


Ex-John Jay College Students File Federal Lawsuit Alleging Faculty Sexual Misconduct

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PM

Public allegations of sexual misconduct and illicit drug by a coterie of John Jay College of Criminal Justice faculty that first surfaced in 2018 have become the subject of a federal lawsuit filed by two former students who claim the school failed to properly handle their claims of sexual assault and harassment at the hands of a number of faculty members.

The complaint, filed on behalf of two women, alleged they had been coaxed into participating in what the faculty members called “The Swamp:” an alleged social circle of drug use and sexual misconduct among a clique of professors on campus. According to the complaint, students were introduced to The Swamp by professors who encouraged them to partake in the use and abuse of drugs in a secluded area for faculty while subjecting them to overtly sexist and misogynistic language.

“[T]heir educational environment at John Jay was a cesspool of sexism, misogyny, sexual harassment and illegal drug use fueled by professors who used their positions of trust, seniority and inherent power-imbalance to prey upon female students’ vulnerabilities and manipulate them to satiate their own sexual desires,” the lawsuit claims.

For example, one of the plaintiffs, Claudia Cojocar, stated that she is a survivor of sex trafficking, which began in her native country of Romania. She claimed in her complaint to have been sexually assaulted by a professor shortly after matriculating to John Jay in 2012. Shortly after that incident, she said she sought out academic help from Ric Curtis, a professor who was recognized as a leader in the field of human sex trafficking.

He was also the driving force behind The Swamp, according to the complaint, where Cojocar was allegedly subjected to unwanted and sustained sexual harassment and assault by Curtis and other faculty members.

The other plaintiff, Naomi Haber, claims she, too, was cultivated by the faculty to join The Swamp, where she was routinely subjected verbal and written sexual harassment by Curtis and others. She claimed she was raped on a number of occasions by another faculty member, Anthony Marcus.

Curtis and Marcus are each named defendants in the complaint. Attorneys for both men claimed their clients have already been vindicated.

“Dr. Marcus has already been cleared of these allegations—including the claims of rape and assault—by both the Manhattan DA’s office and John Jay’s Title IX investigation,” Marcus’ counsel, Beranbaum Menken attorney Scott Simpson, said in a statement. “He will continue to vigorously defend himself against these allegations.”

Curtis’ attorney Robert Herbst similarly stated that his client was absolved of the claims brought against him following the school’s own investigation.

“Substantial evidence of fabrication and motive to fabricate on the part of these two women was presented to both the District Attorney and the College’s investigator. This evidence will be front and center as we vigorously defend this lawsuit and clear Prof. Curtis’s name,” said Herbst, who went on to criticize the plaintiffs for not fully participating in the school’s investigative process.

Wigdor LLP partner David Gottlieb, who represents the plaintiffs in the federal suit, dismissed the two professors’ claims of innocence.

“John Jay found numerous allegations of sexual misconduct asserted by our clients against the professors to be substantiated, and John Jay has announced that it intends to terminate them,” Gottlieb said. “This is hardly the first time a sexual assault victim has had to be further victimized by being called a liar—we are confident the evidence will firmly establish their claims as we proceed with litigation and discovery.”

A spokesman for the office of Manhattan DA Cyrus Vance Jr. did not respond to a request for clarity on the claims made by the defendants’ attorneys.

While the school may have taken action recently, both women claim their initial complaints to other faculty and staff at John Jay went nowhere. This includes the college’s dean of undergraduate students, who the pair claimed was aware of the sexual misconduct and drug use but refused to take action.

The pair then filed a Title IX complaint against the school in 2018. They claim the school’s investigation into the allegations were conducted inappropriately and in violation of the City University of New York’s own rules in dealing with such claims.

The school has claimed it has acted appropriately, noting that the faculty members were put on administrative leave after receiving the allegations. The investigation—conducted by an outside firm the plaintiffs claim were conflicted—ultimately led the school to begin the process of terminating the faculty members.

“John Jay will promptly, thoroughly, and fairly investigate any allegations of misconduct and hold accountable anyone—without exception—who is found to violate our policies,” John Jay director of media relations Richard Relkin said in a statement.

