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# St. Lawrence University, professor sued in sexual assault case

(<https://www.northcountrypublicradio.com/news/st-lawrence-university-professor-sued-in-sexual-assault-case>)

BY DAVID SOMMERSTEIN (NEWS DIRECTOR) (/NEWS/REPORTERS/2/DAVID-SOMMERSTEIN)

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File photo: St. Lawrence University

Apr 09, 2023 —

An assistant professor at St. Lawrence University is suing a fellow assistant professor, claiming she was drugged and raped at his house. The woman, identified as Jane Doe, is also suing the university, arguing it mishandled her sexual assault investigation.

According to the lawsuit (</assets/files/1%20-%20COMPLAINT%20against%20St.%20Lawrence%20University%20and%20Erne> filed in federal court last week, Jane Doe went to her male colleague's house for what she expected to be dinner and a work session in April 2022. She alleges the assistant professor mixed her a cocktail she believes contained a date-rap drug. After drinking it, she describes being "physically helpless like a rag doll and unable to formulate words." She claims the man then raped her in an upstairs bedroom.

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The lawsuit describes a power dynamic at play in which the male professor had a role in Jane Doe's career advancement, including receiving tenure at St. Lawrence. It says the university encouraged her to collaborate with him as part of the tenure process.

Jane Doe reported the alleged assault through St. Lawrence University's Title IX process. The lawsuit accuses the university of engaging in "victim blame and shame conduct", grilling her for inconsistencies in her story while believing the male professor's account of events. It also claims Jane Doe was not allowed to have a lawyer present when she was questioned despite university policy allowing for that in sexual assault cases.

Jane Doe also reported the incident to the village of Canton police. According to the Watertown Daily Times ([https://www.nny360.com/news/stlawrencecounty/st-lawrence-university-named-in-sexual-assault-lawsuit/article\\_30a8f741-d997-5ca4-9887-c16982b446fb.html](https://www.nny360.com/news/stlawrencecounty/st-lawrence-university-named-in-sexual-assault-lawsuit/article_30a8f741-d997-5ca4-9887-c16982b446fb.html)), the police say the investigation is still ongoing and would not comment.



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A call to the accused professor's lawyer Friday afternoon wasn't returned.

In an email, St. Lawrence University spokesperson Kim Asch said the university has a process for "investigating misconduct allegations and retained an experienced independent investigator." She said the university provided the faculty member support when she made the allegations. She said the university believes there are "substantial defenses" to the lawsuit and will reply in court.

The lawsuit also claims the male professor had sexual harassment complaints filed against him at two previous positions in New Mexico, but says St. Lawrence didn't work hard enough to investigate his background before hiring him in the fall of 2020.

Asch said in the email the university's "rigorous" background check found no prior employment-related misconduct. She said the accused professor has been placed on administrative leave and was removed from campus "within days" of receiving the complaint. **We simply couldn't do this without you.**

The university says he will not be teaching classes in the fall. Our fundraiser has ended and you've helped us raise \$297,486 of our \$305,000 goal! (X)

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After informing the college community of the lawsuit Thursday, University President Kate Morris wrote an email to the campus Friday, acknowledging that students are "angry" and recognized their "depth of concern" about the university's procedure for handling sexual assault and harassment cases.

The university has made counselors available and will be holding a student forum Wednesday evening.

St. Lawrence University recently hired its first full-time Title IX coordinator, Lindsey Cohen. St. Lawrence's response to sexual harassment and assault complaints has been a contentious subject (</news/story/27118/20150107/campus-sexual-assault-in-the-north-country-what-it-s-like-to-be-the-accused>) on its campus for years (</news/story/4222/20040420/slu-students-on-hate-speech-assault>), as it has on many other (</news/story/43716/20210507/at-suny-potsdam-changing-campus-culture-to-change-sexual-violence-response>) North Country campuses.

*DISCLOSURE NOTE: North Country Public Radio is owned by St. Lawrence University. The University had no editorial or other role in this reporting.*

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