

John Jay College Sued Over 'Swamp' Sex Scandal

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NEW YORK — John Jay College of Criminal Justice botched an investigation into alleged sexual misconduct by four professors, two graduates of the school allege in a lawsuit filed Monday. The complaint in Manhattan federal court is the latest episode in a sex scandal that has roiled the Midtown school, which is part of the public City University of New York system.

The teachers — Ric Curtis, Anthony Marcus, Barry Spunt and Leonardo Dominguez — were part of a debauched group of faculty based in a suite of offices they called "The Swamp" who harassed and assaulted students, says the complaint brought by the graduates, Claudia Cojocar and Naomi Haber. A law firm representing the women, Wigdor LLP, identified them in a press release.

The complaint describes the men's behavior in graphic detail — including Marcus's alleged rapes of Haber in 2015 and 2016. The teachers also bragged about their "sexual conquests" of female students and called students and colleagues "stupid sluts," "idiots" and other profane names, court papers say.

The women allege that John Jay dragged out its investigation into the behavior after they reported it in May 2018 and ignored their concerns about the integrity of the probe.

"John Jay must provide its students and faculty with an environment that is free from any form of sexual violence — period," David E. Gottlieb, a partner at Wigdor LLP, said in a statement. "John Jay has failed in this important obligation and has unfortunately sent a message that it is either unable or unwilling to adequately protect the members of its community."

The professors' alleged abuses, which the New York Post first revealed last fall, reportedly drew the attention of the Manhattan District Attorney's Office and the state's inspector general.

All four professors were put on leave after the school learned of the allegations, and President Karol V. Mason is now seeking to fire three of them based on the evidence that investigators documented, according to a letter Mason sent out last month. The fourth is an adjunct professor who is no longer teaching at the school, the letter says.

The college says it has not seen the new lawsuit, but noted that it notified law-enforcement authorities about the allegations in addition to conducting its own probe.

"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," Richard Relkin, the college's director of media relations, said in an email.

John Jay's investigation involved interviews with more than 60 witnesses and an "extensive number" of emails and documents, Mason's letter says. The Manhattan DA ultimately decided not to bring criminal charges in the case, according to the letter.

The women endured the teachers' alleged abuse for years, according to the complaint. Both faced pressure to have group sex with professors, with Curtis and Dominguez once pushing Cojocarú — a victim of past sex trafficking — to have a threesome with Marcus and Haber, according to the complaint.

The teachers also allegedly got physical with the women when they were their students. Curtis repeatedly touched Cojocarú's breasts, legs and shoulders while she was doing research, the complaint says. And Marcus forcibly raped Haber on two occasions when she was intoxicated in November 2015 and the summer of 2016, according to the complaint.

John Jay hired an outside law firm to investigate the allegations after the women reported them last May. That firm went around the women's attorneys to talk with them personally despite communicating with the professors' lawyers, the complaint says. The firm also did not provide evidence and other materials related to the probe even though the women had a right to review them under CUNY policy, according to the lawsuit.

Cojocarú, Haber and their counsel made formal complaints about the probe to top officials at John Jay, but were told that it was being conducted impartially, the complaint says. The college nevertheless substantiated many of their complaints about the teachers, the suit says.

"Unfortunately, John Jay substantiating many of the allegations brought forth by Ms. Cojocarú and Ms. Haber cannot undo the gross sexual misconduct and assault committed by their own professors and mentors at John Jay, and the painful memories John Jay forced them to relive each and every day throughout the year-long, highly prejudiced investigation conducted by biased and unqualified investigators," the complaint reads.

Lawyers for all four professors reportedly denied the allegations after the New York Post and The New York Times reported on them in September.

"It's a shame how people with hidden agendas and nefarious intentions can manipulate the system and the public in the name of #metoo," Carmen Jack Giordano, a lawyer for Spunt, told the Times then.