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GU Professor On Leave Since 2023 for Sexual Harassment, Inappropriate Conduct Allegations

The professor was previously placed on leave in 2013 after facing sexual harassment allegations, returning to campus once he completed training and agreed to conditions on interactions with students.

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Content Warning: This article references alleged sexual misconduct. Please refer to the end of the article for on- and off-campus resources.



Matthew Gassoso/The Hoya

Georgetown University administrators placed physics professor David Egolf on paid leave in July 2023 after a student accused him of grooming.

In July 2023, Georgetown University physics professor David Egolf was accused of an inappropriate relationship with his student. After the student accused Egolf of grooming, the university placed Egolf on paid leave, though he remains listed as an associate professor.

Three years later, Egolf is in a legal battle with Georgetown over whether he was wrongfully barred from campus and if the university's investigation was improper. The university revealed in a countersuit that the 2023 accusations came 10 years after a student alleged sexual misconduct against Egolf in September 2013.

After the 2013 allegations, Egolf signed an agreement in October 2015 that required him to receive training and a psychological evaluation, according to university-filed court documents. Before returning to teaching, he also agreed to restrictions on interactions with students.

Then, with the 2023 allegations, university-hired independent investigators concluded that Egolf violated the 2015 agreement, as well as the university's sexual harassment policy and the Faculty Handbook.

The Hoya reviewed nearly 250 pages of legal arguments and internal university investigations made public through court filings.

Egolf filed suit against the university on Sept. 26, 2025, alleging Georgetown and four university officials interfered with his financial situation and contractual relations, as well as engaged in civil conspiracy against him.

In its response to Egolf's suit, the university filed a countersuit, which a judge is currently evaluating before the case can proceed.

Georgetown's countersuit states that Egolf violated the 2015 agreement and did not maintain an appropriate relationship with the student, breaching the restrictions imposed on him. In addition to violating the university's sexual harassment policy, the response accuses Egolf of unprofessional conduct including frequent one-on-one social meetings outside of an academic context and non-academic communication.

A university spokesperson confirmed Egolf is currently on leave but declined to comment further. The university's attorney, Henry Platt, also declined to comment.

Egolf's lawyer, Micah Salb, verified Egolf is on paid leave and said the university's investigation of the incident involving the student, referred to by the pseudonym Robert Roe in the lawsuit, is invalid.

"When the university received a complaint from Mr. Roe, it had allegations which did not demonstrate misconduct," Salb told The Hoya. "Nevertheless, they immediately embarked on a full-scale investigation, and the way the investigation was conducted seems to me to be more akin to a witch hunt than to a genuine effort to determine what actually happened and whether there was actually misconduct."

University Investigations

Interim University President Robert M. Groves, who served as provost at the time, informed Egolf in an October 2024 letter that he was planning to revoke Egolf's tenure and fire him. Still, Groves first wanted the Faculty Responsibilities Committee (FRC), a faculty body that handles disputes between the university and faculty members, to evaluate the case.

In accordance with the Faculty Handbook, Groves asserted that he reserved the right to make the final decision, and that his determination that Egolf breached the 2015 agreement was final. According to Salb, as of March 12, the FRC has not issued its final recommendations regarding appropriate disciplinary action for Egolf's misconduct.

Salb said he expects the FRC to decide on Egolf's case within about two weeks.

The 2015 agreement resulted from 2013 sexual harassment allegations. In 2013, an undergraduate student filed an internal complaint with the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Affirmative Action (IDEAA) accusing Egolf of sexual harassment after the pair lived together for a 10-week period over the summer conducting research. Egolf was also accused of providing alcohol to the student and his roommate, both of whom were under the legal drinking age.

After IDEAA found Egolf violated the university's Policy on Sexual Harassment and Retaliation in its 2014 report, Groves, as provost, found cause for revoking Egolf's tenure and terminating his position. Egolf filed an appeal with the Faculty Grievance Committee, which hears complaints from faculty against the university or university community members, arguing the investigation was flawed and that IDEAA's conclusions lacked support.

Complying with the Faculty Grievance Procedures, the university and Egolf entered into a confidential conciliation process, reaching an agreement that allowed for Egolf's reinstatement. Egolf returned to teaching under specific conditions, including that he would avoid one-on-one meetings with students in private or residential spaces, maintain a "professional" relationship with students and refrain from sexual comments and advances. Egolf was also required to complete training on student-faculty relationships, professionalism and harassment before undergoing evaluation by a forensic psychologist.

Egolf's teaching primarily involved individual work with physics students on independent research, as well as lab rotations, according to an internal university platform.

According to court documents, the student who filed allegations in 2023 enrolled in independent research courses with Egolf during the 2022-23 academic year. The student also won a scholarship to work with Egolf as a postbaccalaureate.

Charol Shakeshaft — a researcher specializing in sexual abuse in educational institutions and the former chair of the educational leadership department at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) — said university administrators should give increased attention to faculty members with previous allegations against them.

“If, as an administrator, someone who reports to me has had those accusations, I would then make sure that I supervise that person very carefully,” Shakeshaft told The Hoya.

“That’s my job, is to help you make sure that you don’t cross any boundaries,” Shakeshaft added.

Investigators found Egolf to have violated the Policy on Sexual Misconduct and also engaged in professional misconduct applicable under the Faculty Handbook. Additionally, investigators found that Egolf violated several provisions of the 2015 agreement.

The court documents detail Egolf’s admission to texting the student regularly, exchanging thousands of messages. Egolf also admitted that the student told him about ongoing mental health challenges, including generalized anxiety disorder and “blackouts.”

According to the IDEAA report, Egolf paid for meals and tickets to movie theaters and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts for the student. Investigators also found that Egolf arbitrarily raised the student’s grades and drafted, or helped draft, the student’s thesis and post-bac application — claims Egolf denied.

Salb said throughout Egolf’s years teaching, he commonly brought students, mostly in groups but sometimes individually, to a local pizzeria and paid for meals after office hours or class.

The student alleged Egolf used “sexual innuendo or references” while he was still an undergraduate, which Egolf promised to elaborate on after the student’s graduation. Investigators found that Egolf “removed all prior boundaries” after graduation despite the student’s status as a mentee and post-bac researcher.

Alleged Misconduct

Many allegations revolve around a “graduation celebration,” in which the student privately spent a night at Egolf’s home, and the university’s investigation found that Egolf engaged in “sex-related teasing in the context of private, alcohol-fueled interactions.” Georgetown’s counterclaim said that in his IDEAA report appeal regarding the night, Egolf did not dispute that he changed his shirt in front of the student, referred to as Witness 1, and that the pair consumed approximately three and a half bottles of champagne.

“The graduation celebration was a culmination of more than a year of interactions and conduct whereby Prof. Egolf sought and encouraged an increasingly personal relationship with Witness 1,” investigators wrote. “The undisputed evidence reflects that Prof. Egolf hinted at and appeared excited about engaging in a night of drinking and sharing inappropriate stories of a sexual nature with his then supervisee.”

While investigators did not find that Egolf made explicitly sexual comments while the student was an undergraduate, they noted he made overtly sexual remarks after his graduation.

Egolf made innuendos and alluded to sharing sexual stories while the student was an undergraduate, which investigators found that “he immediately did during the graduation celebration” by mentioning stories of students propositioning him for sex and several incidents where Egolf found a former student — who stayed at Egolf’s home twice after drinking heavily — “naked, with an erection on his couch.”

Egolf did not dispute that, in conversations during the graduation celebration, he discussed how nakedness was viewed by students, using examples of students showering together and saying seeing naked men would not bother him. Egolf also made a joke about genitalia in the conversation, making racial comparisons.

During the same night, when playing a drinking game that involved taping bottles of alcohol to both hands, the student alleged Egolf “offered to assist him with removing his pants to use the restroom.” Egolf also reportedly told the student he had “seen everything” in reference to naked men, though Egolf denied this allegation. The student also claimed Egolf used the restroom with the door open and encouraged the student to do the same, though Egolf said he left the door open because he was having a conversation with the student.

Additionally, in a letter from IDEAA to Egolf informing him of their investigation, the 2023 student — referred to as Witness 1 — alleged that Egolf discussed the student from the 2013 incident — referred to as Witness 3 — in conversations.

“Professor Egolf presented a ‘hypothetical’ where he told Witness 1 that he was previously accused of ‘having feelings’ for a student, Witness 3,” the letter reads. “He advised Witness 1 that as a result of Witness 3’s claims, he was required to remain off campus for two years.”

“After telling a story referencing male genitalia, Professor Egolf offered, unprompted, that he was not gay; Professor Egolf also referenced not being gay when he described the allegations involving Witness 3, detailed above,” the letter also reads.

Salb, Egolf’s lawyer, said conduct must impede a student’s “ability to take advantage” of educational opportunities to be considered sexual harassment, arguing Egolf’s behavior was not constant or pervasive.

“If a faculty member makes a passing reference to something that touches on sex or sexuality, gender or other topics, it’s completely appropriate and acceptable unless it meets that sufficiently severe or pervasive standard,” Salb said.

“By and large, those allegations refer to conduct that’s not even remotely sexual, or to the extent that there is anything that’s remotely sexual in them, certainly falls far from this standard of sufficiency,” Salb added.

Salb claimed that the student did not report Egolf inappropriately touching him or propositioning him. The IDEAA investigation found no evidence that Egolf propositioned the student or “made overt sexual comments” toward the student while he was an undergraduate.

University Policy

Salb said that the Faculty Handbook is not explicit in what conduct is considered “professional” and that IDEAA’s initial letter informing Egolf of the investigation was vague in its accusations. According to the experts The Hoya spoke with, vague policies on non-sexual misconduct that blurs faculty-student boundaries are common across U.S. higher education institutions.

Georgetown’s current Policy on Sexual Misconduct defines “sexual misconduct” as an umbrella term that can include sexual harrassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking. Sexual harassment is conduct of a sexual nature, including sexual advances, requests for sex or verbal or physical comment.

“A hostile or offensive environment exists when conduct is severe or pervasive,” interpretive guidance for the policy in the Faculty Handbook states.

The Faculty Handbook explicitly prohibits sexual advances in relationships with active power imbalances, such as between students and their current professors. It also requires professionalism by faculty members and protects community members from “arbitrary or capricious action on the part of any such persons.”

Salb said Egolf could not have groomed the student because he was capable of consenting to interactions with Egolf.

“While the student had some mental health challenges, there’s no indication that his challenges impacted his ability to consent or to understand what’s happening or anything like that,” Salb said. “The investigators in their report concluded that students cannot consent because of the power differential between them. They made that broad statement, and they did no inquiry into whether, in fact, students — this particular student, especially — could consent or decline to consent.”

Anna Bull, a professor at the University of York in the United Kingdom who researches professional boundaries and sexual misconduct in higher education, said that in relationships with a power imbalance, such as professor-student relationships, consent is not the only important factor.

“Age isn’t the most relevant category here, being a student — being a position of less power in the institution — that’s the most relevant category,” Bull told The Hoya. “Even mature students can get groomed. Even students who are in their 20s, 30s, 40s, can still get groomed because it’s the power imbalance.”

“A discriminatory environment can be created regardless of whether somebody is consenting or not,” Bull added. “So it’s up to the person with more power, the professional in the situation, to uphold the boundaries.”

Bull added that students often do not realize when boundaries are being crossed.

“Of course the student wants to get the support from their professor — is probably enjoying the attention — because this is somebody who they probably admire, want to learn from,” Bull said. “But by the time the student starts realizing, ‘Oh my god, this doesn’t feel right,’ by that point, they feel complicit in what’s going on.”

Salb said “professionalism” in a university setting is dependent on how a faculty member personally chooses to teach and mentor students, and does not necessarily require formality or distance.

“Faculty actually are permitted to teach however they like, and if the university is right that acting professionally according to Georgetown policy means acting in this sort of staid way, then that would directly infringe on the faculty’s academic freedom,” Salb said. “The way Professor Egolf teaches is a reflection of the freedom that he has to teach in a way that’s most appropriate and most effective, that he believes to be most appropriate.”

Shakeshaft, the VCU professor, said universities should develop more specific policies for both faculty and students to reference when evaluating professional boundaries.

“I think that universities should be more explicit, not only with their faculty, but also with students, so that people understand what is and is not expected,” Shakeshaft said.

Three years after the second proceedings against Egolf began, he remains listed as teaching multiple courses in Georgetown’s official schedule of classes. According to an internal university platform, no students have been enrolled in his classes since Spring 2023.

Resources: On-campus resources include Health Education Services (202-687-8949) and Counseling and Psychiatric Services (202-687-6985); additional off-campus resources include the D.C. Victim Hotline (844-443-5732).

Cliff Stern contributed to reporting.