

# Find your voice:

## Administration responds to student concerns after attempted sexual assault on campus

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Editor in Chief

*Editor's Note: We delayed the publication of the Clarion this week for two days in order to provide expansive, thoughtful coverage of the attempted assault, the meeting for women, and the surrounding dialogue between students, staff, and administration. Thank you for your patience.*

The campus has been reverberating with speculation, anxiety, and indignation since Friday, Nov. 7, when an unknown man attempted to sexually assault a female student outside Jones Hall at around midnight.

The email that head of security Stan Jacobsen sent the BC community on Saturday morning said that when the student, who remains publically unidentified, broke from his grip, the man fled the scene. On Saturday, the student reported the incident to campus life with permission to contact the Brevard Police Department. She described the assailant as around six feet tall. He was wearing a black sweatshirt. Authorities are currently investigating the incident, as it is yet unknown whether or not the perpetrator is a student. Jacobsen advised students to travel in pairs whenever possible and to report any suspicious activity.

Director of Residence Life Michael Cohen later informed students via email of a "women only" meeting, which occurred at 9:30 on Wednesday night. The meeting for men is scheduled for 8:45 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 17.

By the time of their meeting, some female students were already expressing their frustration. A small college is an echo chamber for rumors and misinformation, and many were up in arms about the supposed monetary fine for those who did not attend, as well as the division of genders and, accordingly, the possible implication that rape is primarily a female problem.

Dean of Students Debbie D'Anna sent a clarifying email on Wednesday afternoon to inform the campus that while all were encouraged to come, women who did not attend would not be charged. The fine was originally a misunderstanding, but

it had evolved within hours into a controversial rumor.

Finally, around 9:30, women ventured out of the dark to assemble in Ingram Auditorium. The cheerleading squad slouched in a row near the front, still in uniform, while other students, fresh from practice, SGA, and other campus activities, gulped down their only meals of the evening or clumped together in tense, whispering groups. Some seemed skeptical, already made wary by the widespread confusion.

"Before the meeting, I was worried we would be told not to get assaulted," said senior Alison Brown.

Others, however, were curious and eager to hear from the administration.

"I was very glad that they were addressing the issue and that they opened up the forum for discussion, because I felt like it was something that everyone needed to hear," said junior Gabby Smith.

D'Anna began by explaining that she organized the women's meeting out of concern for the safety of female students, as the victim, in this case, was female. "We thought it was important to get you guys in here as quickly as possible because I've heard that people don't feel safe on campus, and that concerns me," D'Anna said.

"We wanted to make sure that we had an environment and a climate that was safe for you to ask questions, and sometimes that's not always true with a mixed crowd, and we have varying levels of maturity," she added. "I apologize if anyone was offended by asking only women to come."

D'anna also stressed that the purpose of the meeting was to educate women on campus about the policies and procedures surrounding sexual misconduct, as well as the available resources and the protocols that she and other staff must adhere to in the event of a reported sexual assault.

"We will not tolerate sexual misconduct," D'Anna said. "That's the bottom line."

"But we can only deal with what we know, and that's why it's important that there is trust between all of us so that you feel comfortable reporting things that have happened," she added.

Dee Dasburg, a National Certified Counselor, also spoke in introduction.

"Students come to talk to me about things all the time," she said. "And I hear stories. Each one of you has a story. Each one of you sitting here tonight, you already know what's happened in your past. You know who said what and who did what. Some of you are sitting here tonight, and something happened to you on campus. You know what's happened. You know if someone said or did something to make you feel uncomfortable."

"Women, find your voice!" she continued, eyes steady. "Don't put up with inappropriate comments. We want you to feel empowered." Her audience broke out in a smattering of applause.

In addition to D'Anna and Dasburg, other staff and community members in attendance were housing director Michael Cohen, Director of Student Engagement Alessandra Tavoloni, Director of Center for Multicultural Service Initiatives Gabrielle Mellendorf, Stan Jacobsen, security officer Marvin Metcalf, and Brevard Chief of Police John Phillip Harris Jr.

Harris, in tune with Dasburg and D'Anna, urged women to report any instances of sexual assault, stressing that, in the event of an attack, a victim may not want to immediately seek legal action, but that she may change her mind down the road. He likened his concern about the recent incident to his paternal affection for his 18-year-old daughter.

"If you come to our police department, I expect you to be treated exactly like I would treat my daughter. It's not because I have an 18-year-old daughter, but because I want to treat everybody with the best police service we can give," Harris said. "Our principles are on the side of our vehicles, and the middle principle is respect. I want you to feel welcome. We will do everything we can when you call us."

He also suggested that women should take certain precautions to decrease the likelihood of an assault, forming contingency plans or traveling in groups.

"Plan ahead," Harris said. "If you parked your car somewhere near the mall when it was light,

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