

Oregon Professor Fired Over Islam Teaching

Lane

Community College should rehire a teacher that was fired after the Council on American-Islamic Relations, or CAIR, complained about a class he was scheduled to teach about Islam. So says the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ).

The ACLJ is arguing that the Eugene, community college violated the contractual and constitutional rights of the teacher, Barry Sommer, by firing him and canceling the class in the wake of pressure from CAIR.

"The school had approved the course and our client's request to teach it. Only after CAIR got involved did the school react—caving to political pressure and intimidation—firing our client and canceling the course," says CeCe Heil, ACLJ senior counsel, who is handling the case. "The school clearly violated the First Amendment free speech rights of our client."

The class in question was called "What is Islam?" The class aimed to introduce students to the Quran and other viewpoints on Islam in a world where terrorism is a constant threat. The stated purpose of this course was to provide a basic

understanding of Islamic doctrines so that students could make informed decisions based on unbiased and current information.

According to the ACLJ, within a day after the course had been advertised online, CAIR contacted college officials demanding that Sommer be removed charging that he intended to promote “anti-Muslim bigotry” and citing his involvement with Act! for America, an advocacy group that speaks out in defense of America. CAIR labels them an anti-Muslim hate group. Within hours after CAIR’s demand and press release, the college fired Sommer and canceled the class.

“It’s disappointing that a community college that should uphold an environment of academic freedom along with diversity and acceptance has failed to do so in this case,” Heil says. “We’re demanding that the school rehire our client and reinstate the class he had been scheduled to teach. If corrective action is not taken, we’re prepared to take legal action to protect the rights of our client.”

Neither Lane Community College nor CAIR was immediately available for comment, but the college issued a published statement on the matter:

“The class was canceled in order to more carefully consider, in consultation with faculty, how best to provide a rich learning experience on religious

topics. The decision was made with due diligence and took into account many perspectives and issues including academic freedom, impact on the community, intellectual inquiry, and balance.”

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College claims misinformation has been posted on websites and reported in the media. The college insists it did not and will not make instructional decisions in response to pressure from any outside group, but rather on the college mission and core values and on student, college and community needs.