

Fort Valley State U. Reaches Settlement With Former Student-Newspaper Adviser

By ALEX P. KELLOGG

The University System of Georgia and Fort Valley State University have agreed to pay a former professor and student-newspaper adviser \$192,000 to settle a lawsuit he filed alleging racial, religious, and sex discrimination.

In his lawsuit, which named the state of Georgia, its Board of Regents, Fort Valley State, and several of its administrators as defendants, John F. Schmitt claimed that he was fired for allowing articles critical of the administration to be published in the student newspaper, The Peachite. He also claimed that he was fired because he was a white employee at a majority black institution, and that a former black administrator at Fort Valley State, Josephine Davis, had accused him of being "part of a conspiracy of white, Jewish men out to get her."

Mr. Schmitt, who is now an assistant professor at Southwest Texas State University, was adviser to the student staff of The Peachite during his tenure at Fort Valley State from August 1997 to June 1998.

The \$192,000 agreement, which was reached last month, denied any wrongdoing on the part of the university and stipulated, among other things, that Mr. Schmitt can never again apply for employment at any institution in Georgia's university system. The agreement also included a new set of guidelines protecting free speech at The Peachite. The policy outlines provisions guaranteeing the job security of the paper's adviser as well.

Among the articles that Mr. Schmitt said the administration complained about were a column criticizing the university's former president, Oscar Prater, for not spending enough time with students, and a series of articles that accused Ms. Davis of mismanaging funds during her tenure as president of York College of the City University of New York.

Ms. Davis, who was the vice president for academic affairs when Mr. Schmitt's contract was not renewed and is now a professor of mathematics, denied that race had played any part in the decision not to renew Mr. Schmitt's contract. She said that the accusations

against her that he had allowed the student paper to publish were completely inaccurate.

"The dismissal was about Mr. Schmitt and his job performance, and I think the settlement speaks for itself in that regard," she said in an interview. She described his charge that she was behind the decision, or that she had called him "part of a conspiracy of white, Jewish men out to get her" as "ridiculous sensationalism."

In an interview on Wednesday, Mr. Schmitt said that he was happy with the settlement, in particular with the new guidelines for the student paper. "That was a condition from day one" of negotiations with the university, he said.

A spokeswoman for the university system said that Fort Valley State must contribute \$75,000 to the settlement, with the additional \$117,000 coming from the Georgia Department of Administrative Services, the insurer for state agencies.

Mr. Schmitt said he will receive \$75,000 from the settlement, with the rest going to cover his legal fees.

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