



University of Virginia Suspends All Fraternities Amid Report of Sexual Assault Allegations

December 1, 2014

Just days after *Rolling Stone* published an article detailing the alleged sexual assault of a freshman student by seven men inside a fraternity house, the President of the University of Virginia, Teresa A. Sullivan, in a somewhat unconventional move, has decided to suspend all fraternities and related activities.

The article, written by Sabrina Rubin Erdely, recounts the alleged brutal gang rape of a then 18-year-old female student at a Phi Kappa Psi fraternity house in 2012. The female student, who is referred to as “Jackie” in the article, describes how many of her friends encouraged her to keep silent about the incident so that they could collectively maintain their social rank and popularity among the fraternities. “She’s gonna be the girl who cried ‘rape,’ and we’ll never be allowed into any frat party again,” said one of Jackie’s friends. The article also describes the University’s “culture of hidden sexual violence” and how University administrators allegedly failed to adequately respond to Jackie’s claim – even after she notified them that two other girls were allegedly assaulted at the same fraternity in a similar manner.

In response to the publication of the *Rolling Stone* article, President Sullivan released a [statement](#) suspending all fraternities and associated social activities until January 9, 2015. “In the intervening period we will assemble groups of students, faculty, alumni, and other concerned parties to discuss our next steps in preventing sexual assault and sexual violence on Grounds,” said President Sullivan. “Meaningful change is necessary, and we can lead that change for all universities. We can demand that incidents like those described in *Rolling Stone* never happen and that if they do, the responsible are held accountable to the law. This will require institutional change, cultural change, and legislative change, and it will not be easy. We are making those changes,” stated President Sullivan.

The University’s Board of Visitors was quick to respond to President Sullivan’s call to action. They held an emergency meeting on Tuesday to discuss the University’s sexual assault policies and the allegations set forth in the *Rolling Stone* article. “I’d like to say to ‘Jackie’ and her parents I am sorry, and to all survivors of sexual assault, I am sorry,” said Rector George Keith Martin. “As we said last week, this type of conduct will not be tolerated at the University of Virginia. The status quo is not acceptable. Like all of you, gathered here today, I am appalled,” said Martin. The University has also called for an independent investigation of its sexual misconduct policies and its responses to claims of campus sexual misconduct.

However, not everyone agrees with President Sullivan’s decision to suspend all Greek life activities. Some students believe that the President’s decision serves to unjustly punish and ostracize students who were not

involved in the alleged sexual assault. One student specifically stated that by closing the fraternities, the University is essentially “punishing an entire system for what individuals have done. It isn't fair to take this away from innocent people.” One Board member, Stephen Long, also believes that the University “should not randomly point fingers and cause heads to roll just because it satisfies some gut instinct. We need to slow down and get the facts.”

Campus sexual assault is a colossal problem that extends far beyond the Virginia state lines. In fact, the University of Virginia is just one of nearly ninety institutions throughout the nation that have made it onto the U.S. Department of Education’s public list of colleges and universities that are currently under investigation for allegedly mishandling complaints of sexual assault and sexual harassment in violation of Title IX. Especially during this new era of Title IX enforcement by the federal government, institutions are encouraged to review, and if necessary, revise their sexual misconduct policies. Faculty, staff, and students should also receive training on what improper conduct is and what to do about improper conduct if they see it happening to them or anyone else. All members of the campus community must know how to effectively prevent, recognize and report claims of sexual misconduct in order to ensure a safe and healthy campus.

If you or your institution has any questions or concerns regarding education-related issues, please contact James G. Ryan at jryan@cullenanddykman.com or at 516-357-3750 or Hayley B. Dryer at hdryer@cullenanddykman.com or at 516-357-3745.