more acceptable term, but it is mainly used by Christians. The term may be too simplistic, narrowing the complex phenomenon of homosexuality to sexual attraction that simply needs reorientation. Sexual preference can be used but it can have similar undertones as SSA. Out of respect for LGBTQIA+ individuals and a desire to facilitate dialogue, we recommend avoiding the use of the term whenever possible, although frankly, no better term exists for theoretical description of the phenomenon of same-sex attraction. Despite its limitations, “gay” will usually offer the safest, most general term to describe individuals in dialogue.

Questions about NU Policies:

Does being gay violate NU’s community standards?

Our Community Handbook has an extensive policy on sexuality, which includes sections on same sex relationships and gender dysphoria. The policy considers sexual relations of any kind outside the confines marriage between one man and woman is a violation., Sexual orientation, however, does not constitute a violation and a would not, but itself, result in disciplinary action. Many students in our traditional undergraduate program have questioned their sexuality or disclose that they experience attraction to people of the same sex without suffering reproach or hostility. As a community, we have a responsibility try to balance acceptance of students who express same-sex attraction without celebrating that orientation or encouraging same-sex sexual relationships, depending on the help of the Holy Spirit.

What happens to students who come out or are gay?

It is hard to answer this question universally because every student conduct situation is unique and treated as such within our disciplinary process. As with most student conduct cases, a student will have the opportunity to make a change and to receive healthy accountability. Unless the student expresses no willingness to change or adhere to the sexuality policy moving forward, or the violation is so severe that we deem separation as necessary, we will offer the student an opportunity for grace and restoration while continuing their education at NU. We do not conduct reparative therapy or try to “scare straight” our students. Rather, we try to walk with them, present them compassion and care, and hold them accountable during their time at NU. We would only dismiss students unwilling to change their behavior to conform to our community standards. If they choose to remain a student at NU and refrain from the problematic behavior, we give them

another chance and create a plan for restoration and growth. We do not dismiss students from Northwest University solely on the basis of their sexual orientation.

What are the bounds of confidentiality for staff/faculty?

Federal law requires faculty to report instances of sexual harassment and/or sexual misconduct that violates our Title IX policy. Students revealing their sexual orientation to faculty does not constitute a mandatory reporting situation under law or institutional policy. Therefore, faculty have no obligation to report it. If faculty become aware of students violating institutional policy in terms of sexual practice, they can consult with Student Development regarding how best to address the situation and encourage restoration and accountability for individual students.

We recognize that private student-employee conversations about sexuality constitute confidential communications, especially when the employee is clergy or a counseling professional.

- When initiated by the student, faculty should welcome conversations about sexual orientation or behavior.
- In most cases employees should not initiate the conversation.

What is a faculty/staff member's responsibility when we learn a student is gay?

Obviously, context is critical in these situations. There is really no set of specifics that fits every situation. We may learn different things about students in different ways at different times, and because of the breadth of meaning in the definition of "gay" (see above) we should not assume that we understand what it means when we learn/find out/know a student is gay. The key is to respond with sensitivity and caring, making sure that our first concern is for the student and their well-being, not questions of school discipline. If we are concerned about the well-being of a student in general and want to check in with them or refer them to the Wellness Center, that is of course appropriate.

Employees should keep in mind that our goal is, ultimately, the best possible outcome for students, who are still "in-process" as young adults. As they "work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12) we should seek wisdom in how best to assist them. Where we have opportunities to walk with them and speak to them in this journey we should. Where others are better suited to do this, wisdom counsels referring to them.

How can a staff or faculty member help to protect a student's confidentiality in the context of classroom or public disclosures?

Since learning may involve a deep personal interaction, instructors and students should establish clear guidelines for personal disclosures. This especially pertains to dealing with public professions of gay identity. Students and professors/staff should understand that the classroom does not provide confidentiality.

- Professors may want to explain to the students the limits of confidentiality within a classroom setting and what to consider before sharing intimate experiences.
- Professors may want to include a statement within the course syllabus that helps students understand the limits of confidentiality in the classroom.
- An example statement: "In this class, you may encounter teaching and learning that may feel very personal. Personal experiences and identities can enter into the class discussion. Disclosing such information, where appropriate, can add to the learning experience. Nevertheless, students should carefully consider the advisability of such disclosures since classrooms do not provide for or guarantee confidentiality."

To what degree can employees discuss points of view on sexuality that are different from the University's understanding of biblical teaching?

The "Academic Freedom and Responsibility" statement in the Faculty Manual provides a guide in this area, which notes that "Freedom of expression is recognized as a requisite for effective and intelligent dissemination of idea" and that "limitations on expression do not include suppression of the traditional academic disciplines or areas of those disciplines, but they do require that ideas and opinions be presented in a Christian context." Employees should remain mindful that they "advocate nothing contrary to the Bible, the Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths, or the stated purposes of Northwest University."

Within these parameters all aspects of these issues can be discussed outside and inside the classroom—always within the context of applying and integrating a biblical worldview to the questions at hand.

What are principles and best practices for navigating conversations about sexuality in a classroom? How can faculty help normalize conversations about human sexuality?

Faculty should strive to make clear that this subject matter is appropriate for discussion and affirm the conversations related to it.

- In general, these kinds of conversations make sense in two types of situations: 1) where the curriculum content intersects in some way with conversations about sexuality, and 2) where larger societal or community issues weigh heavily or significantly on students/faculty and the demands of Christian community. In both cases, faculty have freedom to invite conversations in their teaching.

- Faculty are best suited to speak to the issue of sexuality in at least two or three ways: 1) at a shared human level, 2) from a common Christian perspective, 3) in those places where the topic intersects with their areas of academic expertise. In no case should faculty members feel compelled or required to speak in areas beyond their level of expertise and training.
- Faculty should avoid “soapboxing” and forced student conformity to their personal opinions or perspectives in a way that short-circuits conversation and/or learning.
- In addition to teaching on the topic from a perspective informed by their training and scholarship, faculty should aim to adopt a pastoral approach in these areas that seeks to listen and understand students’ processing.
- In discussions of this nature, faculty should:
 - Take care to use accurate, anatomically correct terms.
 - Develop a personal comfort level in talking about sexuality. If we feel awkward, the conversation is likely to feel awkward too.
 - Be aware of their own perspectives, experience, race, and gender, and how they may impact the conversation.
 - Adopt a compassionate and nonjudgmental stance. Correct inaccuracies where they emerge but realize that students can be harmed if they open up and we respond harshly or judgmentally.
 - Allow students to leave a conversation without embarrassment if they feel uncomfortable.
 - Let students know exactly what we will talk about ahead of time.
 - Set clear discussion ground rules.
 - Be sensitive to the different perspectives and experiences in the room.
 - Consider a lower stakes way to help students understand that their own perspective/family experience may not be the only one. One idea is to talk about how different families view nakedness.
 - Realize that others may have experienced hurt around sexual issues.
 - Be respectful of those who think differently than you do.
 - Not use rude or pejorative terms, especially those that degrade another person or group of people.
 - Where possible, avoid “all or nothing” terminology.

How can we best help students process their questions, concerns, experiences, feelings, and thoughts around sexuality?

- Remember that there is normally a “question behind the question” or an “experience behind the question.” Most times students do not process sexuality in the abstract but want to make sense of their own experiences, thoughts, relationships, feelings, etc. Search for that. Ask about that.
- Ask questions about how their sexuality and faith interact, seeking to listen and understand before offering prescriptive statements.
- Give students the space to be honest about their dislike or disagreements with what Scripture has to say.
- Some students fear that their sexual past, present experiences, desires, thoughts, etc. will impact their salvation or Jesus’ posture toward them. We must help them understand the relationship between the grace of God and human struggles with sin. Often questions around sexuality center on personal identity, meaning, and community. For Christians, victory over sexual sin comes with growth in sanctification and trust.
- Same-sex attraction can sometimes feel like the unforgivable sin. Consider framing conversations that start with “I think I’m gay” more like those we have when someone says, “I think I’ve lost my faith?”.
- Students want to trust you. You don’t have to act defensively or prove anything. Saying “I don’t know” or “I am still processing my own opinions” builds credibility with students.
- Ask questions about the student’s understanding of the meaning of words, experiences, reactions, thoughts, feelings, etc.

How can we love and care for students around these issues?

- Approach students with pastoral care and personal dignity.
- Remind students that they will not be kicked out for their sexual orientation
- Encourage and facilitate regular, public conversations, lectures, assignments, events, chapels, etc. about sexuality that normalizes student’s processing their own sexuality.
- Regularly embrace disagreement in conversations while displaying civility.
- Show love, respect, and dignity to any student who is same-sex attracted from a pastoral and personal perspective.
- Remember that the vast majority of traditional undergraduates are still at an age when they are very much “in process.” Take care not to force them into a corner that would lead to a kind of premature identity foreclosure.

What is a faculty/staff member’s responsibility when student express concerns or confusion related to gender?

- The comments above (related to context, caring sensitivity, student well-being, and spiritual and personal development) are appropriate in this situation as well.

- There is a difference, however: while the term “gay” may have to do with some combination of identity, community adherence, and/or sexual practice, questions of gender concern identity and, likely to a lesser extent, community. Gender as such does not directly involve sexual practice and, in this way, is does not primarily constitute a moral issue. This key distinction is often lost in the conversation and should be kept in mind in interactions with gender-questioning students.
- The NU Policy on Sexual Morality and Identity should help anchor our approach in its conclusion that “all humans, male and female, are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and that God loves each one of us. We recognize that gender identity is formed through complicated biological and social processes.” Following Mark Yarhouse and Julia Sandusky, we further understand that while “...the reality is that, for a small percentage of persons, gender identity does not align with biological sex...the fall touches every aspect of human experience, including sex differentiation and gender identity” (108).
- Operating from a stance of deep Christian compassion in the face of complex realities, we must make sure to listen attentively to students as they share their lived experience and honest questions or confusion, suspending any immediate need for comment or evaluation on our part. As Yarhouse and Sandusky note, “receptivity to the story, even without knowing the solutions for practical problems, goes a long way” (130).
- Assumptions based on a student’s personality, style of dress, or other culturally-conditioned factors should not give cause to draw conclusions about gender. We believe that gossip, rumors, and supposition have no place in a community defined by Christian truth and love, and we should work hard to dispel these where we encounter them.
- Many of the issues involved in questions of gender identity can involve complex factors and can elicit deep pain and trauma for reasons personal, societal, and cultural. As such, faculty should strongly consider referring students to the Wellness Center to help them process through their questions with trained professionals. In other words, faculty should neither carry nor feel that they should carry the burden of helping students through these complicated issues by themselves.

Does being transgender violate NU’s community standards?

We believe that all humans, male and female, are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and that God loves each one of us. We recognize that gender identity is formed through complicated biological and social processes. We strive to offer a caring and supportive community to those struggling with gender identity. At the same time, we expect all members of our community to exhibit a consistent gender identity for the duration of their time at NU (1 Corinthians 14:33); we do not approve of changing or attempting to change one’s sex while enrolled at NU.

