

Letters To The Editor...

Letter to the Editor [of the] X-Press:

For the past number of years, our University campus has not been a safe place for women. During the 91-92 term, incidents of hostility towards women increased with little or no reaction from the University Administration.

In May of 1992, representatives from eleven women's organizations represented on the Island met with UPEI President Willie Eliot, Dean of Arts Vern Smitheram, and Ian MacDonald, Director of External Services and Extension on May 29, 1992 to express our concerns. We asked that the University publicly address the issue of safety for women on campus.

As a result of the violent incident in September, the University is beginning to address the issue of violence against women. There has been approval in principle by the Board of Governors for a Task Force on violence against women and a review of the security needs of the University.

As a representative of the Women's Coalition and a graduate of UPEI, I am pleased to see the University finally taking action on a serious issue that has been a problem on campus for many years. By admitting there is a chilly climate for women on campus and the commitment to students, staff, faculty, and visitors by President Eliot to seriously to address the safety of women, the University has the opportunity to establish itself as a responsive and caring institution. My regret is that it took a reported sexual assault of a student to move the University into action.

Our society and our University is not a safe place for women -- that is now a proven fact and violence is expressed in a number of ways, not just through sexual or physical assault. What we say and what we do to women in non-physical ways is often more damaging and serious than a physical attack.

The recent disagreement of student groups over the proposed showing of the movie "Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death" is a case in point. We all have a right to say and act on what we believe in; but with that right comes a responsibility for the actions or reactions resulting from the expression of that right. It is a time to be sensitive and respectful of the rights of all. The right of "Academic Freedom" cannot be used to circumvent what the University Administration and the University Community have committed themselves to addressing and changing on our campus. There is the responsibility of perpetuating the fear and lack of respect for others. Whether or not the film is shown, every party involved has to weigh the

responsibility and consequences of their actions.

But we can and ought to challenge what others think. The encouragement of differing opinions is the base of the philosophical existence of a university. Baiting the opposition and hidden adversaries are not the methods a university teaches or ought to condone to encourage debate among those with differing points of view. Those who will not speak for themselves but manipulate others to speak for them are unworthy of academic or any respect and have no right to claim "Academic Freedom" through their right of position.

There is a role for everyone to play at this point in time, whether or not one believes in or agrees with the issue of violence on campus. Respecting the action taken by a large number of students, faculty, and staff during the crisis in September is one thing everyone can do through word and deed. All members of the University Community have the responsibility to ensure that each of its members feels safe and is not threatened by the actions of others.

December 6, 1992, is the third anniversary of the Montreal Massacre. Let us honour those young women through OUR actions and commitment to making our campus a safe and respectful place.

Yours truly,
Joanne Ings '75,'81
and on behalf of the
Women's Community Coalition

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