

Prior to fall 2018, I could not have imagined resigning from my position at UW-Eau Claire. Yes, there were stressors and yes, there were things about my job I didn't enjoy. We were working long hours making decisions for the merger with UW-Barron County and pushing to solidify our incoming class. The university was still dealing with years of budget cuts, consolidating departments, construction projects, and low morale. But we were excited about the new Vice Chancellor of Enrollment who was about to start. He was going to provide the leadership and advocacy that was needed for recruitment and retention, and we were ready to partner with him.

Early in that fall, Vice Chancellor Colom met one-on-one with his direct reports. Heather Kretz, as Director of Admissions, was one of those individuals. Her meeting was at the end of the day, and she returned to the office as I was about to leave. When I saw the look on her face, I followed her into her office and closed the door. She expressed shock and alarm at this first meeting with her new boss. As opposed to a general "get to know you", which had been the case with his other direct reports, Heather shared that he immediately questioned her qualifications to be a Director of Admissions. She shared other negative comments he made and harsh language he used. It was clear to both of us that this was not a normal first meeting between a Vice Chancellor and one of his directors.

As the semester progressed, things became worse. As a member of the Admissions senior staff, Heather shared a lot of information with me regarding her interactions with Mr. Colom. It was easy to recognize that his behavior was unacceptable and probably actionable. I encouraged her to document their conversations, talk to HR, insist that another person be present in their meetings – anything to call attention to his behavior and protect her. Heather was determined that her competency, professionalism, and reputation would prevail and Mr. Colom would start to see her as a partner to accomplish his goals. That did not happen.

Within weeks, Heather shared that Mr. Colom informed her she should start looking for another job. He did not see her as his Director of Admissions. When it got to this point, I knew I had to do something to better understand what was happening. Through a little networking, I connected with an individual who had worked with Mr. Colom at the University of North Florida. This individual shared their story of watching Mr. Colom fire or drive out good, hard-working people. This individual also reached out to others who shared their stories. As I read them I came to understand that what was happening at UW-Eau Claire was not unique, it was a pattern of behavior that had happened at Mr. Colom's past institutions. It wasn't one person, it was countless individuals across departments. These were not low-performing individuals – they were rising professionals who were passionate about education and loved their jobs. Many of them left higher education after what they experienced. For some, it was still too traumatic to write about. I wondered how this could not have come out during the search process. After all, the university paid a lot of money to hire a search firm.

Surely if our Chancellor had known about this, he would not have hired Mr. Colom. And, if it was brought to his attention now, he would find it unacceptable, right?

I decided to submit my letter of resignation after Heather Kretz met with the Chancellor in early January 2019. As campus saw and heard in the weeks that followed, the Chancellor supports Mr. Colom and believes he will solve the enrollment challenges the university is facing. My resignation was driven by the following:

1. I will not work for a Vice Chancellor who treats people the way he treated Heather and so many others. This is not an individual I can respect, and I will not give him any credibility by remaining on his team.
2. Based on stories shared by people from his previous institution, there is a good chance I would encounter the same type of treatment as Heather eventually. It appears Mr. Colom struggles with strong leaders who express opinions and challenge him.
3. Based on stories shared by people from his previous institution, his behavior likely will not stop with Heather or the Admissions Office. The Division of Enrollment Management includes many departments including ARCC, Blugold Central, Housing, and Athletics. I cannot watch other colleagues be treated the same way. Individuals have already spoken with me regarding treatment from Mr. Colom that concerns them.
4. Doing my job with ethics and integrity is a non-negotiable. Changes either being proposed or being implemented lead me to believe the way the university recruits and admits students will be much different than what was done under Heather's leadership and the leadership of past Admissions directors.

I left the university after 18 years of service. This decision was not made lightly. I realized I was potentially changing my timeline for retirement, especially in regards to contributing to my state pension and my 403b. I knew that my next job might be at a lower salary and might not be in Eau Claire. Even with these factors taken into consideration, I do not regret the decision. It was the right decision for me.