

The *Nicholas Meriwether* Case

Case Name: *Meriwether v. The Trustees of Shawnee State University*

Case Status: Appeal filed to U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit challenging lower court ruling against Professor Meriwether.

Significance: Whether a public university can require a teacher to contradict his core beliefs by insisting he refer to a male student with female pronouns.



Background: Dr. Nicholas Meriwether has spent more than two decades as a philosophy professor at Shawnee State University in southern Ohio, where he has focused his scholarship and teaching on the intersection of philosophy, ethics, religion, and political theory. During a political philosophy class he was teaching, Professor Meriwether responded to a male student’s question by saying, “Yes, sir.” Professor Meriwether responded in this fashion because he refers to all his students as “sir” or “ma’am” or by a title (Mr. or Miss, for example) followed by their last name to foster an atmosphere of seriousness and mutual respect. After the class, the student approached Professor Meriwether, stated that he was transgender, and demanded that the professor refer to him as a woman, with feminine titles and pronouns. When Meriwether did not instantly agree, the student became belligerent, circling around Meriwether and getting in his face in a threatening fashion while telling him, “Then I guess this means I can call you a c**t.” Before walking away, the student promised to get Meriwether fired if he did not agree to the student’s demands.

Although Professor Meriwether offered to use any name the student preferred, the university was not willing to accept that compromise, choosing instead to force the professor to speak and act contrary to his own Christian convictions. A lower court affirmed the university’s actions, prompting Alliance Defending Freedom Attorneys to appeal the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit.

Key Points

- This isn’t just about a pronoun, it’s about what that pronoun means. It’s about endorsing an ideology.
- Freedom—of speech and religious exercise—includes the freedom *not* to speak messages against our core beliefs.
- Public universities shouldn’t require teachers to endorse a belief with which they disagree.

Key Facts

- Professor Meriwether offered several ways to accommodate the student, but none of that was enough in the eyes of university administrators, who insisted he contradict his core beliefs or face punishment.
- Professor Meriwether made it clear that he would accommodate his student by not using a pronoun that now offends the student; at the same time, he can't use a pronoun that offends his conscience.
- This was never about anything Professor Meriwether said or did; only about what the university was demanding he say. Professor Meriwether was punished because he declined to a male student’s demand to be referred to as a woman, with feminine titles and pronouns.

The Bottom Line: Professor Meriwether went out of his way to accommodate all his students and treat them all with respect; his university punished him because he wouldn’t contradict his core beliefs.