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## Student Sues Community College, Alleges Professor Called Him 'a Fascist Bastard' in Class

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By Pete Winn, Senior Writer/Editor

**(CNSNews.com)** - It's tough enough for most college students to give a public speech. What if you gave a speech and your professor interrupted you, called you "a fascist bastard"--and refused to give you a grade?

That's what Los Angeles Community College student Jonathan Lopez said happened to him in his Introduction to Speech 101 class in late November, according to the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), a religious rights law group in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Last week, on Lopez's behalf, ADF filed a lawsuit in federal district court in Los Angeles against the community college's chancellor, individual members of the board of trustees and speech professor John Matteson for allegedly violating the student's First Amendment rights.

Lopez, who was a student in Matteson's public speaking class, simply shared his beliefs on faith and marriage, according to David Hacker, an ADF litigation counsel.

"He was given--like all other students in the class--an assignment to give an informative speech about any topic. It simply had to be 6 to 8 minutes long, and students could talk about anything they wanted," Hacker told CNSNews.com.

On Nov. 28, it was Lopez's turn to give a speech.

"He chose to discuss his faith and the role that he has seen God play in the lives of others, as well as his own," Hacker said. "During the speech he read the dictionary definition of marriage and two Bible verses."

Neither the court document nor Hacker said what the Biblical verses contained, but the professor stopped Lopez, allegedly calling him a "fascist bastard."

"The professor told the other students in the class, at that point, 'If you are offended, go ahead and leave'--well, nobody left, so the professor dismissed the entire class and did not allow Jonathan to finish," Hacker said.

Lopez didn't receive a grade for his speech. Instead, Hacker said, the professor left the assignment sheet on the student's backpack.

"On it was written, 'Ask God what your grade is,'" Hacker said. The professor also allegedly wrote "Prostyelsyzsing (sic) is inappropriate in public school."

Hacker said the lawsuit goes further than alleged censorship. One week after the classroom incident, Matteson also allegedly threatened to expel the student.

“When Mr. Lopez informed one of the deans of the college about what happened, and his desire for a grade, the professor saw him doing this, and came up to him afterward and said, ‘I’m going to get you expelled,’” Hacker said.

The lawsuit also alleges that just after California’s Proposition 8 passed on Nov. 4 limiting the definition of marriage to apply to couples made up of one man and one woman, the same professor allegedly said in class that, “If you voted for Prop. 8, you are a fascist bastard.”

The Los Angeles Community College system was closed for the President’s Day holiday, and attempts to contact Matteson were unsuccessful.

In a letter sent to ADF, LACC Dean Allison Jones wrote that the college considered the matter to be “extremely serious in nature,” according to the lawsuit, and had begun a disciplinary investigation. Jones also said in the letter that two students in the class had complained that they were “deeply offended” by Lopez’s speech--accusing Lopez of preaching “hate.”

Hacker said colleges should be bastions of free speech, not political correctness.

“Colleges should be giving Christians the same rights as other students on campus, especially when it comes to free speech,” Hacker said. “Public institutions of higher learning cannot selectively censor Christian speech.”

Robert Shibley, vice president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, said said given the parameters, Lopez has every right to talk about his faith--and about marriage.

“Public universities and colleges like Los Angeles Community College don’t have the right to prevent people from speaking about their religious beliefs, Shibley said.

“In a classroom,” he added, “if religion is not the topic that you are supposed to be speaking on, obviously like any other topic they can insist that you speak on the things that they ask for. But in this case, our understanding is that they asked him to speak about any topic. There is no reason a state--or frankly, any other--university, private or public should be able to tell you that religious topics are off-limits.”

Lopez is asking for an injunction against the professor and the college’s speech code, which forbids students from making statements deemed offensive. He is also seeking “minor” financial damages, Hacker said.

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