

Mark Juergensmeyer, religion scholar, withdraws from event over religious freedom issue

by [Jana Riess](#) in the [November 11, 2015](#) issue

Mark Juergensmeyer, past president of the American Academy of Religion, withdrew from a symposium on law and religion at Brigham Young University after learning of BYU's policy toward Mormon students who change their faith.

Juergensmeyer, author of *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* and a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, had received an e-mail from the Free BYU organization. The group contacted all the symposium speakers to inform them of BYU's policy that students who enter the university as Mormons but move away from the faith can be expelled, evicted from student housing, and fired from on-campus jobs.

"I could not speak at a conference that is devoted in part to religious freedom at an institution that seemed to be denying that freedom to its own students," Juergensmeyer said. "One of the conference organizers expressed support for my decision as a matter of conscience, but she also gave a spirited defense of the university's policy, in part for financial reasons, since so much of the tuition comes from the offerings of the church."

Juergensmeyer said he has not heard of a comparable policy at any other religious university in the United States but that he has not made a particular study of the question.

"I mean no disrespect to BYU, the faculty, or the Mormon church," he said. "I would not participate in a religious freedom conference at any institution where this would be a policy." —Religion News Service