

Students protest as professor resigns

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By [Chris Barton](#)

A top Ivy League professor has resigned as head of the Auckland School of Architecture, telling students a deep "misalignment" of views between her and faculty management is behind her premature departure.

Professor Peggy Deamer, who was assistant dean at prestigious Yale University's School of Architecture, took up her position in February. She was appointed with much fanfare by Professor Sharman Pretty, dean of Auckland University's National Institute of Creative Arts, in December.

"We could not have hoped for a more outstanding appointment as a result of our international search for this new chair in architecture," Professor Pretty said at the time.



Peggy Deamer

Professor Deamer, who resigned on Friday, August 17, was ordered by Professor Pretty to clear out her office over the weekend.

She met informally with students last Tuesday to say goodbye. She told students she had offered six months' notice to minimise disruption, but that was rejected.

A university spokesperson confirmed Professor Deamer had resigned, saying: "The University of Auckland will not be commenting further on this matter."

Professor Deamer's sudden departure has shocked staff and students, who have been given no official explanation. Students gathered in the school's courtyard in protest and 372 have signed a letter to the vice chancellor asking for problems between the faculty and school to be resolved.

"Her resignation affects a lot of year five students who are about to graduate and are left in a tricky situation doing their final projects," said a student who didn't want to be named for fear of repercussions.

As well as administrative duties, Professor Deamer had been active in studio work assessment.

"Students have an issue with the university not being very supportive of staff and it's not doing much for students either," said the student.

A group represented by the university's students' association is due to meet Professor Pretty next week.

Most architecture staff the Herald spoke to also did not want to be named, describing a climate of fear at the school and saying their jobs would be in jeopardy if they spoke out.

The Herald understands Professor Deamer was constantly thwarted by Professor Pretty in her efforts to make changes at the school.

Acrimonious relations between the school and the faculty have been a longstanding problem and were highlighted in a 2006 accreditation report.

Staff talk of a lack of autonomy in decision making, token democratic processes in faculty meetings and centralised "micromanagement" control by the faculty – especially by institute marketing department directives.

"It's crucial for the school to have people like Peggy, she was doing such a great job," said part-time design tutor Charissa Snijders.

"It seems amazing that when the staff and the students are behind her and she's so passionate about the school that she resigns – you've got to question what's going on."

Ms Snijders said she hoped there would be some sort investigation and was concerned that staff were afraid to speak out. "I think there are some serious issues which are undermining this environment, making it difficult for creativity to flourish."

Professor Pretty's management style has been called into question before. In January another Pretty appointment, Eric Hollis, head of the university's music school, resigned. The music school has also had two reinstatements for unjustified dismissal. In 2005 Professor Pretty had staff complaints against her for bullying and was criticised for how she went about making staff redundant at the Elam School of Fine Arts.

Professor Deamer is being replaced by Department of Planning professor Jenny Dixon.