

2 former students sue NCC

Alleges 4 officials retaliated against their criticisms

BY MAURA MCDERMOTT
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Two former Nassau Community College student leaders have sued the college and top administrators, accusing the school of discriminating against them and violating their free speech and due process rights.

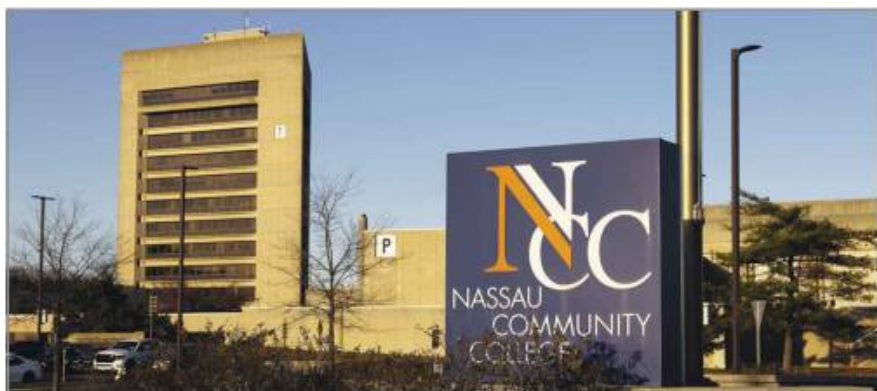
The two students — Grant Peterson, of Roslyn Heights, and Jordan Groom, of Glen Cove — said in their lawsuit that college officials threatened, bullied and disparaged them in retaliation for their criticism of the college. The lawsuit, filed in November in federal court in the Eastern District, alleges that college officials also discriminated against the two plaintiffs and encouraged other students to “engage in differential treatment” of them.

Peterson has an unspecified disability and Groom is a member of the LGBTQ+ community, the lawsuit states.

Lawsuit names 4 officials

The lawsuit names Maria Conzatti, who leads the college as chief administrative officer, along with three other college officials: David Oyero, dean of students; Charmian Smith, vice president for academic student services; and Craig Wright, acting associate vice president for civil rights and belonging and Title IX coordinator.

The college “will not comment on ongoing litigation, especially one that involves a student matter,” said Jerry Kornbluth, the college’s vice president for community and gov-



The two former students said in their lawsuit that they were threatened, bullied and disparaged.

ernmental relations. “The lawsuit has been referred to the county’s attorney’s office to respond to the complaint.”

The Nassau County attorney’s office did not respond to a request for comment.

Peterson and Groom were student leaders who “actively and publicly criticized” the college and its policies, the suit states.

In the 2024-25 academic year, Peterson was student chair of the academic senate and Groom was the student trustee on the college’s board of trustees, according to court documents.

Peterson, 21, is now studying history at the University at Buffalo. He said in an interview that he urged the school to invest more in its honors program and student clubs, and he and Groom also raised issues such as maintenance and cleanliness of the college and low participation in student government elections.

“I felt like there was an opportunity for me as a student leader to advocate on behalf of the student body,” Peterson said.

Peterson said he believes the college retaliated against him and Groom because of their ad-

vocacy. “Being in opposition to the whims of the college administration means that they can censor and censure you with impunity,” he said.

Groom, 29, is now an art history and criticism student at Stony Brook University. He said college officials used “intimidation tactics” in response to his and Peterson’s push for better conditions at the college.

Suit: ‘Threatened’ by remark

In September 2024, the lawsuit alleges, Oyero told Peterson and other members of the student government that if they continued to make comments about student government elections, they could “land the group in serious, potentially legal or disciplinary trouble.”

Soon after, Peterson told Conzatti and Smith that he felt “threatened” by the remark, according to the lawsuit. In October 2024, other student government members told Peterson that college officials told them to “engage in differential treatment” of him, the lawsuit states.

In November 2024, Peterson filed a discrimination com-

plaint against Conzatti, Oyero and three other college officials. Soon after, Wright met with Groom and probed for information about Peterson, but Groom “declined to make any disparaging comments” about Peterson, the lawsuit states.

In January 2025, the college dismissed Peterson’s complaint and reached a disciplinary determination against the two students without giving them copies of the disciplinary documents or the ability to appeal, the lawsuit states.

As a result of the disciplinary determination, the college removed Peterson from student government and revoked his student government tuition stipend, and it required Groom to attend sensitivity training, according to the lawsuit.

Peterson and Groom are seeking a jury trial and unspecified damages.

Maria Fischer, an attorney with Manhattan-based Anderson Law, whose lead litigation attorney Gregory Byrnes is representing the two former students, declined to comment on the lawsuit.

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THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1791 The Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution, went into effect.
1890 Hunkpapa Lakota Chief Sitting Bull and 11 other tribe members were killed in Grand River, South Dakota, during a confrontation with Indian agency police.

1939 The Civil War motion picture epic “Gone with the Wind,” starring Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable, had its world premiere in Atlanta.

1944 A single-engine plane carrying band leader Glenn Miller, a major in the U.S. Army Air Forces, disappeared over the English Channel while en route to Paris during World War II.

2016 A federal jury in Charleston, South Carolina, convicted Dylann Roof of the racist killings of nine Black church members during their Bible study gathering. The following year, he would become the first person in the United States sentenced to death for a federal hate crime, a sentence upheld in 2021.

Police: Two killed in two separate Nassau crashes

BY TRACY TULLIS
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Two people were killed in single-car crashes early Sunday morning, one in North Valley Stream and the other in Massapequa, according to police.

A 20-year-old driving a BMW on Merrick Road in Massapequa lost control of the car just after 3 a.m., according to Nassau County police. The car

hit a tree near Cedar Shore Drive. The driver, the only occupant of the vehicle, was taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead, authorities said.

The second person was killed in a crash on the Southern State Parkway, according to New York State Police.

The crash occurred about 4 a.m. near Exit 13 in North Valley Stream. State troopers arrived to find a Hyundai Sonata

on the right shoulder that had hit a tree, officials said.

“Deodat J. Ramotar, age 35 of Jamaica, Queens and the front seat passenger were uninjured,” state police said in a statement.

“Two of the three rear seat passengers were transported to Jamaica Hospital to be treated for their injuries. One of the rear seat passengers succumbed to their injuries at scene.”

Ramotar had been traveling

“at a speed too fast for conditions and was intoxicated,” the statement said.

Ramotar was arrested and charged with driving while intoxicated, vehicular manslaughter — operating motor vehicle while impaired causing death, vehicular manslaughter — recklessly causing death, and other offenses, according to police.

Police said the Southern State crash is under investigation.