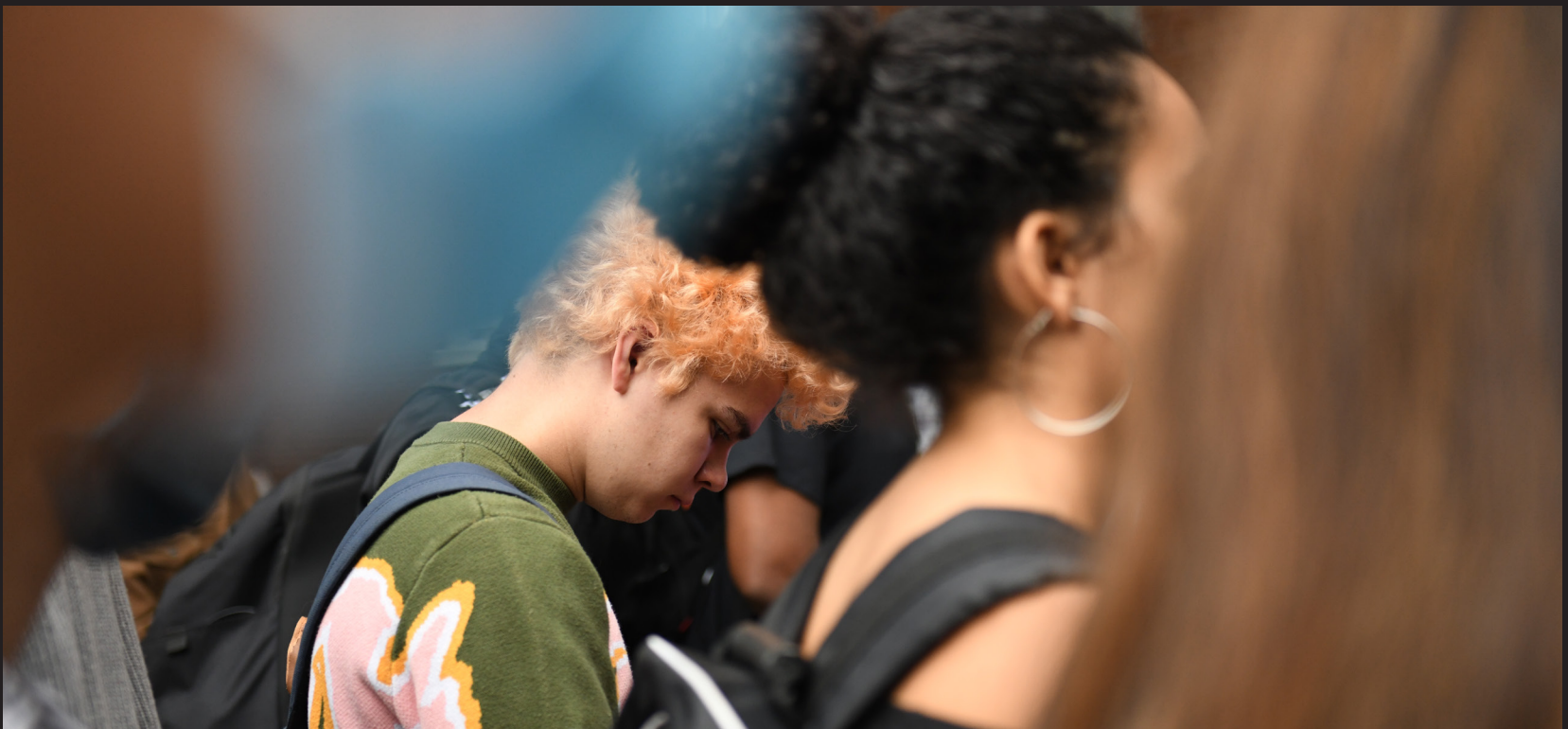


*Content Warning: mentions of sexual assault. If you find yourself distressed by any of the following content, please seek confidential help at the National Sexual Assault Hotline: +1 (800) 656-4673*

## Community Responds to Alumna's *Vanity Fair* Article



Students stand on the Academy Lawn during the Assembly protest.

By SELIM KIM, SAFIRA SCHIOWITZ, CLARK WU and ANDREW YUAN

On Monday, September 13, *Vanity Fair* released an article, “Mr. Weber’s Confession,” by Nancy Jo Sales ’82 which detailed her experiences with the Academy’s

sexual assault reporting process.

Sales’ article details how Director of Student Well-Being, Dr. Christina Palmer, contacted Sales on September 10, 2020 by phone and questioned her about the allegation that now-retired English teacher David Weber had sexually assaulted her.

Sales denied the allegations

Palmer shared with her. However, Sales wrote that the Academy continued its investigation into her involvement with Weber, even after her denial. The investigation eventually led to Weber’s confession of “hugging and kissing a student... in the 1980s,” according to Principal William Rawson’s subsequent all-

school email.

Rawson addressed the impacts of the *Vanity Fair* article in an all-school speech on Tuesday, September 21. He promised to reexamine how the Academy will support students, student leaders and the entire school community when traumatic events occur, and to “put structures and

VANITY FAIR, 2

## Students Protest Academy’s Sexual Misconduct Reporting Policy

By ANVIBHATE, LAUREN KIM, MINSEO KIM, ELLIE ANA SPERANTSAS, KENDRA WANG and ANDREW YUAN

“Take back our childhood.” “Hold the Academy accountable.” “BELIEVE + PRIORITIZE SURVIVORS.” Boldly lettered on cardstock, these words embodied the stances of students on strike from classes last Friday as they demanded a response from the Academy addressing its history of sexual misconduct.

Following the publication of Nancy Jo Sales’ ’82 *Vanity Fair* article entailing the Academy’s sexual assault cases, student leaders of the Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA), Exonians Against Sexual Assault (EASA), Feminist Union and Transitions collaborated to organize an Assembly protest September 17 on the Academy Lawn, where the leaders shared personal anecdotes and encouraged fellow Exonians to sign a petition asking to “hold the Academy accountable for supporting its Student Leaders” in regard to sexual assault cases. This petition voiced the “unfair burden that the Academy places on student leaders due to their negligence in communications surrounding sexual misconduct” and outlines specific demands and calls for accountability; it is published in full on page 8 in this issue of *The Exonian*. Later, students began a class strike, congregating on the steps of the Lamont Art Gallery for the remainder of the school day, demanding that the Academy recognize the levels of student distress and emotional well-being.

Led by members of the Feminist Union, EASA, GSA and Transitions, the Assembly protest lasted for 30 minutes, with students, faculty, staff members

and deans present. Student leaders delivered speeches demanding changes and expressing disappointments in the Academy’s sexual assault reporting policies.

As senior Michelle Park read to the hundreds of students and faculty gathered on the Academy lawn: “To the preps and lowers: welcome to campus. I bet that this is not how you expected your first week of school to go, but this is Exeter for you.”

### Assembly Protest Features Student Speeches

Senior and Feminist Union co-head Siona Jain described sexism at the Academy. “When you are a woman at Exeter, you will be told your voice doesn’t matter even when the matter concerns you. When you’re a woman at Exeter, you will be judged, not based on what you bring to the table, but based on your stomach, shoulders, and chest. You may not be considered a scholar or leader when you’re a woman,” Jain said in her speech at the protest.

Upper and EASA co-head Riley Jones added to the discussion of the culture of sexual assault at Exeter. “Like many of you, I was given ‘the talk’ by my parents the night before I moved into Exeter. My mom sat me down and we made a plan. Always stand by the door. Never go into a faculty member’s home alone. Always tell someone where you are. Don’t walk by yourself at night. I assured her that I would be fine, that we would probably never see more allegations in the news, and that Exeter is a place where I will, above all, I will be safe,” Jones said. “But after every ‘Letter To Our Community’ that pops up out of nowhere in my inbox,



Senior and Feminist Union co-head Michelle Park speaks at the PROTEST, 4 Assembly strike.

# News

## Community Responds to Alumna's *Vanity Fair* Article, Continued

plans in place so that we can provide students the support they need.”

Additionally, Rawson promised to consider structural changes to processes concerning cases of sexual misconduct, “as we did two years ago, to better position the school, to provide support that students need when reporting an assault,” he said. “When participating in an investigation, we will ensure that we have the resources. We will ensure that we have the resources and expertise, including expert consultants where appropriate, necessary to fulfill the commitments that we make today.”

On the same day, Rawson communicated with *The Exonian* to address questions from the *Vanity Fair* article. In this communication, Rawson stated that “the article addresses numerous complex and highly-sensitive matters, from a narrow perspective and based on incomplete or sometimes wrong information.”

According to Sales’ article, Rawson’s statements during the 2019 sit-in included statements such as, “You’re saying that it’s [misconduct] happening all the time. You say whatever we’re doing, it’s not enough, so let’s figure out what more we should do, and we’ll do it,” and “I’m probably more equipped to handle these things because I have a lot of legal training...and I’m used to seeing two sides to a story.”

In an interview with *The Exonian*, Rawson clarified that he intended to understand how the rate at which students reported sexual assault “might relate to concerns about the reporting process and the support victims will receive, and how it relates to other factors that need to be addressed on our campus.”

“There is no perfect process for reporting something so painful and personal as sexual assault, but we want a process that victims of sexual assault will use, and we want victims to

feel supported throughout,” Rawson said.

“The Academy views cases of sexual assault first and foremost as deeply painful, sensitive matters, but they do have a legal component as we are required to report all allegations of sexual assault to the Exeter Police Department,” Rawson added. “Our goal always is to conduct an investigation, and make any subsequent public disclosure, in a way that minimizes harm to survivors and anyone else who might be impacted by the investigation.”

“I do not investigate allegations of student sexual misconduct, and do not decide if an assault has occurred. We have a diverse team of experienced professionals on campus who handle cases and work with independent outside investigators who examine the facts,” Rawson said.

“I do believe my past training is helpful and important to my understanding of these issues and my oversight role, and I continue to undertake training on these very important subjects. I also spend time advancing our preventative measures, and supporting colleagues who focus on that important work,” Rawson continued.

Director of Student Well-Being Christina Palmer expressed that the *Vanity Fair* article does not accurately portray the nature of her work and the relationships she has formed in her four years at the Academy.

In the *Vanity Fair* article, Sales wrote of her conversation with Palmer: “So that’s why I was stunned when, on September 10, 2020, I got a call from Palmer, asking me brusquely, after a few pleasantries: ‘When you were a student at Exeter, did you have a sexual relationship with Mr. Weber?’ She advised me it would be best if I could be brief, as she only had a few minutes for this conversation.”

When asked if this was

an accurate characterization of the interaction, Palmer wrote, “When allegations about reportable incidents are made, my role is to inform, not interview or investigate an alleged victim/survivor, so they are not blindsided by a possible call from the police. I also offer support and resources. Sometimes the alleged victim/survivor shares information with me, but I don’t seek out that information by asking questions. More often than not, the alleged victim/survivor will have many questions which I cannot answer (because I don’t know the answers/details).”

“It is important to note, when historical allegations are made that are reportable, even if a victim/survivor denies the allegations, we are legally required to report them to the Exeter Police Department according to the Memorandum of Understanding with them. Cases are handled by a group of people who support students or alums as they understand the details of what happened. No one person does this work alone,” Palmer continued.

Palmer provided an overview of the reporting process for sexual assault cases on campus. She noted that few reports of sexual assault are made directly to her, “as students will often go to teachers, advisers, or other adults they know.”

“Once someone has made me aware of a possible report, I reach out to the student and their adviser to set up a meeting. I always meet with students who may have been harmed with another adult present. This practice is to ensure the student has someone that they are comfortable with,” Palmer said.

“I have never been in a position that I had so many ongoing cases that I could not manage or give my focused attention and support to a student. I do not investigate allegations of student sexual misconduct, do not decide if an assault has occurred and have no influence over the investigation or discipline outcomes of cases,” Palmer

said.

Palmer emphasized that “all my decisions, communications and organization in regards to reporting happen in consultation with others; I am in constant communication with the assistant principal, general counsel, dean of students and Exeter Police.”

Palmer also discussed her implementations, including an Affirmative Consent Policy as well as several all-campus curricula embedded in Health and Human Development classes. “I will always seek to partner with students about support and justice for those harmed by sexual violence,” Palmer said.

“I also recognize for some students that you may have lost trust in me, my role, and the school reporting process, and therefore, I believe it is important to speak as much as I can with students without breaching confidentiality. My door is open to any and all students who want to speak with me,” Palmer continued.

Among other programs and training for handling of sexual assault cases, Palmer is a member of the Rockingham County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), and attends its monthly meetings. “I am the only educator who regularly attends along with law enforcement, county DA’s office, child advocates, HAVEN and other professionals in this field,” she said.

SART meetings focus on informing attendees about laws regarding sexual assault and best practices for handling cases of sexual assault, as well as case studies.

Palmer emphasized that her role in reports of misconduct is not to be an interviewer or investigator. Rather, “I am determining if an incident is reportable or not,” she stated. “My focus is safety, support and care for the student, informing them that I believe them,” Palmer continued. She also directs students to support systems such as counselors both within and outside of

school and HAVEN.

Palmer said that she then explains the reporting process to the student, “the possibility of a school investigation and their right to decide if they want to participate in it or not, and the process of informing parents.”

“It’s important to note,” Palmer continued, “if a student wants to meet with someone else besides me initially or at some other time in the process, they can ask their adviser or another trusted adult.”

### Students React to Rawson’s Initial Email

The Academy’s initial response to Sales’ article was unsatisfactory to many students. Senior and Transitions co-head Adaeze Barrah felt “disgusted.” “Reading Rawson’s email was in and of itself disappointing (we’re dealing with this again?), but after reading the article in conjunction with the school’s response, I felt an element of disrespect,” Barrah said. “Sales denounces Palmer and Rawson as a result of their poor response to a prospective sexual assault, and here Rawson is recommending Palmer as an outlet in his email.”

“The only thing I’m able to say is that we’re dealing with the same problems,” Barrah said. “I would like to see the Academy invest in multiple counselors that are more diverse and more trauma informed. I would like to see the Academy shift the burden of caring for survivors from literal children to the people whom they pay to take care of said survivors...I remain cynical, but who am I to say that the Academy isn’t working to that end?”

“I feel as though the Academy employs a policy against sexual assault on the grounds that it is considered ethically wrong, but not necessarily on the grounds that it is personally damaging to be a survivor,” Barrah added. “...The culture of continuously supporting survivors does not seem to

be there because the general consensus isn’t that people support survivors; it’s just that sexual assault is wrong. This culture perpetuates the idea that a stance against sexual assault comes from an appeal to reputation rather than an appeal to the legitimate emotions of human beings.”

Senior and Exonians Against Sexual Assault (EASA) co-head Lyric Zimmerman shared similar thoughts. “I felt nausea and anger. A lot of anger. It’s one thing to normalize assault on campus. It’s another thing to normalize complete disregard for the words coming out of a victim’s mouth. It’s something you can barely comprehend as a human being,” Zimmerman said. “The things Sales touched on in her article makes you feel ashamed to be a part of this school, to use this school’s name to get into college. Makes me ashamed for doing any of that.”

“We just want news, information, communication, not just complete disregard for our humanity. I would’ve liked to see some proper accountability and an apology. I would like a [\*\*\*\*\*] apology. That would be beautiful to hear,” Zimmerman added. “That they understand what they did, how much they hurt. You hear the word harm, but you never hear ‘I am so sorry for the pain that I inflicted, how my ignorance and my stupidity and my inability to empathize and to think harmed you.’”

“Until we can say that every student is being supported and loved, until we can say that the kids who are using their power to inflict pain have stopped, the culture of sexual assault is not abolished in any form. Posters don’t change that. Maybe taking away school dances and public forms of interaction in times of COVID gave people the perception that it changed, but it didn’t,” Zimmerman said.

“This was evident when kids started laughing over a



Students gather at the steps of the Academy lawn as part of the Assembly strike, as Principal William Rawson looks on.

# Community Responds to Article, Continued

letter to the community sent during one of our school blocks. I don't believe there's been any change because we weren't yelling loud enough. The school's not losing money. They're not losing social status or appeal. They're not losing the alumni's support," Zimmerman reflected. "If the endowment isn't being affected, from an administrative standpoint, why would they change the system?"

Members of the Student Council (StuCo) have considered their role in recent events and discussions. Senior and Student Council Vice President George Venci said upon reading the *Vanity Fair* article, his "first instinct was to help and provide support to all students and ensure a sense of community for all students."

He sent an email encouraging dormitory and residential representatives to extend support to students. "An alternative purpose [for the email] was to support those dormitory and residential representatives and reiterate that the Executive Board has their back. Student leaders need to make themselves available and accessible to the students in their dorm. I hope that StuCo can always encourage that for our members," Venci said.

Venci said that the Student Council can "stay active in the discussions with the administration" in the future, bringing up the student body's concerns about sexual assault reporting policies during one of their regular meetings with Rawson, as well as stay updated on the investigation protocols.

Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) co-heads senior Jaden Sides and lower Rowan Flanagan had different reactions to the Academy's response. Flanagan felt "shock" and believed that both the article and Rawson's email were revealing of "the true colors of the campus and the Administration."

Sides agreed and noted the "powerless" and "desensitized" feeling that came along with hearing about the article. "I felt so numb to it...I wasn't particularly surprised...I was here for this sit-in my prep year. I was here when all this stuff was released about Kaminski and when this stuff was originally released about Weber," Sides said. "When first hearing about it, it felt like this awful sense of 'this has happened before.' I felt kind of just a sense of acknowledgement and then a bit horrified with myself that this is what I consider normal."

Many students have recognized that the Academy's policies disproportionately harm BIPOC students and queer students. "Queer students are very ignored, in the concept of reporting. A lot of these policies are horribly exclusionary to students," Sides said. "They...can't report without having their relationship outed and being forced to move dorms, having their parents notified and being outed to the community...the pressure is especially there for LGBTQ+ students on this campus and the disparities in reporting...I imagine that reporting would be even less common among LGBTQ+ students."

Flanagan pointed out the increased risk marginalized populations are at for assault.

"GSA, Black people, Black women, people of color ... in general, are statistically more likely to be victims of sexual assault, but also statistically less likely to be listened to, or to be given proper justice for what has been done to them...," Flanagan said.

Barrah shared similar thoughts. "I am a Black girl. I am statistically more likely to be sexually assaulted. I think this amplifies my feelings on the issue because I have more of a personal stake in what my communities think about sexual assault," Barrah said. "I hate having to say this, because it's almost as though I am predicting that it will happen to me (God forbid!) but I have to be frank. I really don't feel very safe anymore."

Since the Academy's response, many student leaders have felt the burden to support the entirety of the student body's distress. "I felt like I had to be a monolith. I felt like I had to represent all of my identities and be the person that a lot of people could come to and talk to," Flanagan said. "I felt that...I needed to be involved with everything possible because I didn't want someone to look around and not see themselves represented...even if that requires stretching myself thin. I felt I had to sacrifice some of myself, in order to help others."

On Thursday, September 16, three days after the release of the *Vanity Fair* article, student leaders from EASA, GSA, Fem Club and Transitions held a community space for "grief, healing, support for queer and BIPOC students, tangible action, and questions," according to their email.

"As coheads of the Feminist Union, Exonians Against Sexual Assault, Transitions, and Gender & Sexuality Alliance, we've noticed a repeated pattern of behavior, routine letters from the Principal, and a complete lack of change," the email stated.

"We want to acknowledge and give autonomy to the complex nature of Ms. Sales' story, but importantly, we want to note that her article has sparked conversations about sexual assault reporting on our campus and has shed light on how the reporting process fails to be trauma-informed."

"We understand that for the older students at Exeter, this article may bring to mind the tiring cycle of demanding transparency about the reporting process and sexual assault on our campus and in turn, failing to see substantive change from the administration. For new students at Exeter, we understand that this article is jarring—our campus is a place where you should feel safe, and we are deeply disappointed that this will have sparked your first conversations on campus about sexual assault, consent, and healthy relationships," the email continued.

Upper and Transitions co-head Priya Nwakanma described the planning process behind the Community Healing Session. EASA, Feminist Club, GSA and Transitions co-heads met on Tuesday, September 14 and spent the following two days organizing the event.

Nwakanma said that the Community Healing Session, "in contrast to the protest, was a collaboration

between the students and the administration."

"We met with some [of the] deans and we got their suggestions, we got their concerns and we did our best to address those concerns," Nwakanma said. "A lot that went into it, a lot of people who had to sign off on it, and [it was] a lot of work for everyone involved."

Additionally, Nwakanma commented on the improved inclusivity of the conversations about sexual assault among student leaders. "I really respect and admire Fem Club leaders for making the decision to loop Transitions into this, because I know originally it was just Fem Club and EASA, and they felt like they needed a voice specifically for women of color. And obviously they looped GSA into it as well. I think that was a good decision," she said.

Sides shared their reflections on attending the community space. "Since we had affinity spaces, I feel like a lot of people left with a stronger feeling of community and a stronger feeling that they are not alone here and that there are people that they can go to. Exeter, despite its flaws, is not just this miserable place of just you go there and you're bound to just be just sad," Sides said.

Zimmerman said, "I hope people who attended the community circle left feeling heard at the end of the day. I wanted them to walk out of the Thompson Gym feeling as though their anger, their sadness and their confusion, in some way, shape or form, was a little lifted from their shoulders from just listening to others. In listening to the voices and the ideas and the pain of others and in keeping the pride and the passion of others with them. That is how you build community."

Some students believe that much of the solution to the Academy's problems lie in institutional changes that encourage a shift in perspective to the way sexual assault cases are handled. Sides said, "There has to be a system in place where the people that are receiving these reports are able to be trusted and possibly are more relatable to the student body so that there are people of color students can report to—people that they feel understand their experience in that these reports are actually acknowledged and are looked at not through a legal lens, but through a lens of 'this student is hurt. What, what does the student need?'"

"I know people of color, queer people, and people of other disproportionately affected minorities that have reported sexual assaults and been ignored by Palmer, by CAPS, by admin, by everybody. I know people have reported at different times and gotten ignored regardless of whether it was four years ago or one year ago," Sides added.

Flanagan expressed similar thoughts and added how trained professionals were needed within the reporting and handling process. "We are teenagers and you need years and years of training to know how to make things trauma-centered. And Palmer is not trained in that. We are not trained in that. You need professionals that are trained in how to deal with trauma," Flanagan said. "So expecting Palmer and students, and any people that do not have that training, is unreasonable and will further traumatize people."

## A Statement from Dr. Palmer

I feel disheartened. Disheartened that my work in support of victims/survivors on this campus is being overshadowed by this article that does not describe my work and the relationships I have on this campus. This work is my passion and career, and I am proud of what has been accomplished. I have felt honored to be one of the voices at the table for victims/survivors and anyone else impacted by sexual violence to ensure that this work remains a priority and does not get lost at the school. I understand for many victims/survivors, it might feel that no one cares or gets it... which is untrue.

In my 4 years here we have established an

Affirmative Consent Policy, an all-campus curriculum embedded in HHD classes on Consent, Healthy Relationships, Bystander training, dating violence, resources and now boundaries (which will be new this year). Being able to bring required programming such as HAVEN's Consent workshop, Boundary, and Bystander workshops, Now that We're Men (the play), introducing last year our first Take Back the Night (to give victims/survivors a space to speak), celebrating Denim Day, restorative justice circle practice that helped influence community conduct, being a part of the development and estab-

lishing a protocol practice for reporting as well as inviting student clubs such as EASA and Fem club to partner in some of these programs, including presenting to student leaders about the reporting process this year. I will always seek to partner with students about support/justice for those harmed by sexual violence.

I also recognize for some students that you may have lost trust in me, my role, and the school reporting process and therefore I believe it is important to speak or as much as I can with students without breaching confidentiality. My door is open to any and all students who want to speak with me.

When interviewed by *The Exonian*, Palmer provided a statement regarding her work experience and reaction to the *Vanity Fair* article. Her statement can be found in the top right corner of this page.

Senior Harry Gorman said, "You know, sexual assault is happening on this campus. We know it exists, and we know that the processes in place are ill-considered. But it's all hanging in the air. Reading the history of sexual assault in the article and thinking about just the utter lack of respect the survivors faced was a horrifying experience. We need victims to be able to find some peace afterwards, or at the very least be able to go on the path to find peace while on this campus."

"It is our collective grief and anger and sadness and the collective sense of totally being fed up with all this that drove this change. We truly owe our thanks to the student leaders who stood up during Community Healing and during the protest on Friday," Gorman added.

Entering the Academy as a new upper last year, Gorman noted that as a newer member of the Exeter community he felt less entitled to have a voice during this time of change. "Having family who came here before myself, I knew a little about what was going on. It's not uncomfortable for me to join in these conversations, and I wouldn't say I'm excluded from these conversations, but I'm always cautious to not step over others who have more experience being at the Academy than myself."

Sides agreed. "There are things that happen that are just really like a slap in the face and where you realize 'oh, so this is what's happening,'" Sides said. "It's not just the Administration that doesn't care. It's not just certain students that don't care. It's not just specific teachers. It's really ingrained in the culture of the academy."

Flanagan said, "I think for me, which is incredibly just sad...is having a conversation with preps about how to dress when they have certain classes and certain teachers, and having to warn them about the fact that they're not safe in their

own school environment and that not every adult that they are told to trust can be trusted."

"There is kind of little that you can do about that... 'disheartening' is the lightest word I can use in this circumstance," Flanagan continued.

Senior Lindsay Machado noted how, although there seems to be some form of change, most efforts are still student-led. "All [the Academy] is really doing is renaming these policies to something that's more palatable to students...I don't think we're really accomplishing anything at all. There have been changes in the past few years that I have appreciated: more consent workshops, more education and awareness for students...And I really think that credit goes to EASA," Machado said. "I think the administration is listening and I think they see us and I think they hear us, but ultimately this school is a business with a legal reputation. And I think that any leader or trustee board of said school is going to prioritize that first."

Machado added, "It hit me the other day when I was walking to class and I saw my good friend, Ana Casey, who is a co-head of EASA and had been doing so much in the last week...I saw her walking to class and she had, you know, the backpack and it kind of hit me that Ana is just a high school student and she is...still legally a child."

Like many students who attended the Academy in 2019, senior Teja Vankireddy expressed that the wave of change initiated by the sit-in at that time seemed to subside after a few weeks.

Vankireddy acknowledged that there were some changes implemented after the sit-in, such as the discontinuation of Principal's Discretion and the creation of the Sexual Misconduct Committee. However, in Vankireddy's view, the sentiments surrounding sexual assault on campus did not change.

Vankireddy hopes that the demands outlined in the petition written by student leaders will catalyze improvements to the Academy's response to sexual assault cases. "I

think they did a really good job of picking out tangible actions the school could take. Because a lot of what the school does is very performative, in that it's just spewing different [words] like 'we will do better.'"

Vankireddy recalled finding out about the *Vanity Fair* article before its publication. "There was a faculty email that was sent out the day before [the article publication]. I was in the common room and then an anonymous faculty member said something about the article," Vankireddy said. "And then I went online. I looked at it, looked it up and it was releasing the next day."

Upper Ina Mason commented on how Academy culture surrounding sexual assault has remained unchanged. "I think that the culture of this school is one that we have not talked about for a long time, because in personal experience and just hearing from other people, people are getting hurt on this campus," Mason said.

Additionally, Mason expressed that "the nature of [how] people talk about women is not healthy. It's not good. It's not right. Because a lot of people say that certain things are over-exaggerated when things are reported, that they're 'small' things and that whoever was the victim was over-exaggerating or over-emotional."

Mason hopes that misconceptions about sexual assault and sexual assault victims can be dismantled and that conversations surrounding them can be expanded to consistently include voices from people of all identities.

The wide range of student reactions to the *Vanity Fair* article seem to share a desire for progress, which students reported not experiencing despite Rawson's promises during and in the aftermath of the 2019 sit-in. The lack of trust between the Academy and the student body prompted student leaders to demand changes to the Academy's handling of sexual assault on campus in a protest that started on September 17. The community awaits as the Academy reevaluates its processes, policies and culture.

# Students Protest Academy's Policy, Continued

I realize how wrong I was. Three years later I can tell you with certainty that I do not feel safe. I am scared.”

“At just 16 I have also been forced to pick up slack from the administration. To help new students process their own fear, sadness, and uncertainty,” Jones continued. “And so I do. I talk with them at night, in the common room, the hallway, and the bathroom. I listen to them while they cry. I listen while they question their decision to come here. I listen while they question their safety. I listen when they ask, ‘What if it happens to me?’”

“I am up here not because I want to be, but because this

role of an adult for their peers, and change that is necessary to create an environment where sexual assault is not a primary concern for students during their second week of high school. This has not been the first time where conversations about sexual assault have arose on campus: this is a continuation. We as students have had enough. We want this year to be the final year where students who are here to learn feel obligated to assume the position of primary counselors,” Odums said.

Upper and Transitions co-head Lydia Osei criticized the administration's actions: “All of us gathering here together

sexual assault in their trauma and how to do that in the best way. We're advocating the best we can, but in no way the best possible way we could.”

Osei agreed, citing the need for support on campus. “A lot of students felt left in the dark and we felt a lot of pressure to be there and support students. The sexual assault policies weren't being discussed too often by adults on campus and none of my teachers brought it up until the protest,” Osei said. “We are tired of the level of pressure on us, especially this early. It's also important to recognize that this is not normal. We deserve to be heard, to be listened to and to

## Class Protest

Soon after the assembly protest, some students gathered on the stairs in front of the Lamont Art Gallery, calling for a class strike. Senior Ela Andreassen, one of the class strike organizers, stated that the strike was “to support the people who are feeling like they were emotionally unstable to go to class and they weren't feeling completely right. And it's okay. Because some of the other people here are also supporting you and we're also getting the same punishment.”

Feminist Union and EASA club members were informed of, but asked not to be affiliated with, the class strike. “We already planned to meet with the administration and we worked hard to be so careful about the planning so it could lead to productive conversation. There were parts of the class strike that we didn't think would lend themselves towards that productivity,” Casey said. “I think the ‘Dick me’ signs were really inflammatory and to people who are not affiliated with the school, it sounds weird.”

Busser built on that idea. “Especially since Transitions is run primarily by women of color and people of color, it's very easy for something like that to take away from the assembly strike,” they commented. “At the same time, I respect everyone and their actions. People are entitled to their expression—we need that.”

“Another thing is a lot of the faculty were really supportive of what we were doing and we were not striking against the faculty, we were striking against the way that the admin has taken care of the situation and all the situations before it,” she continued. “I think when you strike against faculty who are mostly on our side, it starts to erode some of that trust there and the support that they can provide.”

## Rawson Responds

Student leaders met with Principal William Rawson Monday to discuss possible policy changes and scheduled further meetings with other

the students would like the school to take, but I believe talking through the issues is the best way to achieve some common understanding under such circumstances,” Rawson said. “I hope the collaboration with students that followed the 2019 sit-in will provide a model for collaborative work with students now.”

## Community Reflections and Reactions

EASA advisor Barbara Desmond shared reactions of students shaken by the events. “I am hearing students express frustration that the school is not paying enough attention to the emotional impact of reports of sexual misconduct, from the past and recent past, on our current students,” Desmond said. “The students in my classes were sobered by the protest. They appreciated the chance to talk about it a bit, while also acknowledging and respecting that not everyone may want to talk about it in class.”

In response to the protest, English Instructor Patricia Burke decided to make space during Harkness discussions for her students on Friday. “My students had some in-class brainstorming for their next essay, and I added an open topic in case they needed to write about their experience at the protest or about the article,” Burke said. “This gave them a private space to process, reflect, or think about something else. I did not collect these.”

English Instructor Mercy Carbonell supported students' demands for changes and hoped for further changes in reporting policies. “I stand in solidarity with the organizers of the Community Healing on Thursday and the Protest on Friday,” Carbonell said. “While I believe in student activism and have witnessed the ways in which youth-based activism can make radical, essential change, I do not believe the labor should fall on students. As adults, we all must be trained in sexual assault prevention and must all practice trauma-informed care.”

“[Student leaders] should not have to be responsible for demanding change and raising awareness that will allow students to feel safe/

acknowledge the harm it's failure to handle the cases has caused. They need to hold themselves accountable. They need to support the student leaders.”

The student leaders also received incredible support from the alumni community, who were all equally angry with the way the school was handling these cases. “I think alumni I've spoken with are quite mad at the administration. If we were there, we'd be in the front lines of the protest, striking assembly,” Lisa commented. “We're really worried about our good friends that are still there and having to deal with this, because it's so emotionally taxing. I think we've been sending out a lot of texts to our good friends. Like, ‘Hey, please reach out if you need anything.’”

Those involved in conversations surrounding the Academy's handling of sexual misconduct did not just include returning students, faculty and alumni. New students offered their support as well. Prep Aiden Vieira-McCarthy said, “There have been events in the past few days at PEA [Phillips Exeter Academy] where kids have protested and have not gone to class because they're wanting to protest an issue that the administration has been dealing with. And I think that the school has a long history of sexual assault that hasn't gotten better over time. I think that what the students did was good. I think that they saw that they had an issue, they exercised their right to protest, and it was effective.”

Prep Sophia Jia said, “Throughout the admissions process, I've done a lot of research into the schools I applied to. And this is not only Exeter. I've seen a lot of stuff like this that has happened and that was one of my more major concerns when I was applying to boarding school. But I never thought that it was right in front of me, not until now.”

In an email sent to *The Exonian*, Sales expressed her gratitude and respect for student activism supporting sexual assault victims and redressing the Academy's reporting policies on sexual assault:

“To the students of Exeter: I've been a journalist for almost thirty years, but I've never been more moved by



Senior and EASA co-head Ana Casey speaks at the Assembly strike.

needs to end here. Because children should not have to pick up the burden left to us by the administration. And because we should not live in a community where we are scared,” Jones concluded.

Upper and Transitions co-head Priya Nwakanma echoed Jones' sentiment in her speech, stating that students alone should not have to carry the burden of recent events. “Nothing about this week has been easy. There is a wave of quiet anger and a boiling sadness, and for some people, it's their very first week here. They expected to spend this week walking carefully through Exeter's historical hallways, upholding the reputation that the administration tries so hard to protect. Instead, they have been witness to the incredible grief of a community trying to reckon with itself.”

Nwakanma questioned, “How many people on this campus are called into Dr. Palmer's office and treated not like victims, but like legal matters? How many people need to rehash each detail of their sexual assault until they're once again intimately aware of every curve of the memory? How many people, in an attempt to reclaim their agency, have it taken from them all over again? The answer is already too many.”

Senior and EASA co-head Ana Casey assuaged other students. “You do not deserve to go through what we have been through and what this school has put us through,” Casey said. “You do not deserve to shoulder the responsibility that the administration refuses to acknowledge is actually theirs.”

“However old you are, you are too young to be doing the administration's job for them. You deserve to feel like a kid. You deserve to enjoy school and learning and friends without this burden,” Casey continued. “And so all of us are standing up here on the steps today to tell you that that burden that was passed down to us, will not be passed to anyone ever again. It ends with us.”

Upper and Transitions co-head Ki Odums demanded change to the school's environment and the emotional burden students shoulder in supporting their peers in unsafe environments. “This is an outcry of change; change that is long overdue, change that allows children to be children and not feel the burden of responsibility to take on the

shows that we aren't and haven't been taken seriously. It shows that students aren't the focus and we're not willing to wait any longer for the administration to care about the wellbeing of the students. It shows that we want change.”

Senior and EASA co-head Lyric Zimmerman called for an end to complacency. “No longer will I accept the expectation for greatness while it's paired with no respect. I reject the undue burden thrust upon me to teach children wrong from right. I refuse to normalize that which hurts others for the sake of an elitist ignorance. I say this to ensure that no one after us goes through what those before us survived. I am done with my fear of this institution in which I am expected to change. Here's to the end of complacency,” Zimmerman said.

Upper and Feminist Union co-head Jennifer Finkelstein recited an alumni's call to action, which was directed to the Academy and its next steps. “I am grateful for the faculty and students who make Exeter the amazing place it is. I'm ready for Exeter to embrace this challenge for real, with honesty, transparency and dedication to getting it right. I hope Exeter can see this moment as the challenge that it is, and rise up to meet it.”

Jain concluded her speech by addressing the administration. “To the admin, do better or pay me. I, along with all of the amazing activists on campus, deserve to be a kid. Hire a consultant, an advocator with sexual assault experience. Make the survivor feel comforted, cared for, and listened to. We come first.”

## Assembly Protest Organizer Reflections

A list of demands drafted by student leaders was signed at the protest and online, calling for changes in the Academy's commitment to creating a safe environment for students.

Jain explained the motivation behind the assembly strike. “Our main goal was to protest the undue burden on student leaders, the lack of trauma informed care, and survivor-centered conversations,” Jain said.

Senior and Feminist Union co-head Janessa Vargas described the burden students face when coping with sexual assault trauma on their own. “We have no experience working in advocacy. We have not been professionally trained to deal with survivors of

be taken seriously.”

Zimmerman felt “incredible immense pride” when she stood up “I felt pride in that moment when I stood up there, speaking to everyone. Incredible immense pride. The support I felt in that moment, when the school watched me speak, listened to me, and how I articulated how badly this school did me wrong, did us wrong. That was a moment of euphoria. That I could physically see a difference being made, even if it was for 45 minutes.”

Jones added, “the article was a tough read and I was super shaken up, and I expected there to be more to the letter to our community email that we received, where they used all of this passive language of like ‘We're so sorry for the hurt that you feel that we have caused you,’ and it was really troubling that they referenced Dr. Palmer as someone to go see, even when the article was about her.”

“And so I expected that maybe we would talk about it more. And I went to a Student Listener that night, and I figured that we would have a conversation about it here, but we didn't,” Jones continued. “And so I think at the core, I was seen throughout the week by so many different students who had stories to share and concerns, and were scared that they weren't safe here. And the school did nothing to help prepare us or support us while we were giving those conversations,” Jones said.

Senior and EASA co-head Lila Busser spoke about how the administration expects student leaders to act like adults. “The school doesn't tell us what's going on. They don't tell us when they're making changes, or what the rules are, or why we can't know things, or what the legality is behind all of this, so they treat us like children in that respect,” she said.

“But they treat us like adults in that they expect us to be able to uphold and support the community while also trying to support ourselves, take care of our academics, sports, extracurriculars, clubs that we co-head, being student listeners and proctors,” Busser said.

“And then added on top: our social lives, having friends, enjoying high school and all of the opportunities that this place does offer. We should be experiencing the things that we're supposed to experience when we're kids, which is what we are, really,” they continued.



Students gather on the Lamont Gallery steps for a class strike.

relevant faculty. “Currently our plans depend on how the administration follows through. I had a meeting with them Monday night along with several other co-heads,” Jain said. “They were very receptive, and I'm cautiously optimistic.”

“We have work to do,” Rawson said in a speech to the Academy during the Core Values Project timeslot on September 21.

In an interview with *The Exonian*, Rawson expressed his opinions on the efficacy of the strikes. “Students must judge this for themselves. My door is always open to hear concerns of students, and I always favor working together toward common goals. There will be times when we disagree on some issues, or times when competing considerations preclude some actions that

respected. And yet what they created, designed & offered are acts of stunning courage, vulnerability, vision, purpose, and justice,” Carbonell said.

Charlotte Lisa '21 and former Student Council co-President agreed that the students did some admirable and impactful work. “All the best change that I've seen at Exeter is because of student protests,” Lisa said. “I couldn't be prouder of students protesting and putting in that emotional work and emotional labor to do that.”

In response to Sales' letter, Lisa expressed her opinions about the Academy not holding themselves accountable even after the article was published. “What the student leaders are asking for at this point feels a little bit like the bare minimum,” she said. “Like I think the academy needs to

the readers of any story I've done than I am by you. To see you rise up and take over this narrative and transform it in a positive way has been a wonderful thing to behold. Your support of each other, your commitment to change, and the clarity and grace with which you are doing all this is both stunning and humbling. I especially want to say thank you to EASA and the Feminist Union for helping lead the way. I also want to thank those of you who have reached out and expressed support for me personally. I know some of you are also survivors, and to you I send back my support and love. Thank you for giving us all hope for the future. What you are doing is beautiful and important. Please don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise.”

# A Million-Dollar Question

By DANIEL ZHANG '22

*Content Warning: mention of rape, grooming, sexual misconduct.*

It was the end of August when we called. There were still 48 minutes before my shift ended, but nobody was around when I surveyed the restaurant, so I ducked into the restroom before accepting the Messenger dial. “Hey,” I said over the phone, trying to be casual. “How have you all

stinctually, even though I still technically had a shift to finish. “I’ll write the email. You want me to—”

“CC, yeah, and add [the name of another editor] to that. Time of arraignment, initial statement, affidavit. You know.”

For a while, the call went silent. But I knew what we were all thinking. The initial frenetic groove of divvying up assignments was so familiar, it almost felt comfortable. It was something we recognized,

was the same uncomfortable feeling that something private had been exposed when the affidavit recounted the actions of teachers I had in class just months before with the clinical objectivity of legal narration.

We reread the affidavit over and over when a terrible realization began to settle, amidst all the legal jargon, interview transcripts, and archived texts. It is difficult to summarize the Kaminski situation in full for newer students, so I will direct you towards *The Exonian*

gations against Kaminski over the course of the investigation, and their parents expressed a desire not to have the concerns investigated. Detective Patrick Mulholland of the Exeter Police Department still described concern over these interactions and the possibility of grooming. The Academy issued a second warning in April 2016, requesting that Kaminski discontinue private interactions with the student.

On May 9, 2016, a month later, Campus Safety received reports that the student was seen walking to Kaminski’s apartment. Kaminski was later seen driving the student home. Campus Safety reported this incident to police. Mulholland raised to the student’s parents that Kaminski’s disregard of employer warnings was another sign of grooming.”

I imagined I was back in Mock Trial again, playing out a cross examination in my mind. All material within quotations is verbatim from the sworn legal affidavit in *State of New Hampshire v. Kaminski*, publicly available now on the New Hampshire Judicial Court’s website, so that I avoid confusion and move as closely to the facts as possible. Read closely.

In April of 2016, “Kaminski was told not to be alone with [the student] and not to drive her anywhere.” Yes—this is a direct quote from the affidavit.

On May 9 of 2016, “[the student] was seen walking to Kaminski’s apartment...he gave [the student] a ride home

ingly edited and revised, with keen attention paid to its construction and possible impacts. Consequently, the information that is included—and what is not included—all becomes deliberate. You don’t just forget to include that Kaminski did the explicit thing he was told not to do, but virtually no notable consequences came as a result. In an effort as carefully measured and considered as the administration’s emails, you either choose to include it or you don’t.

The reason why I bring up this assumption is because it indicates a more fundamental problem with the Academy’s response to sexual assault cases in the present. There is no trust. Independent of any policy solution or public statement, the mutable, elusive, yet perhaps most critical quality of trust in the administration is missing from the students right now. The feeling is almost palpable, omnipresent on campus. This was the moment where I had lost trust in “the administration.”

I use the term “the administration” carefully. One rule I had when I served as Editor-in-Chief of *The Exonian* was to always replace “the administration” with “the Academy.” Because, I reasoned, “the administration” substituted real, hard-working people with a shadowy specter of authority, distancing them from the rest of the community which they, too, were a part of. Now, I think “the administration” is the appropriate nomenclature.

**“In 2016, after community members brought forward concerns, the Academy reported suspected boundary violations by Mr. Kaminski to the Exeter Police Department (EPD). EPD closed the case after consulting with the family and completing their investigation. The Academy placed Mr. Kaminski on written notice that certain actions would result in his termination.”**  
- Principal William Rawson in 2020 on Kaminski’s termination

afterward.” Again, yes—a direct quote from the affidavit. A direct violation of the warning he received just a month prior.

“[A former dean] made contact with Kaminski via email regarding this instance.” So yes, the administration was aware—and apparently cared enough to send him an email.

But one critical fact remains. If this was Mock Trial, I would be staring straight at the judge as I delivered this line: but Kaminski was not fired afterwards—even after he explicitly violated the two boundaries he was ordered to observe after multiple reports from multiple community members, even after the Exeter Police Department explicitly warned they suspected grooming, the only consequences were an email and a letter. Kaminski’s employment was not terminated.

I would know his employment was not terminated. Because two years later, in the fall of 2018, he lifted my suitcase into the third floor of Front Street and welcomed me to Exeter.

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The million-dollar question is why. It’s the same question an editor asked me to send to Rawson at the time when *The Exonian* was brainstorming follow-up questions. “But,” the editor said casually, “you know there’s no way he responds.”

Perhaps this was an unfair assumption, but it was one that made sense to me at the time. After all, if the administration had omitted this critical fact in their initial email, why would they now explain it? When an email comes “From the Principal,” it is a fair assumption that the text has been painstakingly

of Mr. Kaminski’s breaches and failures to abide by Academy instructions this year, which at the time would have been 2020? Was “[the student in question]” not “seen walking to Kaminski’s apartment” in May of 2016 as the affidavit said? Was it not also seen that “[Kaminski] gave [the student] a ride home afterward” in May of 2016? And wasn’t it the case that “[a former dean] made contact with Kaminski via email regarding this instance”—this time, in September of 2016? At the risk of sounding insufferable, 2016 is pretty definitely before 2020. So what was going on?

We also asked in the same initial email:

“Additionally, could you kindly provide us with the written notice? If that would prove difficult, we would appreciate it if you could share when the letter was sent, who sent it, and, if possible, an overview of its contents. We would particularly like to understand what these certain actions were listed as.”

They responded:

“The Dean of Faculty sent a letter to Mr. Kaminski in September, 2016, placing him on written notice that failure to abide by the letter would result in his termination. We treat personnel files as confidential and cannot provide the written notice.”

There are so many questions left. But amidst the constellation of confusion, one fact becomes abundantly clear from deduction. The school

been?”

“What the f\*\*k,” a friend said in response. “What the f\*\*k is going on?”

Just seconds before, the familiar chime of an Outlook notification heralded the vague subject line “A Letter to Our Community.” It was the summer before my upper year, a week before school would begin in the fall of 2020. When I read the unspecific subject line, I expected news about the pandemic—more specifics about masking or social distancing guidelines.

I began to read. “I am sharing distressing information in the attached letter about a former faculty member, whom many of you may know...” From the body of the email, which did not delve into details, I thought someone had passed away before I clicked to expand the attached PDF.

“I am writing to inform the Exeter community that the Rockingham County Attorney’s office today has filed criminal charges against former math instructor Szczesny (Jerzy) Kaminski for multiple counts of sexual assault involving a former Exeter student,” Principal Rawson’s letter began. Oh, I had thought. Another? I swiped away from the email, looking up again for new customers, my boss roaming around. Then, after a few seconds, an almost comically long period, I realized that I recognized the name. Every Tuesday night for the past year, he had been the one to say “Thank you, Daniel” as I checked in. On a January morning after a poor math midterm, he slowly explained the limit definition of e to me.

that we knew how to navigate without question. But after that, we did not know what we were doing. A teacher we had seen on the paths for years, who had taught our math classes, who, in my case, was my interim adviser who I had seen every Wednesday for the past year—was a rapist.

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I left Mock Trial to make more time for *The Exonian*, but I found myself oddly grateful for my time in the club when I first received the affidavit. A few hours after the news, we called Tammy Jackson, the media point person for the New Hampshire Judicial Branch, for a copy of the Rockingham Superior Court’s affidavits—“We’re a newspaper,” we had said hopefully, conveniently omitting the “high school” part in hope that she would consider us professional enough. That night, she confirmed that yes, she would send the affidavit over—and that we could call in to the arraignment tomorrow, at 7:00 a.m.

I don’t consider myself a sensitive or easily disturbed person—I don’t mean to say this to fashion myself as some kind of stoic, but it’s just not really who I am. But I will never forget groggily dialing the number Ms. Jackson provided at 6:57 a.m. the next day and almost immediately afterwards hearing Kaminski’s low voice confirm that he was present.

Right after the arraignment, we began to dissect the affidavit. The reality of the case began to settle in as we encountered the initials of adults we recognized—administra-

article we produced for background information necessary for reading this article further: <https://theexonian.net/news/details-kaminski>. I will excerpt the most relevant portions just a little farther below if you really don’t have the time. Here is how Principal Rawson described the Kaminski situation in his initial email:

“In 2016, after community members brought forward concerns, the Academy reported suspected boundary violations by Mr. Kaminski to the Exeter Police Department (EPD). EPD closed the case after consulting with the family and completing their investigation. The Academy placed Mr. Kaminski on written notice that certain actions would result in his termination.”

There is one piece of critical information—our million dollar question—conveniently missing from Rawson’s paragraph that was present in the affidavit. Now hopefully, you have heeded my earlier advice and read *The Exonian* article which fully explains the situation—it will get confusing without this necessary exposition. But as promised, here is the excerpt from *The Exonian*:

“In the fall of 2015, the Dean’s Office received a report of Kaminski coming and going from the anonymous student’s dormitory at odd hours. Kaminski frequently drove this student to music lessons in Boston, and he tutored them privately within his own residence at 74 Front Street. The Academy received more reports of suspicious interactions between Kaminski and the student in 2016. Notably, faculty members reported an

**“In the fall of 2015, the Dean’s Office received a report of Kaminski coming and going from the anonymous student’s dormitory at odd hours. Kaminski frequently drove this student to music lessons in Boston, and he tutored them privately within his own residence at 74 Front Street. The Academy received more reports of suspicious interactions between Kaminski and the student in 2016. Notably, faculty members reported an incident where the student had been late to check-in. Dorm faculty later discovered they had been at Kaminski’s residence.”**

- *The Exonian*

And now, he was a name on a Messenger notification to a familiar group chat that had rested dormant for most of the summer—“142 Exec + News,” *The Exonian*’s News group chat: “Kaminski???”

At the time, I was serving as a News Editor for the paper, and knew that my afternoon was now going to be very, very long. Within minutes, we were on a call. “Okay, okay,” an editor said, “So he was arrested? So let’s reach out to the Rockingham County Attorney’s Office.”

“I can do that,” I said in-

tors, faculty members, probably the same cold recognition many of you felt when you read the *Vanity Fair* article and stumbled upon specific names unique to the milieu of Exeter such as “William Rawson” and “Dutch House.” Names that felt familiar, comfortable to us. It used to feel like we were all in on the same inside reference, the minutiae of Exeter’s landscape uniquely ours, only recognizable among our community. But now, it wasn’t just us who were “in” on it—thousands of readers would now recognize these names. It

incident where the student had been late to check-in. Dorm faculty later discovered they had been at Kaminski’s residence.”

The Academy opened an investigation in 2016, and the student’s parents were notified. The student’s mother reportedly stated that they “trust[ed] Kaminski and [were] not concerned.” Two anonymous deans met with Kaminski and discussed boundary issues; Kaminski was warned not to be alone with the student and not to drive them anywhere.

The student denied all alle-

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As much as I love *The Exonian*, I have to admit, at times, it does not feel entirely necessary. Yes, we knew so-and-so came to Assembly, and yes, we know this policy which was just announced in an all-school email does this. But this was the first time I had

# A Million-Dollar Question, Continued

stumbled upon a real information vacuum. This was the first time our article would be undoubtedly consequential. This was the first time I had to ask myself: if not us, then who?

I researched the articles by professional news outlets—*AP*, *Seacoast Media*, *Union Leader*, etc.—to see if any other newspaper had noted the 2016 discrepancy. They did not. In other words, the only place where the requisite information to form the million-dollar question is the legal affidavit and *The Exonian*. The only place where the million-dollar question is asked is *The Exonian*.

I don't say this as a means of inflating the value of the article we wrote, or patting ourselves on the back. I say this because I want you to entertain for a moment: if that article did not exist, how many people on campus would think the Kaminski case was an incident that was promptly and comprehensively addressed by the administration? How many people would have thought it was something the school handled "correctly?" Can you consider, for a second, an alternate

the past few years. But this question revealed an erroneous impression that I was quite disturbed by—by no fault of the prep's. The impression that all we are talking about, taking action against and protesting is "old news" from the past being dredged up on the shore in the present. It is not. The school's decisive inaction took place in 2016, a mere five years ago. As a consequence, Kaminski was still teaching at this school just last winter.

Here's another point, perhaps even more critical: why were four high school kids the decisive factor between our community's awareness of the administration's mishandling of the Kaminski case and our community's blissful ignorance?

Again, I am not trying to portray the authors of that article and myself as valiant defenders of truth. I am very conscious of being self-indulgent in writing this article. I am just quite literally saying that it is so, so irresponsible to have untrained, non-professional children distributing that very critical portion of information that has so critically defined

exist in the first place if Principal Rawson just told the full story in his email. If the administration just owned up to the uncomfortable elephant in the room and said: yes, Kaminski did breach his explicit warning from the Academy, and yes, we did not fire him when we did.

The conclusion reached from the affidavit—that the Academy just didn't think Kaminski's violation of the warning warranted termination of his employment—is honestly an acceptable answer. Well, define acceptable—I think it would be a very, very stupid, irresponsible, and reckless decision, and one I would frown upon heavily as a student, but it would be an answer. In the absence of an answer, however frustrating that answer may be, mistrust persists. And that is all I feel right now: mistrust.

Exonians are naturally cynical. When you spend so much time in class encouraged to critically dissect all information you receive, the cynic in you naturally grows. I wrote earlier in this article that the absence of information must be just as deliberate

momentous is not always good for one's personal health.

A friend of mine always used to say that I was a "hardo." Again, I don't mention this because I like to indulge

March of 2021, the beginning of my upper spring. They began again last Monday, after I finished reading Sales' *Vanity Fair* article.

I feel so odd writing that I

been frank and forthright in including that information in their initial email, in owning up to that million dollar decision five years ago, that burden would have been lifted from

## Why were four high school kids the decisive factor between our community's awareness of the administration's mishandling of the Kaminski case and our community's blissful ignorance?

in an image of myself as someone who can trudge past all of this. I say this to articulate: it is completely possible to feel you have the emotional capacity and professional competency to address an issue as a student leader (and that may very well be the reality), and it is also completely possible to suffer unforeseen personal consequences to your mental health in the future and navigate deeply inappropriate situations as a consequence of taking on the work. Those two truths can co-exist. When we published our coverage of Kaminski, I felt capable, confident. I felt that I had surmounted an obstacle that proved my professionalism and ability as a high school journalist. But in the week following, I felt scared, anxious. Four days after the case, the advisers of *The Exonian* reached out with an offer to meet with Counseling and Psychological Services to discuss the article.

I texted a fellow editor and friend right after to ask if they would go. "Idk," they responded.

Later that night, we called. I would hate to make this article about myself, but I feel that it is constructive to share this. We both confessed to each other that we had been having nightmares ever since. It's difficult to articulate the scope of what we witnessed in the affidavit and the arraignment, especially because we chose to omit so much of the more graphic and horrifying details in the final article. The most awful text messages, graphic descriptions, and disgusting transcripts seared themselves into my mind. I didn't eat much until the next week. We still talked about the consequences of that article on our personal health—as friends, and as editors—throughout the rest of the year. Every time I walked by his former classroom, my feet skidded over the linoleum to a stop, if only just for a second. I still had nightmares until around

"had nightmares." I feel like a little kid peering into my mom's room at night to tell her I had a bad dream. It's somewhat humiliating to disclose this in the pages of the school newspaper, and as much as I have disclaimed otherwise, I do want people on campus to view me as a serious and capable leader. Even though I shouldn't, I almost feel like I'm just complaining, asking for your attention.

The brave vulnerability of student leaders on Friday reminded me that being frank and open with my feelings does not contradict my right to be taken seriously. And for that, I cannot thank them enough. There is more than one way to lead. Leadership through vulnerability is the bravest way I know.

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A leftover instinct from when I was an editor for *The Exonian* is to ask myself: okay, Daniel, what is the purpose of this article? If my reader could only walk away with a few takeaways, what would you say?

Now that I am a writer, I can more explicitly summarize. One—I want you to keep asking our million dollar question: why was Kaminski not fired after he violated his warning in May of 2016?

Two—I want an answer to that question.

Three—I want to know why the administration's initial email did not acknowledge Kaminski's violation of his warning.

Four—I want to emphasize how frightening it is that if *The Exonian* did not publish its article, Kaminski's violation would not have been written anywhere except a murky legal affidavit few people even have access to, and how even more frightening it is that four high school students were in charge of keeping the world I just described an "if" statement rather than a reality. If the administration had just

our shoulders—which, personal burden and stress aside, is the functionally responsible choice for handling sensitive information and the community's wellbeing.

Five—A faculty member recently asked me out of genuine goodwill what the labor student leaders take on, as referenced at the protest, looks like. I don't even consider myself much of a leader anymore, or to carry that heavy of a burden, but that question reminded me that we should be communicating, sharing our own stories of what labor looks like to us so that we can all understand one another more—students and adults alike. None of our experiences are the same, but they all need to be heard. In order for the administration to adequately remedy the burden placed upon student leaders, they need to be listening. In order for us to support one another as part of a community, we need to be listening. The writer Kazuo Ishiguro said in his 2017 Nobel Prize lecture, "In the end, stories are about one person saying to another: This is the way it feels to me. Can you understand what I'm saying? Does it also feel this way to you?" Well, this is the way it feels to me. Can you understand what I'm saying? Does it also feel this way to you?

So what now? Demand answers. Thank the leaders of EASA, Fem Club, Transitions, and anyone else you know who was affiliated with the protest's organization, and don't forget about last Friday. Reflect on the significance of this moment in Exeter's history to you. Stay aware and updated on how our community is organizing. Share your own story in whatever medium and capacity you see fit. And above all, keep listening to one another. Reserve judgement and pursue understanding. We are most Exonian when we are listening to one another.

## The brave vulnerability of student leaders on Friday reminded me that being frank and open with my feelings does not contradict my right to be taken seriously. And for that, I cannot thank them enough. There is more than one way to lead. Leadership through vulnerability is the bravest way I know.

Exeter where the administration has our unearned trust at the expense of the truth? What does that Exeter look like to you?

A prep came to talk to me about Friday's protest (an inspiring act of bravery, and an incredible feat of strength from the student leaders of Exonians Against Sexual Assault (EASA), Feminist Union, Transitions, and other campus organizations) the other day. He asked a clarifying question—"Well, aren't all these cases from the 80s? So has the school mishandled a case that's happened in...the past decade?"

A comprehensive reading of Nancy Jo Sales' *Vanity Fair* article yields a resounding yes. The 2019 protest comes to mind, and though Sales' story may have happened outside of this decade, it was most certainly responded to within

the landscape of trust between students and the administration. If a similar case were to come out today, I honestly would not trust myself—not because I doubt my commitment to sound journalism, but because functionally speaking, it just makes no sense to rely upon high schoolers to do a job professionals should be doing. It's so irresponsible. What if we messed up? What if we had gotten a critical fact wrong? What if we had not presented information in the most trauma-informed manner possible and hurt someone?

But what if we didn't try? What if we let that information vacuum go unattended?

Here are my two roads diverging in a yellow wood: let the Academy's mistake in 2016 go unknown, or let high schoolers take their best shot at responsibly communicating it. But this dilemma would not

as the presence of information in a letter as carefully prepared as the one Rawson sent—this is not the kind of information that gets accidentally omitted. The cynic in me has to ask: "Did the administration not include Kaminski's violation of his warning because they were hoping nobody would find out?" And would nobody have ever found out if some random high schooler didn't call Tammy Jackson that August afternoon?

I want to be proven wrong. But I haven't been yet.

\*

I have a difficult personal relationship with the concept of "emotional labor," as many other student leaders do too. The Kaminski article felt momentous, a critical service to our community that exemplified *The Exonian's* potential. But at the same time, what is

## A Statement from PATH

By LARRY BOUCHIE '79, JULIAGRAY '97, ANN MALABRE '81, ZANDER PROCOPIIS '80 and VALERIE WAGNER '83.

PEA Alumni for Truth & Healing (PATH) stands with current students and alumni to reiterate that Exeter is ethically and morally letting down survivors of abuse at Exeter and the broader Exeter community.

In her recent *Vanity Fair* article, "Mr. Weber's Confession," alumna Nancy Jo Sales writes about her experience of disregard and dismissal by those representing Exeter as she tried to assert her voice in the extraordinary mishandling of her own experiences

by Exeter's administration and legal counsel. Presently current student leaders are petitioning for Exeter to retain an expert consultant with a background of sexual violence prevention and advocacy. These student leaders are bearing the weight of supporting the student body in processing these events without professional guidance or support from the school administration.

PATH shares the concerns of the Exeter community that the campus may be no safer for students today than it was in decades past. Our calls for sensitivity, transparency, and accountability in handling reports of sexual misconduct remain sadly relevant in light of recurring stories of the

mishandling of abuse allegations—including those involving Nancy Jo Sales and the arrest of Mr. Kaminski last year. PATH is dismayed to hear that the current students feel they have been tasked with supporting their peers without adequate support themselves. This underlines, once again, the need for robust training at all levels in responding to sexual harm.

It is clear from Nancy Jo's article that Principal Bill Rawson's words to PATH from February 2019 expressing "deep regret for harm that has been caused to survivors by past incidents of sexual misconduct and past mishandling of incidents of misconduct," accepting "full responsibility and the com-

mitment to support those harmed," and promising to "engage in principled decision-making with a commitment to act with compassion, understanding and fundamental fairness" remains as empty today as it was three years ago. Five years after the disclosures about Rick Schubart, Exeter has still not developed credible strategies to achieve these promises and objectives.

PATH reiterates the need for:

Transparent and full disclosure of the scope of sexual misconduct at Exeter with acknowledgment that the H&K investigation was incomplete and mismanaged

by Exeter;

A survivor centered and trauma-informed reporting process with truly independent investigations;

A survivor centered and trauma-informed mediation process for survivors to process claims against the school that is not retraumatizing and raises the bar from meeting only legal responsibilities to satisfying Exeter's moral and ethical responsibilities to its students and alumni; and

Transparency in the steps the school is taking to increase training and hold adults accountable when failing to report or respond appropriately and sensitively to reports of sexual misconduct.

A representative on the

board of trustees with expertise in sexual violence advocacy and prevention

Nancy Jo's painful reporting, and the activism of current Exeter students, create a new opportunity for Exeter to reconcile its commitment to knowledge and goodness with humility and responsive leadership. Exeter can – and must – do better.

Ann Malabre ('81)  
Julia Gray ('97)  
Valerie Wagner ('83)  
Zander Procopis ('80)  
Larry Bouchie ('79)

The photos in this issue are dedicated to past and present survivors of sexual assault and harassment. They were taken on the assembly strike on September 16, with the consent of EASA, Feminist Union, GSA, Transitions and individual students. **We stand with you.**

In solidarity,  
Joy Chi, Teja Vankireddy and William Park  
*Photo Editors of the 143rd Exonian Board*

This issue aims to center survivors of sexual assault and harassment. We hope *The Exonian* serves as a platform for these important and often-ignored voices. We recognize and honor the labor that advocates undertake, especially in their interviews with *The Exonian*. **We stand with you.**

In solidarity,  
Moksha Akil, Lina Huang and Anya Tang  
*143rd Executive Board*

# Editor's Corner: Let Us Grieve.



Senior Anya Tang holds a sign at the Assembly strike.

By ANYATANG '22,  
EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER

*Content Warning: mention of sexual assault, suicide*

The prevailing question on campus, after the publication of Nancy Jo Sales' *Vanity Fair* article, overheard from Exonians walking back to class and teachers noticing more and more bleary, red eyes at the table, is "How are you doing?"

When asked, I've been responding with a shaky smile and a half-joking, half-missing-the-words-to-describe-my-feelings, "I'm doing."

When asked to elaborate, I've also been responding with a less light-hearted, "I'm just going from one thing to the next." I say that because I'm afraid of what will happen when I stop. I'm afraid that if my productivity dwindles, that if my hands aren't sending emails and flipping flashcards and sorting laundry, that I will have to rest. And I dread when I have to rest, because then I know that I will have to grieve.

At the quiet moments in my days, when Williams House is asleep, when I lie in bed and stare at my white ceiling, I close my eyes. I close my eyes, and I see everything I relegated to the confines of my memories. I hear words I can never forget, replay scenes in my head I can't pause, and feel things I never wanted to feel again.

And then I wake up and repeat yesterday. "How are you doing?" a well-meaning teacher asks. "I'm doing."

I'm afraid of what will happen when I stop saying those words, because I'm not yet ready for business as usual. So I stay in my limbo of toiling away, dreading those late nights where I stare at my white ceiling and close my eyes. I'm doing, but I'm not feeling.

Grief is a counter-productive emotion. I mean that literally, not negatively. Grief is a barrier to the productivity that sustains a capitalist and white supremacist system. Grief stops me from working. It holds me tight, rendering each word of this op-ed sluggishly difficult to type, until I turn around and finally confront my grief. Though it can be good that we channel our grief to imagine and implement transformative solutions as well as abolishing conditions that exploit our labor and our bodies, we shouldn't just dismiss the inherent counter-productivity of grief. In my time at Exeter, my grieving has earned judgemental statements from students and dismissive emails from faculty. I've learned that grief at Exeter occupies a space that is more logistical and administrative than anything: grief becomes a matter of how many emails I must send to leave class, how many matter-of-fact conversations I need to have with others to explain myself over and over again, and how many times I can hold back my tears from spilling over as I tell a teacher that I'm really not doing okay and I'm so sorry but if I could please just not come to class today I would finally get a chance to rest. For better or for worse, I've learned to get better at holding these tears back.

In a capitalist system that prioritizes productivity over people, I can't take another day to rest, I can't skip meetings, and I certainly can't miss class to grieve. Even at an institution like Exeter, with its extensive resources for psychological and physiological support that my local public schools don't have, the one thing I constantly lack is the ability to embrace the counter-productivity of grief. For example, I find that our accommodations for grieving are frequently described as "making space," if only because the space to grieve is

not a normative function of our classroom or education. I cannot stop in my tracks, sit down, and cry. I can't utilize the processing spaces offered by this school to their fullest extent because it always feels like there are deadlines to meet, essays to write, emails to open. I can't pretend that my grief is linear, an administrative task to be delegated and checked off once I finally say I'm doing better. To do so would be to resume business as usual, and there is nothing usual about the exhaustion I feel.

My grief is the late nights crying huddled in the corner of my room, the too-tight hugs, the radical act of feeling hurt in a system that prioritizes production and deadlines over our humanity. When I am hurt, I cannot work—I refuse to work when I am hurt. Grieving is an act of protest, inherently radical in its refusal of the status quo. As the AIDS activist group ACT UP! would say at their protests, "NO MORE BUSINESS AS USUAL."

Instead of returning to the status quo in these coming weeks, I urge teachers to forego or alter their curriculum to benefit both student and teacher well-being. From small practices such as including trigger and/or content warnings before traumatizing readings, to larger changes such as moving tests back in favor of starting a unit early or turning individual labs into class collaborative labs to save time and build community, the classroom can become a space for us to feel safe and process our emotions. I know students who find each class difficult because their recent readings discuss topics of suicide and sexual assault. Going to class each day is a retraumatizing experience for them, and without the option to opt-out of these readings or sit out of class for a day, their process of grieving and healing is continually disrupted

by the lack of safety in their learning environments. Lastly, I urge teachers to stop marking students absent as rigidly or frequently, and to alter their late policies or remove them entirely. I've noticed that conversations with tardy students frequently identify emotional, physical, or psychological issues, and during this period of grief, many of my friends have found it hard to get to classes on time when waking up each morning and going to classes with unrecognized trauma feels like a Sisyphean challenge. Most students I know would love to miss a class or spend a day in the safety of their rooms, or with a trusted adult, just to have a moment to truly talk with someone who cares about them and release the dam of emotions many of us have been holding in. Absence policies and tardy policies deter students (especially new students) from advocating for themselves, a skill we already encourage on this campus.

For students: please rest. There are so many of you I know and care deeply about that are continuing to stretch yourselves beyond your emotional limits. Set boundaries for yourself. Hug your friends closely. Hug yourself. Run into the woods and scream until your throat is hoarse (and then drink warm tea afterwards in the comfort of your room). Lift heavy things and put them down and lift them again until you reach an arbitrary number. Hold yourself until you fall asleep. Rest in unconventional ways. Apologize; demand apologies. Don't go to class if you can't; one absence is worth infinitely less than your soul and body. If you feel yourself changing, lean into it. Grief changes people. This sh\*t is traumatizing.

One common narrative I've heard in response to these calls for radical empathy is

that there are always those out to misuse our empathy, those with ill will who plan to exploit the "easier" version of Exeter during our time of grieving. To these naysayers, I warn them of their parallels in mindset with other traditionalists too inflexible to accept transformation: the conservatives who disparaged expansions in social security through the racialized stereotype of the "welfare queen," NIMBYs (an acronym standing for "Not in My Backyard") gathering to complain of undocumented immigrants because "there are always the bad ones," and police apologists who defend continually-expanding carceral systems on the basis that "there are always unchangeable evils out there." Each one of these arguments relies on the assumption that a solution or proposed change will be exploited by a group of evil-doers, all inherently unable to change. I recognize the validity of the response, one rooted in the myriad experiences of being hurt by an unchanging institution over and over again. But I also hope to problematize the justification of this response. If we do not give others the grace of our ability to radicalize them, or understand them beyond their performance, then we leave behind the solidarity needed to give a movement momentum. Especially for my white, cisgender, or non misogyny-affected friends: use your labor to change those "unchangeable evils." Speak with the people we do not have the emotional labor or capacity to speak with. We may find solidarity in the most unexpected places, and that may be a reason for us to challenge our expectations.

Similarly, I find that there exists a narrative of how to "grieve correctly." That to grieve in the wrong places with the wrong people, to grieve too loudly, to grieve in an unorganized manner, is to grieve

wrongly. These narratives warn that if we do not portray the delicate, silent conditional grief we associate with grieving at Exeter, that our demands generated by our grief will be delegitimized. That those dominant powers in place will ignore our grief. I find this narrative disparaging and self-defeating. To apply respectability politics to grief, especially grief as a form of radical refusal and protest, runs counter to the tactics and organizing structures utilized by queer and trans\* Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian organizers from college campuses to the New York Stock Exchange. In policing others' grief, in willingly delegitimizing others' grief to prop up the "right way to grieve," we reproduce white supremacist hierarchies of grief that silence voices at the margin in a way that representation politics might never check back for. What does it matter if, for every instance of queer and trans\* melancholia I see platformed, that 20 others are silenced and told to grieve in a different way? For those of us feeling grief and discontentment with others' grieving: stop policing others' grief. A community's grief is not yours to control. It never should be and never was your burden. If we do not recognize these people are deeply-hurt individuals that are part of the same community as us, our organizing and our grieving reproduces the same systems we seek to abolish. We are building the same prisons around others that we seek to dismantle. We need to stop policing grief.

At the class strike held on September 17, I spoke with people who I'd wrongly assumed didn't have stories of their own to share, or didn't plan on staying to show solidarity with those demanding their emotional space be respected by the school's rigid schedules. I learned about grief as it manifests in each facet of our diverse community, and the openness the students at this school have to learning and unlearning their own relationships to grieving.

I find, after all my reflection on grief, that I know little more about grieving than I did before writing this piece. We are conditioned to think and act in certain ways, we can also be conditioned to love and become in new transformations yet unimaginable. We all grieve, in different ways. In manners that are less visible than others. We laugh, we cry, we burn metaphorical bridges, we burn literal bridges, we shout. At our core, we all grieve. We grieve differently, as part of a greater movement under the control of no one student or faculty or administrative member. Our solidarity comes first from the fundamental recognition that you are feeling the same way I am, though for potentially-different reasons and in a potentially-different form. So, I say to this school: let me grieve in the way I want. Let us grieve.

## The Exonian

We would like to acknowledge the Squamscott/Penacook peoples who were the first peoples of this land. We would like to honor their ancestors, descendants and future generations for caring for this area and allowing us to be here today.

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*The Exonian* reserves the right to print Letters to the Editor in a timely fashion and to edit them for content and clarity.

## Demands from Exonians Against Sexual Assault, Feminist Union, Gender Sexuality Alliance and Transitions

We are protesting the unfair burden that the Academy places on student leaders due to their negligence in communications surrounding sexual misconduct.

We, as student leaders, will no longer continue to accept this burden for the sake of protecting our students. The Academy must take responsibility for supporting the general student body and allow student leaders the space to live and learn at the Academy without the responsibility of fixing the Academy.

Additionally, we are asking the Academy to acknowledge their role in inflicting harm upon students who have been failed by the Academy when they decide to report sexual misconduct. Furthermore, the Academy must take responsibility for the active role they have played in inflicting harm and work to minimize harm to survivors in the future.

### Our Demands:

1. The Academy must hire an expert consultant that comes from a background of sexual violence prevention and advocacy. This consultant will be present during all discussions of how and when to present information to the student body, and will advocate for the general school community in these situations. Currently, this position does not exist and the responsibility of supporting the general student body through processing these events falls on student leaders.
2. The Academy must better support student leaders who are expected to provide space and assistance to the general student body following the release of sensitive information. Though student leaders have risen to the emotional burden of supporting our peers regarding topics surrounding the Academy's history of mishandling cases of sexual misconduct, none of us have adequate time or training to handle such responsibilities. Student leaders deserve a warning before the general student body is notified of sensitive information as leaders are expected to bear so much of the following emotional burden.
3. The Academy must reevaluate the position of Director of Student Health and Well-Being. For student leaders to be relieved of many of the burdens involving reporting, there must be significant trust between the student body and the person they are expected to report to. That trust is not built easily, but currently there is none between the DSHWB and students. This position must be held by someone students can fully trust and by someone trained specifically in sexual-assault focused trauma care. The Academy must expand the position to involve multiple people as the burden of being reported to 24/7 is too much for one person to bear. The Academy must work with student groups (such as Exonians Against Sexual Assault and Feminist Union) to reevaluate the position and make the process more trauma-informed so that students can finally feel comfortable reporting to the school and using Academy-provided support systems.
4. The Academy must acknowledge the harm its failure to handle cases effectively causes students, and take responsibility for said harm. Language in all communications from the Academy must not be passive and must actively acknowledge their role in any events being addressed.



The organizers of the Assembly strike on the steps of the Academy Building.