

Former Southwestern Seminary prof Matt Queen indicted

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—A former Southern Baptist seminary professor and interim provost has been indicted on a charge of obstructing justice in a sexual misconduct case, the Department of Justice announced May 21.



Matt Queen in a video for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in November 2022. (Video screen grab via RNS)

Matt Queen, who was previously an administrator and professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, allegedly gave the FBI falsified notes during an ongoing investigation into alleged sexual misconduct at the Fort Worth seminary. He was arraigned Tuesday, according to the DOJ.

“As alleged, Matthew Queen attempted to interfere with a federal grand jury investigation by creating false notes in an attempt to corroborate his own lies,” said U.S. Attorney Damian Williams of the Southern District of New York in a statement.

“The criminal obstruction charge announced today should exemplify the seriousness of attempts by any individual to manipulate or interfere with a federal investigation.”

Queen, who was named pastor of Friendly Avenue Baptist Church in Greensboro, N.C., earlier this year, could not be reached for comment.

DOJ probe of SBC acknowledged

The indictment is the first official acknowledgment by the DOJ of an investigation into the Southern Baptist Convention and its entities. Southern Baptist leaders announced in 2022 that they had been subpoenaed by the Department of Justice and promised to cooperate.

News of the DOJ investigation followed the release of a report from Guidepost Solutions showing SBC leaders had mistreated abuse survivors for years, denied responsibility for the actions of local churches and downplayed the number of sexual abuse cases in the nation’s largest Protestant denomination.

Earlier this year, the SBC’s Executive Committee announced the DOJ’s investigation into the committee was ended, leading to confusion. The Executive Committee later issued a statement saying the DOJ’s investigation into the SBC and its entities remained open.

In a statement Tuesday, the DOJ gave more details about the investigation.

“Since approximately 2022, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York (‘U.S. Attorney’s Office’) and the FBI have been investigating allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct related to a national religious denomination (the ‘Denomination’) and its affiliated entities, and the alleged cover-up of such allegations by individuals and entities associated with the Denomination,” according to a statement.



Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth (BP File Photo)

As part of that investigation, Southwestern was required to give any documents about abuse to the FBI. However, according to the DOJ, a seminary official received a report of alleged sexual abuse by a student in the fall of 2022. That alleged abuse was reported to the school's campus police, though not to the FBI, but no other action was taken.

A Southwestern staffer, referred to as "Employee-1" by the DOJ, later was told by a Southwestern leader (Employee-2) to destroy a document about the incident and the seminary's inaction, according to the DOJ.

Queen was allegedly in the room with Employee-1 when this happened, but allegedly told the FBI in an interview that he had not heard Employee-2 say to destroy the report.

Accused of falsifying records

He subsequently produced a set of fake notes from the meeting, the DOJ alleges, which he presented to the FBI in June 2023—but he gave conflicting stories about when the notes were written, later admitting the notes were fake.

“On June 21, 2023, Matthew Queen testified under oath that he had in fact heard Employee-2 direct Employee-1 to make the Document ‘go away,’” according to the DOJ.

The 49-year-old Queen could face up to 20 years in prison after being charged with one count of falsification of records.

“Matthew Queen, an interim provost, allegedly failed to inform the FBI of a conspiracy to destroy evidence related to the ongoing investigation of sexual misconduct and instead produced falsified notes to investigators. Queen’s alleged actions deliberately violated a court order and delayed justice for the sexual abuse victims,” said FBI Assistant Director in Charge James Smith.

“The FBI will never tolerate those who intentionally lie and mislead our investigation in an attempt to conceal their malicious behavior.”

‘Antithetical’ to seminary’s values

Southwestern said the student involved in the alleged abuse was suspended and later withdrew from the school. The seminary also stated it reported the matter to the DOJ as it was required to do.

The school said the alleged actions described in the indictment were “antithetical to the values of the seminary.”

“After the seminary learned of Queen’s actions in June 2023, he was immediately placed on administrative leave and resigned as interim provost,” the school stated. “All employees alleged to have acted improperly in this matter are no longer employed by the seminary.”

Southwestern, once one of the nation’s largest seminaries, has fallen on hard times in recent years. Last year a report from the school’s leaders detailed years of financial mismanagement, including overspending its

budget by \$140 million over 20 years. The school's former president, who left in the fall of 2022, is suing the school for defamation.

The school also settled a lawsuit in 2023 with a victim of Paul Pressler, a leader of the "conservative resurgence" in the SBC, and in 2021, sued to regain control of a Texas foundation that had been taken over by former staffers, who allegedly tried to divert money away from the seminary.