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Catholic university rethinks class on gay marriage

by Kelly Heyboer by Religion News Service

SOUTH ORANGE, N.J. -- Seton Hall University's governing board is debating whether to cancel a course on gay marriage after Newark Archbishop John J. Myers said it conflicts with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The course is scheduled to begin this fall for upperclassmen in any major, university officials said, and would explore the issue without advocating for either side.

Myers said news that Seton Hall students will be studying gay marriage "troubles me greatly." Myers does not have the authority to cancel a class, but is chairman of Seton Hall's board of trustees and president of the school's board of regents.

In a statement, the archbishop said the church teaches marriage should be between only a man and a woman.

"This proposed course seeks to promote as legitimate a train of thought that is contrary to what the church teaches. As a result, the course is not in sync with Catholic teaching," Myers said.

Larry Robinson, Seton Hall's vice provost, said the course was approved by both the political science department and the dean's office.

"The initial review at the departmental level and at the dean's level suggests that the course is not an advocacy course ... but a 'special topics' course to objectively examine a significant current public policy issue," Robinson said.

"Thus, we fully anticipate that the Catholic position on same-sex marriage will be explored."

W. King Mott, the Seton Hall associate professor of political science scheduled to teach the course, told the campus newspaper he didn't think it was unusual for a Catholic university to offer a class on an issue the church does not support.

"The best schools offer controversial classes," Mott told the *Setonian*. "The class is not about advocacy, but about studying the issue from an academic perspective. It's about awareness."

Mott, who is gay, has clashed before with church and university officials. In 2005, he was demoted from associate dean of Seton Hall's College of Arts and Sciences after his letter challenging the church's view on homosexuality was published in *The (Newark) Star-Ledger*.

Faculty members protested Mott's demotion, arguing school officials violated his academic freedom when they punished him for writing a letter. But Seton Hall's provost upheld the demotion and Mott, who has tenure, remained as a prominent professor.

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[Kelly Heyboer reports for the *The Star-Ledger* in New Jersey.]

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