



Northwestern University Professor Requests Leave of Absence After Ten Women Sign Open Letter Accusing Him of Sexual Harassment, Abusive Behavior, and Bullying

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A professor at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, Alec Klein, is taking a leave of absence after eight former students and two former employees issued a public letter accusing him of sexual harassment, abusive behavior, and bullying.

The [letter](#) outlines twelve instances of sexual misconduct by Klein including allegedly making sexually graphic remarks, attempting to kiss a prospective employee before hiring her, asking a female employee to come to his hotel room for a drink, and giving unwanted neck massages at work. In addition, the letter also describes Klein as being verbally abusive, repeatedly accusing students of insubordination and reprimanding them "to the point of tears" over minor offenses. According to the letter, Klein talked about his sex life and pressed for intimate details about others, and claimed women are "too emotional" and "immature."

The letter was addressed to Northwestern Dean Bradley Hamm and states: "This is Medill's #MeToo movement. We are writing to tell you that Alec Klein's time is up. His harassing behavior. His predatory behavior. His controlling, discriminatory, emotionally and verbally abusive behavior has to end."

Klein has been employed by Northwestern since 2008 and was named head of the Medill Justice Project in 2011. He responded to the public letter in a [statement](#) denying all allegations and stating that he intends to take legal action. "Many of the allegations involved a disgruntled former employee who had been on a corrective-action plan for poor work performance several years ago," he wrote. "The university conducted an extensive investigation, interviewing current and former employees, former students and others, and reviewing emails, expenses, and other records. The complaint was determined to be completely unfounded. I was cleared of any wrongdoing and the claim was dismissed." Klein further said that "[i]n their anonymous evaluations, my students have overwhelmingly said the class was among the best they have ever taken, and they have specifically noted how much I care for them."

"The University takes seriously all complaints that are brought to its attention," Northwestern said in a statement. "Many of the allegations were contained in a complaint brought several years ago by a former employee. At that time, the University conducted a thorough investigation and the complaint was not substantiated. Northwestern

will now review the allegations received today."

But the women behind the letter are criticizing the school for allegedly failing to appropriately respond to their claims. "Despite numerous allegations, investigations, and complaints — and at least one settlement — Alec Klein is still teaching. He still has tenure. He is still leading the Medill Justice Project, a crown jewel of the institution. Many of us have spoken to Title IX officers. We've spoken to other university officials and still, nothing happens." They continued, "[h]e is a liability and a predator among your faculty. Yet his actions have gone unchecked for years, further traumatizing more and more women. Medill has not only let us down — but it has also failed to protect us." Students have come forward to describe a "whisper network" that prompted them to avoid working with Klein. They claim that Klein's actions are an "open secret at Northwestern University to the point that many students have boycotted his class."

In the letter's closing statement the authors asked for the University to take action regarding the allegations. "We are not seeking to merely reprimand Alec Klein," the letter reads. "We are demanding accountability for his dangerous behavior. He is a liability and a predator among your faculty. Yet his actions have gone unchecked for years, further traumatizing more and more women. Medill has not only let us down — but it has also failed to protect us."

This latest situation at Northwestern comes at a time when many colleges and universities have been accused of mishandling complaints of sexual misconduct. In the wake of the current increase in lawsuits brought by both complainants and accused individuals, institutions are advised to review their sexual misconduct policies and update them if necessary to ensure compliance. We encourage institutions to provide regular training to students, educators and all members of the school community on how to properly recognize, prevent and respond to allegations of sexual misconduct. Employees that are involved in implementing an institution's grievance procedures must have training on how to conduct a prompt, thorough and equitable investigation.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding education or employment related issues, please contact Hayley B. Dryer at HDryer@cullenanddykman.com or at 516-357-3745.

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