

Southwestern Seminary files motion against dismissed professor's suit

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FORT WORTH- [Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary](#) has filed a motion in federal court to dismiss the gender-discrimination lawsuit that former professor Sheri Klouda brought against the school.

The motion argues [the suit](#) should be dismissed because seminary officials' decision to dismiss Klouda is protected by the First Amendment.

"The seminary's relationship with its professors has been held by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to be the same relationship as a church with its ministers," the motion said. "Any decision the seminary may take regarding the employment of one of its professors is an ecclesiastical decision, which this court is bound to accept out of deference for the free exercise of religion, protected by the First Amendment."

The motion also refuted each of Klouda's claims of breach of contract, fraud, defamation, and promissory estoppel

Klouda, who was hired in 2002 to teach Hebrew in a tenure-track position at the Fort Worth school, [lost her job last year](#), allegedly because of her gender. She sued the school March 8.

In the suit, Klouda said Paige Patterson, who became Southwestern's president in 2003, personally assured her the advent of his administration would not jeopardize her position. However, school officials told her in 2004 she would not get tenure.

Van McClain, chair of the school's board of trustees, explained in a letter posted on a Southern Baptist blog that Klouda "did not have tenure and, like hundreds of professors around the U.S. every year, was told that she would not be awarded tenure."

Public outcry at the dismissal, reported not only in Baptist news outlets but also in the Dallas and Fort Worth daily newspapers, the Associated Press and Religion News Service, has given the issue unexpected national prominence.

The seminary terminated Klouda's contract in December 2006, and she now teaches at Taylor University in Upland, Ind.