

# OPINION

This column represents the views of the Old Gold and Black Editorial Board.

## Process for trustee selection needs work

It's not often that we praise the board of trustees. After all, they're all corporate tools, and the student newspaper is here to cause controversy and rancor, right? But this time we just can't help ourselves.

The trustees — finally — listened. They chose sophomore Laurie Hunt, the students' choice, as the students' voice on their board. She replaces senior Joy Vermillion, whose term expired last spring.

Kudos, then, to the board, and congratulations to Hunt.

But hold on a minute. There's also something fishy here. In selecting Hunt, the trustees inexplicably broke with convention, because, for the first time anyone can remember, it bypassed the Student Life Committee's recommendation for the seat, and took six months to do it, too.

The SLC, if you recall, interviews the top three vote-getters in the election, and recommends a candidate, whom the board usually rubber-stamps.

This spring, the SLC nominated junior Omaar Hena — the third-place candidate — as its choice for student trustee. Everyone assumed that Hena would be rubber-stamped by the board as well, and that would be that.

Except that wasn't that, because at the end of its spring meeting, when the board is supposed to decide these things, we still had no new student trustee. It took until October — and a special round of interviews by two members of the board — to get one named.

The problem with that is twofold: First, the students went for six months without a representative on the board.

More importantly, by dithering for half a year, the trustees cast doubt on both their own sincerity as well as the

candidates' qualifications.

Hena, you see, wrote a column that appeared in the *Old Gold and Black* the week of the trustees' spring meeting in which he harshly condemned certain Greek organizations and activities. Hena is also a minority, and would be the first minority student trustee in the history of the university.

We're certainly not saying that the board is racist, or even that its members were so irked by Hena's column that they decided to reject him in retribution. But appearances do matter because they lead to serious questions. For example, does all this mean that Hena was really the most qualified candidate, and now we are stuck with a lesser light?

Probably not; Hunt is surely as capable as Hena. But the whole mess could have been avoided if the system for picking the trustee were a little more intelligently designed.

Currently, Student Government interviews all of the potential candidates and chooses six whose names are to appear on the ballot. That screening process is reasonable and fair, and it should be kept.

But for the election itself, the trustee candidates must obey ridiculous rules — no campaigning except by word of mouth — that are simply not appropriate for a campus with over 3,600 undergraduate students. Those should be done away with.

Finally, the SLC's involvement should be eliminated. It's clear from this year's messy selection process that the trustees themselves, not the SLC, should conduct the final interviews. After all, the student trustee is the liaison between the trustees and the students. And that's something to which the students and trustees both seem to assent.

last year's sexual assault was never apprehended. University Police must continue their search for the assailant in this case. Not only would that grant the victim a measure of peace and allow her to finally feel safe and vindicated, it would also make other women on the campus feel safer in the knowledge that at least one rapist is behind bars.

University Police have released a composite sketch of the suspect. Many other leads have been pursued, and hundreds of interviews have been conducted. Obviously the police are working hard to resolve the case. All we ask is that they not quit now. People still want and need answers.

# A personal reality check

## Last year's assault victim tells her story.

To most people, Oct. 5, 1996 does not signify a memorable day in their lives. For me, however, it is a day that I shall often and painfully remember. This was the day that I was attacked and raped on our campus.

*Amy K. Eckert*

GUEST COLUMNIST

It is also the day that I learned that violence is a reality in the world and in our community and that I had been sheltered from it most of my life. Oct. 5, 1996 was the day that my eyes were opened and I lost my innocence.

After a night of weekend revelry spent in the traditional university fashion, meaning that I hung out with friends and did the usual campus partyhopping, I began to head home.

It was between two and three in the morning, and as I walked up the stairs to my dorm room on the Quad, little did I know or suspect what was to follow in the next three hours.

As I unlocked the door to my room and reached for the lights I was knocked unconscious by a stranger who was hiding in my closet. I didn't see the intruder, and I don't distinctly remember getting hit over the head, but he told me all about it much later.

All I remember is struggling to get to my feet once I came to and then realizing that someone was holding me down. That is when I began to scream. I didn't shout or scream long; the threats he made silenced me pretty quickly.

I was scared. I had never been so scared in my whole entire life. I thought that I had lived all of the life that I was going to. I begged for my life.

I can't describe what it is like to be so scared and so confused. I honestly thought my life was over.

The next two and a half hours are difficult to describe. My attacker confided in me that he was a drug dealer and that he had not planned on my being in the room at that hour. He was in the wrong room, looking for money that was owed to him by a student who had bought drugs from him numerous times and had never paid.

He was confused, deranged, scared and strung out. He told me a lot, too much, but not enough to help the police. After the first half hour I actually began to calm down and tried to think rationally. I thought I might actually survive, and for a short while I thought that he was only a confused kid who really wouldn't hurt me.

I tried to reason with him but he kept getting angrier and more violent. I told him to take anything he wanted in the room, and to just leave. I had no idea what he looked like and I promised not to go to the police.

In the ensuing two and a half hours I was held captive. It felt like mental and physical torture combined. During that time the situation escalated continually in violence. My attacker wanted to leave, but he didn't want to get in trouble. So he tied me up. That wasn't enough. He still didn't leave.

So he tried to suffocate me. Suffocation must be the worst form of death because you try to fight back and you can feel the oppression of death on your face as someone clutches a pillow or object against it, trying to smother the life out of you. He wanted to knock me out so he could leave without my screaming.

All of this happened at our school and in our dorms — that is what really frightens me. What had seemed unrealistic and improbable quickly became a frightening reality. I often tell people that this person stole from me in more ways than one.

I did manage to fight him off when he was trying to suffocate me, but that only resulted in making him even more angry and violent. The situation seemed to grow worse with every passing second.

It seemed like forever, but time also seemed to often pause and then speed up. It was after he tried to suffocate me that I realized he was capable of killing me. That's when I grew desperate and scared again.

Then, he raped me. I'm not sure that I even remember all that happened in the next half hour. I know he raped me for a half an hour because I could see the clock. At this time I felt completely numb. I emotionally put up a wall and let the will to live and fight drain out of my body.

It was over. At that point I was prepared to face the worst. Nothing seemed to matter anymore, including life.

When he was done with me he literally tossed me aside. He told me he would be back to kill me if I said anything to anyone. To this day, I think he truly meant it. To me, I was I already dead.

He walked out. He just walked out of my room like he didn't have a care in the world. I couldn't believe that I was still alive or that this horrible nightmare was over.

It was pitch black and maybe around 5:30 a.m. My mind raced to figure out if I had actually heard the suite door close behind him — maybe he was still there hiding in the dark of my room or in the hallway of my suite. Then I heard a door from one of the rooms in the suite open. I stumbled out of my room and was thankful to finally see human faces.

I was in shock; I thought it was over but it was just beginning. There was still the pain of the coming year of recovery to get through. I looked down and saw my feet stained with blood. The rest of the day is a blur.

This story may seem too dramatic or violent to be true, but it is. All of these events occurred on our safe, secure, gated, naive little campus.

I am no longer angry about what happened. Oct. 5, 1996 has become a part of who I am now. I am angry that rape is still happening in our country.

As I read the newspaper and watch the news I am continually disturbed by stories of rape committed in our community. It bothers me even more that the pain I went through this past year is something that many women at our university understand and continue to experience.

My eyes have been opened. I often think about how naive and innocent I was. Violence was never a reality to me before, but it is now. And it happened on our campus.

That is what is so unbelievable to me. All of this happened at our school and in our dorms — that is what really frightens me. What had seemed unrealistic and improbable quickly became a frightening reality. I often tell people that this person stole from me in more ways than one.

At this point some of you may be asking why I am writing this guest column. There are two reasons: first, it is helping me get through this painful recovery, and second, I want to help others. I do not want to see anyone else experience the pain that I felt emotion-

ally, physically and psychologically.

I originally kept my name from the newspapers and asked those that knew about the attack to keep my name private because I was scared and am indeed a very private person.

This past year has been a rough one for me. Many people told me I was strong. I haven't been strong; I merely grieved privately and pushed through the pain in order to keep up my academics. It wasn't always easy — often I would call one confidant in the middle of the night to vent and let out all that I had been feeling, but no one ever knew.

I was lucky though, because I had supportive friends and family. Some victims have to recover all alone because they try to keep it a secret.

As victims, we are often told that we won the battle, no matter how much the pain hurts. We won because we survived and we can try to prevent this crime from happening to other people. That is what I have tried to incorporate into my life since that dreadful night. I want people to learn from what happened to me.

Sometimes one of the few things keeping me going is the hope that others will not have to fight this battle and that they will learn from my story. I don't have all the answers, but there are a few things both men and women can do to prevent this violent crime and help support the survivors. We all need to join together on our campus. Here are a few suggestions.

Women, please enroll in Rape Aggression Defense System courses. These self-defense courses are taught by University Police. I took the RAD course last semester and I learned a lot, had a blast, and now I know what I could have done to fight off my attacker. For women, it is one of the best preventative measures one can take in order to deter rape.

Men, one thing that I have learned is that my male friends and family were often very confused about how to help me through the recovery process. I was often told that they had wished they had been there to help me. The fact is, you will probably know someone who has been raped.

Please encourage your loved ones to take the RAD classes and learn other preventative measures. If you have a friend or family member who has been raped and you are unsure about how to help them recover, just stop by the counseling center. They can be very helpful and will steer you in the right direction.

Also, as students we need to make smart decisions about our personal safety. Do the smart thing: don't walk alone at night, keep your doors locked and take the shuttle back to your dorms after studying late at the library. But most importantly, don't put yourself in an awkward situation with someone of the opposite sex.

I hope that my story has helped to raise awareness on campus about the reality of rape.

Last year, after the Speak Out ceremony in Wait Chapel for Rape Awareness Week, I was saddened and disappointed to see that few people were in attendance. Even close friends of mine, both men and women, were missing, and we all could have used each other's support.

I think what is important to remember is that rape is not merely a female issue. Rape not only affects women, but men as well because victims are often someone's girlfriend, sister or friend. When one person is harmed we all suffer.

Please try to learn from my story and prevent this heinous crime from happening to more women. I have to believe that something positive will come out of my experience. If one person can be helped or one rape deterred, than losing my privacy is worth it.

## Crime stats are down, but assault case remains

University Police deserve resounding accolades for their part in the recently released crime stats, which show that campus crime decreased last year. Their hard work and constant surveillance are certainly the biggest contributing factor in the safer campus.

Congratulations should also go to Police Chief Regina Lawson, for her response to the crime stats. Attributing the success to the police work instead of the gates and keycard systems is accurate and fair.

However, even with the success that the statistics demonstrate, one crime remains outstanding — the assailant in

## OLD GOLD AND BLACK

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