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BYU Criticized for Putting Professor on Leave

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Gene Kennedy Reporting

A BYU professor's conspiracy theory about 9-11 is generating plenty of talk. But this morning the criticism is aimed not at the

professor, but at Brigham Young University, for putting Dr. Steven Jones on paid leave.

Critics say the issue here is academic freedom.

The American Association of University Professors, or AAUP, believes academic freedom protects the professor's statements outside the classroom. But the major question that remains-- what did he say in the classroom?

Physics Professor Steven Jones says he only offered his 9-11 theory when students asked him about it.

Dr. Jones says evidence at Ground Zero suggests the Twin Towers fell because of pre-set demolition charges, not jetliners hitting them. Jones has written a paper spelling out his theories on why the World Trade Center collapsed.

He's become somewhat of a celebrity in conspiracy theory circles, but some students complained about his comments.

BYU has put him on leave, saying he can do research at the university but cannot teach two classes while his comments are under review.

Carri Jenkins/ BYU Spokesperson/ September 8: "The increasing number of accusations and speculative comments made by Dr. Jones regarding the collapse of the World Trade Center involves a concern that Dr. Jones' work on this topic has not been published in an appropriate scientific venue."

BYU spokeswoman Carri Jenkins recently added, "We do believe professors must speak responsibly. Professors need to clarify when they are speaking for themselves on personal concerns."

What Jones may have said in the classroom and how careful he was about disclaimers are subjects of the review.

Meantime it's not only is the AAUP blasting BYU. So is the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education.

Its president says, "BYU is literally the example we use of a university that does not promise strong free speech or academic freedom protections."

This debate is far from over.

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Randall Jeppeson reporting



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