

Update: UND police officer charged with 10 counts of possessing child porn

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A veteran UND police officer has been charged with 10 felonies after law enforcement officers say they found child pornography on his laptop.

Paul Bradley Meagher, 42, was charged today with 10 counts of possession of child pornography, all Class C felonies, in Grand Forks District Court after being arrested Tuesday evening.

Court documents say investigators carried out a search warrant at Meagher's apartment Tuesday evening, where they found a laptop containing images of adults sexually abusing children as young as 4 years old.

Investigators met with Meagher before carrying out the search warrant, and after reading him his Miranda rights, he declined to speak with law enforcement, according to court records.

Meagher has his first court hearing on the charges at 9 a.m. Thursday.

If convicted, Meagher could be sentenced to up to five years in prison on each count, though that is very unlikely. He does not have a prior criminal record in North Dakota or Minnesota, according to an online search of North Dakota and Minnesota court records.

Meagher, who was hired by the UND Police Department in 2004, was placed on administrative leave recently after the department was informed he was the focus of a criminal investigation, according to a news release.

An internal UND investigation found Meagher had violated departmental policy, university policy and law enforcement code of ethics, and the university plans to fire him, according to the release.

Prior to joining the UND Police Department, Meagher worked at the Grand Forks Juvenile Detention Center from June 1995 to April 1999, according to his job application. He was then transferred to adult corrections at the Grand Forks County jail, where he worked for four years, according to his job application.

He had a short stint at the McHenry County Sheriff's Department in Towner, N.D., before he was hired by University Police in 2004, according to his job application.

Meagher attended the Lake Region State College's Peace Officer Training Program from August to December 2003 and graduated as a valedictorian, according to his job application. He finished three years of coursework in UND's criminal justice program from 1991 to 1994 but did not earn a degree.

In a 2011 performance evaluation, Meagher was given low marks for his attitude toward the job.

"Paul seems content with the skills he has and does not have the desire to pursue any other skills within law enforcement," reads the evaluation.

The North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation is handling Meagher's case and typically does not comment on open investigations.

Meagher is the second UND employee in the last three months to be charged with possessing child pornography.

A former UND department chairman, Robert William Beattie, 55, recently was accused of possessing on a flash drive more than 800 images and videos depicting sexual abuse of children ranging in age from 1 to 14 years old.

Charges were first levelled against Beattie, who chaired the Family and Community Medicine Department at UND, at the state level, but the charges were dismissed in light of a federal indictment filed in August in which Beattie was charged with two counts of possessing child porn and one count of distributing child porn.

Peter Welte, the Vogel Law Firm attorney representing Beattie, said the stakes are higher at the federal level, where distribution of child pornography carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison and a maximum prison sentence of 20 years.

"The federal government takes the case once they decide they want to

carry the bigger hammer to punish the defendant," Welte said at the time.

Beattie has pleaded not guilty to the federal charges.

Beattie was on track to go to trial in October, but the trial was pushed back to Jan. 12 after Welte asked a federal judge for more time to prepare and negotiate with federal prosecutors.

Beattie was placed on administrative leave at UND and was released from jail in late August. He was placed on electronic home monitoring at his Cushing, Minn., lake home.