

Thank you for reading SantaFeNewMexican.com. You're entitled to view 5 articles for free every 30 days, and you currently have 3 remaining. Then, if you enjoy our site and want full access, we'll ask you to purchase an affordable subscription.

3

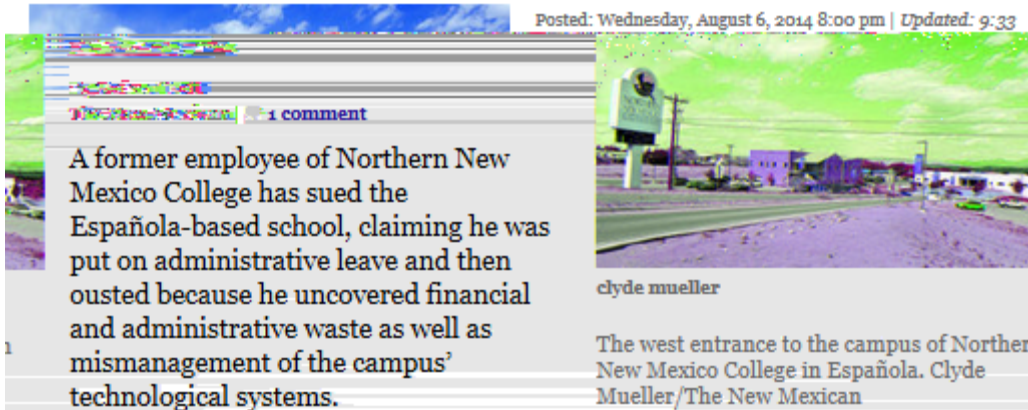
Remaining

# Ex-Northern New Mexico College employee files whistleblower suit

Print  Font Size: 

Recommend 1 Tweet 1 g+1 0 Pin it 0 Share 0

Posted: Wednesday, August 6, 2014 8:00 pm | Updated: 9:33



clyde mueller

The west entrance to the campus of Northern New Mexico College in Española. Clyde Mueller/The New Mexican

Among other charges in the whistleblower complaint filed in state court, the college used federal grants for projects and violated state procurement codes with officials dismissed his reports of at least 10 online porn sites.

Some of the financial concerns also were raised in state audits in 2012 and 2013. The findings from 2012 had been corrected. Other findings, including concerns about internal financial controls, were repeated

District Court, Angelo Jacques alleged some contracts were not approved under grant guidelines. He also claims college officials used one computer being used to access online

Some of the financial concerns also were raised in state audits in 2012 and 2013. The 2013 audit noted that some of the findings from 2012 had been corrected. Other findings, including concerns about internal financial controls, were repeated

Jacques' complaint says despite repeated warnings and reports of violations, the school's executive team ignored or dismissed his claims and eventually told him to stop digging.

Jacques is an Española native who served in the Navy for 20 years before taking the job as director of information technology at Northern in September 2012 for about eight months at \$95,000 a year. He said by phone Wednesday, "They pretty much wanted to silence me — change the subject, not discuss it. 'Don't worry about it, we'll take care of it.'"

Jacques said the college has the right not to renew employees' one-year contracts. But the fact that he was placed on administrative leave with no explanation a week before his contract ran out — and then was escorted out of the building by a security guard — made him feel like "a common criminal."

The complaint says Jacques was placed on administrative leave and then was denied re-employment because of his efforts to warn his employers and others — including state Sen. Richard Martinez, D-Española — about the problems, questions and improprieties.

Ricky Serna, vice president for institutional advancement at the college, said via email Wednesday, "Mr. Jacques was not terminated, his contract was not renewed for legitimate business reasons. We look forward to our day in court and hope that the media takes as much interest in the case as it did with the accusations."

It has been a rough year for the financially challenged college. In April, its governing board cut three programs and a number of staff and faculty positions in order to maintain a \$32 million budget. In May, five of the school's faculty members claimed they were fired in retaliation for speaking out against the school's administration and its handling of both finances and staffing.

One of those five, former assistant professor James Biggs, previously told both the state Higher Education Department and U.S. Department of Education that the school had improperly used grant money to pay his salary.

In the spring, at least 500 critics of the college petitioned the state's Higher Education Department to reject the school's budget and investigate the college, arguing that the institute's leader mismanaged federal funds, raised tuition and cut programs, leading to a decline in enrollment and staffing. At that time, Higher Education Secretary Jose Garcia said it is not within his department's purview to pursue an investigation into the allegations.

Last semester, the college reported it had about 800 full-time students and about 750 part-time students. Serna said Wednesday the college is bracing for an expected enrollment decrease of 5 percent. The board did not raise tuition this year.

In late July, Gov. Susana Martinez and the state Board of Finance, citing concerns over the college's finances, declined to support a proposal from the college to issue up to \$13 million in revenue bonds to build dormitories on the campus in an effort to attract out-of-region and out-of-state students.

Contact Robert Nott at 986-3021 or [rnott@sfnewmexican.com](mailto:rnott@sfnewmexican.com).