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William and Mary president resigns

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Gene Nichol, the former president of William & Mary, resigned yesterday amid much controversy in Williamsburg.

Since taking over the position in July 2005, Nichol has enacted several policies that have had a positive reception from The College of William & Mary, but a controversial reaction from the school's Board of Visitors and the Virginia House of Delegates.

In a statement to the school announcing his resignation, Nichol claimed four incidents that occurred during his tenure as college president have directly resulted in "a committed, relentless, frequently untruthful and vicious campaign — on the Internet and in the press" being waged against him and his family.

The incidents include Nichol's "altering the way a Christian cross was displayed" on a public building that was used for college events both religious and secular, to make religious minorities feel more comfortable and included on campus.

Nichols also refused to ban a speaker series program that was both governed by students and paid for by student fees, who some had found offensive or unappealing, at the risk of violating student's First Amendment rights.

He has also enacted programs to help increase financial aid for potential students with the strongest financial need, as well as boosted the diversity at William & Mary since his stint as president began. According to Nichol's statement, the last two incoming classes at the college have been the most diverse in the school's history.

Over the past two years, the school has also doubled its number of minority faculty members at the same time integrating more minorities into the administrative leadership of the college.

As a result of those actions, Nichols claimed in his statement that that the Privileges and Elections Committee of the Virginia House of Delegates "effectively threaten(ed) Board appointees if I were not fired over decisions concerning the Wren Cross and Sex Worker's Art Show."

Nichol was informed by the school's rector on Sunday, Feb. 10 that his contract as school president would not be renewed in July, and he elected not to finish out his tenure.

The reaction on campus has been largely one of shock and disappointment, and has created discontent among students toward the William & Mary administration.

"The resignation of President Nichol in the wake of his non-renewal has blindsided the Tribe community," said Bailey Thomson, a William & Mary sophomore and leader of the Pro-Nichol movement on campus, in a statement.

"The students are outraged and upset at the Board of Visitors' actions, which are seemingly inattentive to student and faculty concerns and almost singularly reliant on donor relations. The gap between decision-makers and students appears to be wider than ever before."

Students at the college planned to gather last night in front of Nichol's home to sing the school's Alma Mater and deliver "thank you" cards to the former president.

However, according to a press release sent on behalf of Virginia Delegate Bob Marshall, the decision not to renew Nichol's contract as president of William & Mary was based off of a discovery that Nichol had allegedly withheld information regarding a withdrawn \$12 million dollar donor pledge by James McGlothlin, despite Marshall's Freedom of Information Act request.

According to a letter that Marshall sent to Michael Powell, the Rector of The College of William & Mary, and the Board of Visitors yesterday, Marshall made the FOIA request on March 22, 2007, asking for any information about alumni suspending or withdrawing financial pledges to William & Mary. He claims that he was given information in response to his request, but nothing about the retracted donation in question.

Marshall claims in the letter that during a lunch with Nichol in early 2007, Nichol denied knowing anything about McGlothlin's withdrawn pledge until late Feb. 2007.

However, in his letter addressed to Powell, Marshall claims knowledge of an e-mail that "clearly shows that former President Nichol knew that this pledge was being withdrawn in December 2006."

The e-mail from Dec. 2006 was unavailable.

In response to what he believes was the intentional withholding of information by Nichol, Marshall requested a copy of Nichol's contract from Powell to review.

He stated in his letter to Powell, "I would suggest that this intentional and calculated misrepresentation of the truth constitutes failure of duty and gross malfeasance in office which are grounds for his complete termination from The College of William & Mary."

Currently, Nichol has plans to remain at the school as a faculty member in the school of law.

"President Gene Nichol's tenure, though apparently controversial, has been a resounding success," Thomson wrote in the statement. "Nichol has brought W&M to the world's doorstep."