

UW-P officials deny racial discrimination

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PLATTEVILLE, Wis. -- University of Wisconsin-Platteville officials deny that a former professor was discriminated against and fired based on her race and national origin.

The Wisconsin Attorney General's Office filed a reply last week to a lawsuit filed by former UW-P professor Florence Omachonu in Federal District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin. The attorney general's office is representing Chancellor Dennis Shields, College of Liberal Arts and Education Dean Elizabeth Throop and School of Education Director Alison Bunte in the lawsuit. Omachonu also named the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents as a defendant.

Her suit claims that discrimination based on race and national origin was a factor in university officials denying her tenure in 2013 and firing her in 2014. Omachonu, an African-American born in Nigeria, started as an associate professor at the university in December 2008 and obtained her doctoral degree in 2012.

She claims her tenure was denied based on selectively negative student evaluations in 2010 that were not a fair comparison. The suit says Omachonu met with Bunte and other administration officials over discrimination issues in 2010 but it was not successfully resolved. She also stated Bunte assigned her too many classes and unfairly compared her to other faculty "not similarly situated to her."

In the reply, the attorney general's office denies that any discrimination took place, stating the actions were taken for legitimate business reasons. The defense states that questions were raised among faculty and officials about Omachonu's teaching effectiveness and about student evaluations questioning the clarity of Omachonu's instructions and assignments.

The reply also states that because Shields, Throop and Bunte, as well as the Board of Regents, are state actors they are immune to lawsuits unless the state consents or Congress lifts their immunity. The reply asks that the lawsuit be dismissed.