

## Former UW-P professor files lawsuit

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PLATTEVILLE, Iowa -- A former University of Wisconsin-Platteville professor claims she was discriminated against by school officials and was unfairly fired.

Florence E. Omachonu, who taught at the UW-P School of Education from 2008 to 2014, filed a suit last month against the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents and multiple school officials, including Chancellor Dennis Shields.

According to a petition filed in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin, school officials illegally denied Omachonu tenure and discriminated against her based on her race and national origin. She is seeking reinstatement, back pay and unspecified punitive damages.

The school has not yet filed a reply. Alexander Hummel, associate vice president for communications for the UW system, declined comment.

Omachonu, who is from Nigeria, was hired in December 2008 as an associate professor. According to the petition, Omachonu's initial appointment was contingent on her eventual acquisition of a doctoral degree, which she received in 2012.

According to the petition, former School of Education Director Alison Bunte in 2010 "unfairly" criticized Omachonu based on student evaluation scores. Bunte raised concerns "regarding the clarity of Dr. Omachonu's instruction and assignments, as evidenced by selective student evaluations," Omachonu's attorneys stated in the petition.

Attorneys also claim Bunte unfairly compared Omachonu to faculty members "not similarly situated to her" and assigned Omachonu an "overload of classes."

Omachonu met with Bunte and other administrators in 2010 to address claims of discriminatory treatment. The meeting was unsuccessful, according to the petition.

In 2013, tenured faculty at the school of education unanimously recommended that Omachonu be granted tenure. However, Elizabeth Throop, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Education, asked Shields to deny tenure based on Bunte's evaluation, according to the petition.

Shields "informed Dr. Omachonu that he refused to recommend to the board of regents that the university grant her tenure application on the basis of her teaching skills," according to the petition. She was not retained for the 2014-2015 school year.

Omachonu's attorneys claim that the use of Bunte's evaluation and her firing show "willful discrimination against Dr. Omachonu on the basis of her national origin."

The petition also alleged that the UW-P campus was "riven" with racist acts and hate crimes in 2010. Dozens of racially motivated instances -- including the painting of racial slurs on black students' homes

-- were reported at or near the school that fall.

Tim Hawks, Omachonu's attorney, declined comment.