

Backers say Baylor prof faces firing for his views

by [Bob Allen](#) in the [December 27, 2011](#) issue

A Baylor University professor is fighting dismissal charges that supporters say are aimed at silencing a dissident voice in America's Jewish community.

According to published reports, Marc Ellis, university professor of Jewish studies and director of Baylor's Center for Jewish Studies, said during a November 21 speech to the American Academy of Religion that he has become a victim of "selectively enforced" policies regarding practices that are routinely overlooked.

Ellis, an expert in Holocaust studies and liberation theology, said former Baylor presidents defended his outspoken opposition to U.S. and Israeli policy toward Palestinians. He claimed that current Baylor president and former Bill Clinton prosecutor Kenneth Starr was personally involved in efforts to fire him, a charge denied by Baylor spokeswoman Lori Fogleman.

Neither side is discussing details of the charges. Ellis has hired a lawyer to fight his dismissal on the basis that he is a tenured professor. Several high-profile individuals have come to his aid. Princeton scholar Cornel West, feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether and Archbishop Desmond Tutu cosponsored an online petition on his behalf to "stop persecution" of a dissident voice.

Fogleman told the *Waco Tribune-Herald* that the charges against Ellis have nothing to do with his exercise of academic freedom, but due to privacy rules she could not go into the details without the professor's permission.

Ellis's attorney,

Roger Sanders, questioned whether timing of formal charges filed November 18, just three days before Ellis was to be honored by the 10,000-member American Academy of Religion at its San Francisco annual meeting, was intended to embarrass the professor. Fogleman said the dates were coincidental and that the charges came after a period of due process.

Ellis told the academy that his duties were curtailed after the investigation began. He said all of his classes for the fall semester were canceled unilaterally, and he was stymied in efforts to bring West, an acknowledged scholar and frequent commentator on political talk shows, to the campus in Waco, Texas.

Ruether,

visiting professor at Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University, told the Waco newspaper that Baylor wants to get rid of Ellis because it considers his views on Israel too controversial. She said she believes that Ellis is willing to accept severance, because the Baylor environment is unfriendly and he is near retirement age. She wondered why the university didn't negotiate with Ellis instead of risking notoriety by firing him. —ABP