

**Statement by Patrick Henry College to concerned alumni and students
about article in *The New Republic***

February 18, 2014

Many of you may be aware of an article just published in *The New Republic* magazine (and picked up by several websites/blogs) concerning allegations of sexual assault now being made in connection with events that occurred off campus some years ago – especially about one situation more than seven years ago, and another about four years ago.

Sexual assault is a tragic and growing phenomenon. According to *The New Republic* article, two of five college women in America report being sexually assaulted. As much as we would like to believe otherwise, even a place like Patrick Henry College is not totally insulated from this social environment.

Because you have invested your hearts, minds, and resources in this College, you should know that Patrick Henry College is absolutely committed to the protection and care of our students, male and female equally. When and if issues arise, we take each allegation seriously and try to conduct appropriate investigations with a spirit of emotional support while seeking truth. We may not perfectly achieve this objective every time, but this is our aim; this is our heart. The thesis of the article, that women are somehow treated less favorably than men, especially in difficult situations involving physical interactions between a male and female student, is categorically false.

The article is based primarily on three incidents that occurred in the past, the two mentioned above and one situation involving a former student who had suffered a sexual assault prior to enrolling at the College. Although the reporter asserted that the women with whom she spoke had waived their privacy rights, we did not believe such a waiver (which was never provided in writing to us) was sufficient to allow the College to discuss each of the incidents since they also involve other students who did not waive their rights. Consequently, and regrettably, we were and are constrained in our ability to provide a detailed response.

We can, however, summarize the key issues in the College's handling of incidents (as we did to the reporter) in the sincere hope that it will allow our students and alumni to rest assured in knowing that the College is, and always has been dedicated to upholding the dignity of all our students.

With respect to both the 2007 incident – which occurred about two hundred miles away from campus during Thanksgiving break in a private residence – and the 2010 incident – which apparently occurred about ten miles away from campus – the College promptly conducted a careful review. The fact is that the information provided by the key individuals at the time differs from the allegations now related in the *New Republic* article. The College acted on the basis of the information made available at the time. Moreover, at no time did anyone suggest to any female student that she was somehow responsible, or more at fault for the situation.

The third incident, involving a student who had been sexually assaulted the summer before enrolling, has also been grossly misreported. While we are hampered out of our continuing concern for that individual from sharing any further details, we can say that when it became clear that she was struggling, understandably, with some of the continuing effects of the earlier assault, the College contacted her parents, solely out of concern for her. Upon recognizing the situation their daughter was facing, her parents chose to remove her from school. At no time did anyone suggest that she was “unfit” for the College.

There are several other incidents referenced that we cannot respond to, even generally, because we do not have sufficient information. Where possible, we provided the reporter and the magazine with clarification of some of these allegations contained in her article, but she either chose to disregard the information or simply lumped the information into a single paragraph toward the article's end. In particular, her attribution of offensive and harmful statements alleged to have been made by our Dean of Students is not true and was denied in writing.

The College understands that we are far from perfect and recognize that past events can be revisited and constructive criticisms of the process can be developed. As this is true in life generally, so also it is true in college administration. The College has been reviewing its procedures for handling situations like this. In fact, before this article was published the College had already commissioned a specialized legal firm to undertake an audit of our sexual harassment policy and procedures, both to review past events and to recommend further improvements. Our greatest regret is that any student, female or male, would leave our campus feeling as if they were not valued or cared for.

Nonetheless, any fair observer would conclude that a review of the entire evidence demonstrates that PHC earnestly sought to do the right thing in each instance, did not attempt to cover-up any sexual crimes, and did not seek to blame women for the improper behavior of male students. Many of us, who are dedicated to realizing the vision of Patrick Henry College, are deeply troubled by the unbalanced and inaccurate depiction of our College and the events on which the story is based.

Some readers have wondered if the overall aim of the article is to associate PHC with a set of anti-women attitudes that we do not hold, and to insinuate that we are connected with outside movements that we positively reject (like the “Quiverfull/Christian Patriarchy Movement”). This philosophy, incorrectly attributed in the article to Dr. Michael Farris, Chancellor, espouses that college is inappropriate for Christians in general, and especially women. As his own life at PHC and with his own children reflect, Chancellor Farris has never agreed with such an offensive philosophy.

Contrary to the reporter’s account, Patrick Henry College believes it is offensive to suggest that persons who have been assaulted are somehow “responsible” for the crime that has been perpetrated against them. The College and its administrators do not take the view, and have never taken the view, that female students somehow are responsible if they have been subjected to a sexual assault.

PHC remains firmly committed to protecting and preserving the safety and dignity of our students. We care deeply about the students mentioned in the article and others, and seek to avoid anything inconsistent with the College’s Christian mission and vision. All administrative actions taken in the cases discussed were taken with the students’ best interests at heart and with a conscientious intent to resolve each matter justly, objectively and on its merits. Certainly we are glad that the number of such situations involving PHC students is far below American campus averages. At the same time, we know that any organization, including PHC, can continue to improve its sensitivity to and its handling of sexual assault allegations. Here at PHC we are committed to continuing to perfect our protocols and procedures in this area.

Our foremost concern has always been to protect and nurture all of our students. Because of this, we certainly regret that any former students mentioned in the article may have left our campus feeling as if they or their concerns were not fully valued or acknowledged in their time here. We hope they know that we desire the best for them and want them to remain connected to our community as alumni.

Please direct inquiries to:
Office of Communications
Patrick Henry College