



NEWS RELEASE

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Former Portland State University Vice Provost Dr. Douglas Samuels receives \$795,000 discrimination lawsuit settlement

PORTLAND, Ore. — Portland State University's former vice provost of student affairs, Dr. Douglas Samuels, received a \$795,000 settlement from the school, concluding a four-year legal battle alleging racial discrimination. He filed suit against the institution in U.S. District Court in 2005, charging that the university violated his civil rights when it demoted him to a teaching post.

Dr. Samuels stated that he was subject to inequitable treatment in terms of pay, committee assignments and job responsibilities during his four-year tenure.

"I hope this settlement will be a healing milestone for both Portland State and my family," said Dr. Samuels, who lives in Southwest Washington with his wife and their three children. "This has been a significant professional and financial hardship, and I'm looking forward to resuming my career working with university students."

In 2001, Portland State University hired Dr. Samuels as vice provost of student affairs after a nationwide search. His responsibilities as vice provost were vast, including admissions, records, registration, financial aid, educational opportunity programs (federally funded initiatives), student academic advising and support services, career services, student activities and leadership programs, student health and counseling center, dean of students office, orientation, graduation ceremonies, campuswide judicial system, community college and transfer initiatives, and student organizations. He reported directly to the vice president and provost for academic affairs. Previously, Dr. Samuels had been associate dean of student affairs and diversity at Vermont Law School.

Shortly before Dr. Samuels was hired, former Portland State President Daniel O. Bernstine commissioned a Campus Climate Study to, in part, address the university's lack of diversity. When Dr. Samuels arrived, there were no persons of color in senior administrative positions other than the President and the dean of social work at Portland State.

"Portland State had a reputation as a very hostile working environment for faculty and staff of color," said Attorney Glen McClendon, partner with Lindsay, Hart, Neil & Weigler, LLP, who serves as legal counsel for Dr. Samuels. "Given the highly unusual treatment he endured during his tenure, he had no choice but to follow through with this complaint."

(more)

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According to Dr. Samuels, almost immediately after being hired, he encountered difficulties administering his department and implementing the changes mandated by the Campus Climate Study. After stripping him of his administrative post in Fall 2005, and demoting him to professor in the Black Studies Department, he resigned from his faculty position.

Still, Dr. Samuels remains proud of his achievements at Portland State. Under his leadership:

- Portland State’s enrollment nearly doubled and the university became Oregon’s largest. “We revamped enrollment and increased student retention,” Dr. Samuels said. “A key to that effort was the articulation agreements we developed with area community colleges (Portland, Clackamas, Mt. Hood and Clark) to easily transfer classes and credits.”
- Dr. Samuels helped establish Portland State’s Multi-Cultural Center, and guided the development of a new housing residential life program, featuring a \$44 million, eco-friendly housing complex in downtown Portland.
- Dr. Samuels also helped launch the Native American Student and Community Center, which is an on-campus facility where Native American, Alaskan Native and Pacific Island students find academic and social support.
- He also managed a budgetary crisis. In first six month as vice provost, Dr. Samuels was told to cut \$400,000 from the department’s budget out of an \$11 million budget. “Instead I increased our revenues by \$350,000 and didn’t have to lay off any staff in a department of 400 employees.”

Since his departure, Dr. Samuels has been involved in consulting, community activities and as a caregiver for his mother. With the lawsuit behind him, Dr. Samuels continues to seek an administrative or teaching position in higher education.

“Finding a new position has been difficult with this litigation pending,” Dr. Samuels said. “I’m hopeful that this is a significant step in clearing my reputation and in getting back to work.”

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