



UW President Faces Backlash Over Effort To Fund Partner's School, Dean's Ousting

UW President Ed Seidel is facing backlash after the demotion of a popular dean of engineering. Detractors say the president backed a failed effort to send engineering money to a UW school his partner runs, and the demotion of the dean who stood in the way.



Clair McFarland

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University of Wyoming President Ed Seidel, left, and former UW College of Engineering and Physical Sciences Dean Cameron Wright. (Greg Johnson, Cowboy State Daily; University of Wyoming)

University of Wyoming leadership is in turmoil and the UW president is facing immense backlash after the Board of Trustees demoted a largely beloved college dean.

UW College of Engineering and Physical Sciences (CEPS) Dean Cameron Wright was removed from his position, which he'd held on an interim basis since 2019 and officially since 2022, and placed on the faculty of the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, says [a statement UW released Wednesday](#).

The outcry has been significant. Detractors say UW President Ed Seidel pushed for Wright's demotion because Wright refused to shift \$500,000 marked annually for the engineering college to the School of Computational Science run by Seidel's partner — to make it a spinoff from the engineering college.



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UW, conversely, says it demoted Wright because he lacked a cogent plan to use state funds to elevate the CEPS to nationally recognized levels of excellence.

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The Farewell

Wright made a presentation to the UW Board of Trustees on March 27, on the state of the engineering college and of a 13-year-old program designed to propel the CEPS to the Tier-1, or nationally recognized level.

The college hadn't reached that level, but it had been fraught with extreme turnover, a messy reorganization effort, a pandemic and other unforeseen obstacles, Wright noted. The program had been short-changed multiple times, he said.

One day later, Wright sent a letter to his faculty that read like a farewell.

He praised them for the progress they've made toward the program's goals despite having "less than **Get Our Free Daily** g that the original Governor's Task Force said it would take."

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“There are various behind-the-scenes pushes going on related to all of this,” wrote Wright, referencing an incident from last fall and adding, “I won’t go into that here.”

He then quoted the late U.S. Sen. Al Simpson, who said “If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don’t have integrity, nothing else matters.”

He urged the staffers to focus on their mission and on taking care of others — and educating students “no matter what.”

The discussion surrounding Wright's demotion happened behind closed doors, as Wyoming law dictates.

The UW Board of Trustees on March 28 convened in executive session – a private meeting state law reserves for discussing personnel matters and a handful of other non-public topics. The trustees then emerged back into public session and voted to approve the “personnel matter” they’d discussed.

Board Secretary Brad Bonner was not present for the vote. All trustees present voted in favor of the motion.



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“The decision was made by the Board, not President Seidel or his administration,” UW spokesman Chad Baldwin told Cowboy State Daily in a Friday email.

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University of Wyoming President Ed Seidel and his partner, Dr. Gabrielle Allen. (University of Wyoming Photo)

Don't Let Anyone Retaliate

Wright's mention of last autumn likely referenced his refusal to sign a memorandum of understanding diverting \$500,000 in earmarked, annual funds to the computing school to move it outside the engineering college.

Sen. Chris Rothfuss and Rep. Karlee Provenza, both Democratic delegates of Laramie sent Gov. Mark Gordon a letter in September, saying that though UW had reversed course on pushing for the diversion to aid the school's separation, Wright may face retaliation for "standing firm on these principles."

Rothfuss and Provenza urged Gordon to protect Wright from retaliation and safeguard the money the Legislature intended for the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, while scrutinizing "the appropriateness of any (computing school) expenditures while it remains within the College."

Wright did not respond by publication time to a Friday voicemail request for comment.

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The John P. Ellbogen Foundation – which gives hundreds of thousands of dollars per year to UW — announced a pause in grants to UW for the spring 2025 funding cycle and beyond.

The foundation's letter cited a lack of transparency surrounding Wright's deanship dismissal, which it said "diminishes the confidence and trust that are foundational to our commitments as a donor."

A dozen university deans on Friday dispatched a letter of their own to UW President Ed Seidel, university trustees and Interim Provost Scott Turpen, referencing "the abrupt dismissal of several senior leaders, absent transparency or meaningful engagement," among other issues, as eroding trust in the administration.

'Pet Projects'

In a heated exchange of letters with Board of Trustees Chair Kermit Brown, National Advisory Council Chair Zia Yasrobi claimed Seidel had tried to siphon the engineering school's "already strained and inadequate funding to his pet projects."

That claim is echoed in an open letter to the press released by Bruce Pivic, Vice Chair of the College of Engineering Advisory Board and Chairman of the Electrical Engineering Advisory Board.

"It appears," says Pivic's letter, that Seidel "played a pivotal role in Wright's removal" because Wright would not allow Tier-1 money earmarked for the engineering school to the School of Computational Science.

"Reports suggest that President Seidel intended to appoint his significant other, (Gabrielle) Allen, as the dean of this new school," the letter says.

Allen, who is the Director of the School of Computing now within CEPS, declined Friday to comment to Cowboy State Daily, saying "I understand that these questions have already been addressed by other members of the university."

A [conflict of interest plan](#) under her UW bio confirms Allen's relationship with Seidel.

The university ultimately ruled the money could not be diverted to the new school, Pivic's letter adds. He urged UW trustees in a separate letter to meet with Wright to hear his perspective and

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Former University of Wyoming Dean of College of Engineering and Physical Sciences Cameron Wright. (University of Wyoming Photo)

No Plan

Baldwin in his email countered, saying the lawmakers' September letter warning of retaliation was "based on a false premise," and UW had "several performance reasons" for demoting Wright.

"Those reasons were communicated to him," continued Baldwin. He emphasized the Tier-1 program's goal of elevating the college to "new levels of excellence."

Wright's own report showed the college hasn't met those goals, and "he could not articulate a cogent plan to make progress on meeting the goals," added Baldwin.

Pivic contested UW's reasoning in his own interview, saying, "If they discharged him because he has not met the Tier-1 initiatives (then) they did not look at his... report on Tier-1."

Wright's March 2025 Tier-1 plan touts 16 goals and plans to achieve them. These emphasize working with the industries the college is meant to feed as well as alumni, offering programs to middle-school-age students, tracking scholarship students' performance, recruiting good students, driving

adening and innovating curricula.

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to prop up the computing school.

"We effectively have a retaliation that's being justified by a performance, a shortfall of the College of Engineering," said Rothfuss. "But the irony is that performance shortfall was caused by the actions of the president – not the actions of Cam Wright."

Rothfuss later clarified that Seidel's actions weren't singlehandedly responsible for keeping the college from reaching its goals, "but that's a key point."

That's Why We Reviewed

Baldwin also referenced the controversy of last autumn. Wright alleged a conflict of interest in Seidel "forcing" him to divert money to Allen's School of Computing, the spokesman wrote.

Those allegations prompted the school to review the situation for a violation of the president's conflict of interest management plan regarding his romantic partner, he added.

When Allen applied in 2022 to direct the school, Wright and former Provost Kevin Carman – not Seidel – granted her the job, Baldwin said.

The Board of Trustees approved the \$500,000 diversion of ongoing funds for "synergistic collaboration" between the engineering college and the computing school, he wrote.

Baldwin said it was Carman who asked Wright and Allen to sign an MOU formalizing that flow of money to the computing school even if the computing school left the engineering college.

And on Sept. 19, 2024, Seidel and Carman "clarified" that Wright didn't have to sign the MOU, Baldwin added.

Both Carman and Wright promised to use the money to "enhance" the computational science portion of the CEPS, wrote Baldwin.

The spokesman added that after all this, UW found that Seidel "did not direct additional finances" to the school his partner directs, and he did not violate his conflict-of-interest plan.

Additionally, wrote Baldwin, Allen plans to let her term as computing school director expire at the

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lemic term, and return to her faculty appointment.

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(University of Wyoming Photo)

Shroud Of Secrecy

The UW Faculty Senate Executive Committee had strong words for UW in the wake of Wright's demotion and voiced "grave concerns" about Seidel's leadership in a Tuesday letter to faculty members.

"The actions today are symptomatic of a systemic failure of leadership that has spanned several years, and seen multiple deans and other administrators dismissed under a shroud of secrecy that prevents holding leadership accountable for any decision that is made," says the letter. "The prevailing view is that these administrators are at-will and serve at the pleasure of the President. But we would like to remind those in leadership that we do not operate like a corporation with the President as a CEO – we operate on the principle of shared governance."

The letter cites a UW regulation to that end.

"The President's seemingly arbitrary actions, unwillingness to listen to others and lack of concern for shared governance has eroded what little trust remained between the faculty and his office and has left the faculty do not have any confidence in his leadership," says the letter. "We plan to move forward at our upcoming Faculty Senate meeting."

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Baldwin furnished a response from Seidel.

"I fully agree that we need to have mutual respect, willingness to work together and trust to achieve UW's goals," says Seidel's response. "I take the concerns of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee seriously. Trust is essential, and where my actions or words may have contributed to a loss in that trust, I take responsibility. I'm committed to growing our partnership through open dialogue and a renewed focus on shared governance—because we can only achieve our goals if we do it together."

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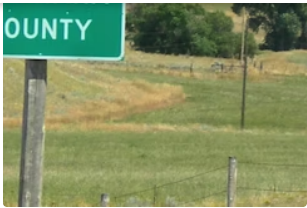
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