

Christian college parts ways with transgender professor

by [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#) in the [October 16, 2013](#) issue

A California Christian college has asked a professor who was once its chair of theology and philosophy to leave after he came out as transgender.

Heather Clements taught theology at Azusa Pacific University for 15 years. This past year, he has begun referring to himself as H. Adam Ackley.

Ackley, who is in his third year of a five-year contract, said that he and APU have agreed to part ways, with the university agreeing to pay him through the academic year. But, he said, the university wants other professors to take over his classes. He also said that his insurance was denied when he sought hormone treatment and “top surgery” for his chest area.

“They’re giving me privacy to transition but denying medical treatment to do that,” said Ackley, who is 47.

APU spokeswoman Rachel White declined to discuss Ackley’s employment, saying that the issue is ongoing and personnel matters are confidential.

Azusa Pacific is a nondenominational evangelical university of about 10,000 students and 1,200 faculty located east of Los Angeles. Heather Clements earned an M.A. at the Claremont School of Theology in 1991 and a Ph.D. at Claremont Graduate University in 1997.

To his knowledge, Ackley said, there is nothing in the university’s policies about transgender people, just the declaration that “humans were created as gendered beings.”

“I did not get a sense directly from the individuals with whom I was speaking that they had a theological problem with transgender identity,” Ackley said. “I did get the message that it has to do with their concern that other people, such as donors, parents and churches connected to the university will have problems not

understanding transgender identity.”

Ackley said that he accepted his transgender identity this year after the American Psychiatric Association removed gender identity disorder from the list of mental illnesses in its manual. Ackley said it wasn’t until this school year that he met with higher-ups at the university about the change.

“This year has been a transition from being a mentally ill woman to being a sane, transgendered man,” he said. He has two children and is in the process of a divorce from his second husband.

As the news trickled out on social networks, he said he saw people making various assumptions. “People assumed that I’ve done something—some sex act,” he said. “I’m not violating any sexual conduct and it’s embarrassing that it’s implied. I live a very chaste life.”

Ackley said he has received offers from other Christian and nonreligious institutions to teach or consult.

In a YouTube video posted September 20, Ackley declared in a slideshow that he was raised in an “unconditionally loving family of Christian grandparents and hippie parents who allowed me to be myself—assigned female gender at birth but kept thinking I was a little boy, trying to be like my grandpa.”

He wrote that he became a baptized Christian at 18 and was ordained in the Mennonite Church in 1999; he transferred a decade later to the Church of the Brethren.

“I tried to conform to Christian womanhood as best I could,” he wrote. His first marriage ended, and during his second marriage, he said he was told by spiritual directors, spiritual support groups, psychological professionals and medical doctors to try harder to conform to the gender that was assigned to him at birth.

“Yet treatment with hormones, therapy and prayer to make me more female led to physical, psychological and spiritual deterioration,” he wrote. —RNS