

## EDUCATION

**Teacher fired over sexual orientation talk**

Friday, February 22, 2008 | 6:10 PM

By Lyanne Melendez

**SAN JOSE, CA (KGO) -- San Jose Evergreen Community College is under fire tonight by a group that defends academic freedom --- after the college fired a teacher because of a class discussion on sexual orientation.**

This was a summer class offered at San Jose City College. There was a debate about sexual orientation, and now apparently the teacher made some remarks that really offended a student.

The fired teacher worked part-time at San Jose City College. Last summer, as part of a human heredity course, June Sheldon led a discussion on the controversial "nature versus nurture" debate.

[Story continues below](#)

Advertisement



David Hacker is an attorney representing Sheldon. She did not want to be on-camera.

"What she was answering was a question by a student about nature, whether nature gives us traits or whether it's through our environment that we acquire traits in heredity and Ms. Sheldon simply just answered the student's question," said attorney David Hacker.

In other words, are we born with a specific sexual orientation or does our environment determine that orientation?

Hacker is with the Alliance Defense Fund; the same group that sued to stop same-sex marriages in California.

"Colleges and Universities have become so radical that when someone states uncontroversial and undisputed facts they get terminated for it," said Hacker.

Sheldon was terminated by the San Jose Evergreen Community College District. Despite our attempt to contact them, no one there would comment.

But the foundation for individual rights in education posted on their Web site a letter written by Sheldon's boss, the investigator in this case.

The letter by Dean of Math and Science Leandra Martin says: "Sheldon stated that mistreatment to pregnant women at a certain point in the pregnancy can cause male homosexuality. She also said that there was no such thing as true female homosexuality. Based on my investigation June Sheldon was teaching misinformation in a science course, and recommended her dismissal."

This student attends the other community colleges run by the district. He's familiar with the course.

"There were things that were offensive to me, but I understand it is part of the course," said Evergreen Community College student Terence Tanching.

Nikos Mourtos is a professor at San Jose State University. He believes teachers should have freedom of academic speech.

"When it comes to ideas I think people should be free to present

ideas, the pros and cons of each idea and let students decide on their own what is right and what is wrong," said Mourtos.

As it stands, June Sheldon, teacher has not sued the district. She may, if the Alliance Defense Fund says they have a good, solid case against the college and the district.

(Copyright ©2008 KGO-TV/DT. All Rights Reserved.)