

Professor frog-marched off Wits campus

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A Witwatersrand University professor has been 'frog-marched' off the campus following allegations of sexual harassment.



Rupert Taylor, of the political studies department, is the second senior lecturer sent home on special leave after being caught up in the web of allegations of sexual impropriety at the university.

He is accused of making sexual advances to students by means of cellphone SMSes and social networks.

According to reports from the Johannesburg campus, security was called in when Taylor refused to leave the campus last week after being told that he had been put on involuntary special leave.

Taylor could not be reached for comment.

Shirona Patel, Wits's head of communications, confirmed the incident yesterday (21 April).

"The university can confirm that [Taylor] has been put on special leave. Anyone put on special leave is escorted off campus immediately," she said.

"He is the only professor to be put on special leave [with regard to] sexual harassment aside from the case last month."

Tsepo Wa Mamatu, the deputy head of dramatic arts, is the other academic sent on special leave. Female students have accused him of molesting them at rehearsals and auditions.

Vuvuzala reports

Wits campus newspaper Vuvuzela, which exposed the sex scandals, reported last week that security workers were called in after Taylor refused to leave.

Vuvuzela reported that, after being booted off campus, Taylor contacted the newspaper by e-mail and said: "I am deeply upset and concerned about the damaging allegations that have been published against me in Vuvuzela and elsewhere, on and beyond Wits campus.

"I regard these allegations of sexual harassment against me as devoid of any truth and defamatory," he reportedly wrote.

"The false allegations have resulted in very serious damage to my dignity and reputation. I am taking legal advice on my possible recourse in this regard."

Vuvuzela reported last year that a lecturer - who has since alleged to be Taylor - would text sexual advances to female students, asking for sex with "no strings attached".

In one SMS he reportedly said: "Hope you will turn me into your personal slave. Make me serve you and then reward me!"

More allegations

Last month Daryl Glaser, a professor in Taylor's department, penned a letter that was circulated widely and published on PoliticsWeb in which he accused the university's legal office of trying to censor anyone who tried to speak about the sexual harassment allegations.

Glaser wrote: "The Vuvuzela report implicated our head of department; it was also decided that the department would formally ask the person involved - Professor Rupert Taylor - to step down until the investigation could be completed.

"He immediately agreed to this request, and also independently asked the head of the school to conduct an investigation . He has repeatedly denied the reports in Vuvuzela [September 2012] in the strongest possible terms," Glaser said. After the report, Vuvuzela received accusations against two other lecturers.

The Sunday Times reported last month that Wa Mamatu had been accused of sexually assaulting students at rehearsals, auditions and off campus over a period of six years.

In one of several complaints the Sunday Times published, Wa Mamatu was alleged to have told students at a rehearsal to lie down before he switched off the lights. He told them a story with strong sexual overtones and asked them to touch themselves, before kneeling down next to a 21-year-old student, unbuttoning her slacks and touching her intimately.

After the Sunday Times report, Wits appointed law firm Bowman Gilfillan to investigate the claims.

A separate internal campus-wide inquiry, led by the university's Centre for Applied Legal Studies, was also set up.

On Sunday (21 April), Patel said that although only Taylor and Wa Mamatu had been put on special leave others were being investigated.

"There are about four other cases under investigation at this stage . not all are staff," Patel said.

Source: The Times via I-Net Bridge