

In short, I relocated 1,100 miles for what I thought would be a dream opportunity at a reputable university. I quickly discovered that the small program I was in had been led by a recently departed program director who was abusive toward the remaining faculty member while the dean disregarded her requests for help. This dean retired at the request of the university shortly before my arrival, but she came back to the school as an instructor. The recently departed program director left because her pupils had finally turned her in to student services, so her poor behavior could no longer be ignored; she was demoted, and she responded by finding work at another academic institution. However, she retained a small adjunct position at another school within the university and continues to be on the university's payroll to this day despite her history within the university itself.

In the meantime, the abused faculty member became the new program director. She was as abusive to me as her predecessor had been to her. The new dean recognized there was a problem but never gave the matter any time. I felt safe discussing the abuse with my department chair, who was about to retire. She began to prep her replacement and disclosed some information about the faculty problems within my program. But then the new dean suddenly departed as the department chair retired, and the woman who was supposed to have replaced the department chair was kept in her existing position.

An interim dean and a new department chair were appointed, but the new department chair didn't have any information about abuse within my program. Back to square one. In the meantime, I had become numb to my own potential for power and continued to suffer through the psychological maneuvers of the program director, ready to abandon my career. I departed from the university after only two years. That was the summer of 2020. I've never checked my online reviews from students; I just don't want to know what they say. It is now the spring of 2023, and I've opened a private practice so I will never have to endure workplace bullying again. Since I left the university, I had to eat through my savings account while building my business--savings that were supposed to have been for the down payment on a house.

I am a mental health professional and have the language to describe and the knowledge to understand what I went through as I look back at it, but that is irrelevant in the face of the need for recuperation and repair. I try not to think about what this experience has cost me financially, and I wonder how the original dean can continue to be allowed to profit from her negligence. I also wonder how the two program directors can continue to be allowed to profit from their abusiveness. IF THE UNIVERSITY HAD NOT TOLERATED ABUSE TO START WITH, MY DREAM OPPORTUNITY MIGHT ACTUALLY HAVE BEEN A DREAM INSTEAD OF A NIGHTMARE.

I have not gone into details about the abuse here, but it's clear from the way I framed my story that the university's administrative disorganization did not and does not prioritize the communicating of information about abuse. I requested exit interviews when I left, and although the cast of characters finally seemed to be sympathetic, I was asked inappropriate questions such as "Did you ever tell her to stop?", which is a form of victim-blaming and highlights ignorance about the subtleties of relational abuse. I was also told that perhaps I could have asked "better questions" in my interview for employment at the university, as if somehow I was responsible for the abuse because I didn't think to inquire about the school's stance on gaslighting, hoarding power, setting others up to fail, and belittling colleagues in front of an audience.