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WPI looks into reports of abuse by fraternities

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE STAFF MARCH 12, 2014

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Worcester Polytechnic Institute and campus police are investigating allegations that female students were subjected to abusive and degrading behavior by fraternity members.

The allegations appeared on a Facebook page where students can post anonymous messages about campus life. In postings last month, three women said they were targeted after they had consensual sex with a fraternity member, when other members rushed in and poured water on them or pelted them with ice or pudding.

The posts did not say where the alleged incidents

occurred. College officials said they have not confirmed whether the allegations are true but are taking them seriously.

“Such posts are deeply disturbing — not only because they allege that such vile acts may have taken place at the hands of some of our own community members, but because these posts offer a warped reflection of the values of this university and the vast majority of its citizens,” the college’s interim president, Philip B. Ryan, said in a letter to the campus community last week that was signed by leaders of student government and Greek organizations.

Student Elliott Wiegman, who is president of the campus Interfraternity Council, said he, too, was upset by the postings. Such behavior, he said, “does not have a place in the WPI fraternity community.”

The letter from Ryan urged anyone with additional information about the incidents or similar cases to contact campus police, school counselors, or the dean of students. The message also thanked students who saw the posts on the WPI Confessions Facebook page and notified authorities.

“They not only alerted us to these allegations, but they responded insightfully and compassionately to the posts — providing guidance and encouragement to those they perceived to be in need,” the letter said.

Others who commented on the Facebook page questioned whether WPI “condoned a culture of violence” — an assertion that college officials rejected, saying in the letter: “The message is not only inaccurate, but is dangerously wrong to send to anyone who may feel threatened, or worse, violated.”

Such “confessions” Web pages are popular at many college campuses, and some have stirred controversy.

In October, a Boston College student faced disciplinary measures from the university after he allegedly wrote on a Web page dedicated to the college that he had raped three women while at BC. He later

turned himself in to university police and administrators and admitted the post was a hoax.

At WPI, which has about 4,000 undergraduates, the dean of students, Philip N. Clay, said in an interview Tuesday that while topics like sexual assault and campus violence are “very difficult to talk about,” it is important for administrators and students to tackle them together publicly.

“If you’re going to change the campus culture, you need to have an open dialogue,” Clay said.

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