

Commissions plan rape forum; stress need for communication

By Dean Anason

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Assembled Wednesday to discuss the wide variety of issues and hostilities surrounding the recent campus rape investigations, representatives of the commissions on the Status of Women and the Status of Minorities scheduled a Thursday morning meeting to begin planning an open forum for the entire school.

The commissions also considered the release of an additional written statement to the community, possibly to be authored by Director of Public Safety Ed Medlin, and the creation of a communications network to spread news from the University on major campus-wide concerns throughout the Emory community.

In addition, letters inviting approximately 28 different members of the University to form the task force investigating the alleged rapes were scheduled to go out Thursday morning, according to University Secretary Tom Bertrand.

"Anything that happens to one member of the community happens to all of us," according to Dr. Robert Ethridge, assistant vice president and director of Equal Opportunity Programs. Despite the "field day" by the local media, Ethridge expressed concern that the facts of the cases still remained unclear.

One pressing question, according to Ethridge, concerned the apparent "disparate treatment" of the suspects in the two rape investigations, which he said "could be racially motivated."

Two rapes were reported to campus police last month, Jan. 28 and Jan. 29, according to Medlin. EUDPS arrested senior Sherard Kennedy in connection with one of the rape investigations the day after it was reported. In the other case, no arrest was made.

Questions arose as to whether the latter suspect, a white male, received preferential treatment while Kennedy, a black man, was apprehended quickly.

There were also concerns about racism by black students and others

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Administrators criticize Wheel article

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that the Wheel coverage of the cases had sensationalized the Kennedy arrest but obscured the other case, according to Assistant Dean and Director for Minority Affairs Vera Rorie.

Medlin, invited to the meeting to provide details on the two investigations, denied any charges of racism but called such questions “fully justified.” He elaborated on his concern that the University lacks any system to disseminate information on a daily basis to the Emory community when such a crisis arises.

“I don’t think we were particularly successful in doing that. It’s unfortunate,” Medlin said.

He deemed local media coverage “inaccurate” and the events “incorrectly summarized.” He generally commended accuracy in the Wheel, but he was exceptionally critical of the front page article Tuesday detailing past alleged incidents involving Kennedy,

“I’m really upset about what was in the Wheel yesterday,” Medlin said. “There are plenty of white students who have been accused of violent activity and been allowed to stay in school,” he said.

Rorie said that she was somewhat “relieved” by the Wheel article, having feared the content and slant of the article. “I was concerned with a character’s assassination,” she said. Although she said she sees nothing wrong with reporting the facts of the indictment, Rorie explained she was concerned by the continuing emphasis on the story that might harm the climate and reputation of the school.

“We need a procedure for getting information directly to our community without depending on the media,” Medlin said, but he made no new proposals. To deal with the current rape controversy, the public forum and letter were suggested. The construction of the communication network was suggested by Jan Gleason, director of Emory News and Information.

Medlin denied that too much information was revealed by Public Safety, explaining that some items by law must become part of the public record of DeKalb County. His policy is not to confirm names for the media, he said, and that he did not do so in either of these cases.

However, “willing to err on the side of disclosure,” Medlin said he did supply more detail than normal because of the circumstances and the demands of the community.

Dean Peter Dowell discussed the “paradox” that an administrator faces when public information circulates and he or she must still maintain University confidentiality policies.

The issue of communication was the principal topic of the discussion. “Based on this paradox, how can we communicate within this community?” asked Ali P. Crown, chair of the Status of Women at Emory commission.

Ginger Buffington, a College student and member of the Status of Minorities Committee, leveled her criticism at the administration, saying the statement from the University arrived far too late and that public relations was too high a priority in such matters.

“I want people to know what goes on here,” she said. Although few students were present at the meeting, she felt her sentiments were wide spread. “I’m not speaking alone. I’m speaking for a lot of frustrated students on campus,” Buffington said.

Buffington and others strongly supported the idea of an open campus forum where students could be informed as a group about the situation and be able to ask questions. Bertrand supported the symbolic action of the move, but he questioned whether one meeting would be very effective. He suggested meetings called by each division.

Both Ethridge and Rorie reminded the participants of the meeting that the issues at hand are the results of even deeper conflicts. “I think we really need to focus seriously on the ‘isms,’” Ethridge said, to see how sexism and racism drive such crises and how the University handles them.