

Open Letter to the Office of Student Life, The Dean of Students - Ted Pratt, The Assistant Dean of Students - Michael Sledge, and the Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services - Eileen Coughlin.

To Administration and Students at Western Washington University,

The Associated Students of Western Washington University want to reaffirm our commitment to serving, protecting, empowering, and caring for vulnerable student populations. In this instance, the AS Board is referring to survivors of sexual assault.¹ It has recently come to our attention, according to the Western Front, that the Office of Student Life under the leadership of Ted Pratt² and Michael Sledge³ has made the decision to readmit a student convicted of sexual assault to Western Washington University.⁴

There has been a history of the Office of Student Life putting survivors of sexual assault in extremely unsafe⁵ and compromising situations.⁶ The Associated Students Board of Directors is appalled and disgusted at the recent decision to permit this student to attend classes on this campus without being transparent with our student body.⁷

The AS Board of Directors has heard (and read) from several students over the years about how the Office of Student Life under the leadership of Ted Pratt and Michael Sledge has done more to scare them than support them.⁸ Moreover, for this reason, students feel they do not want to approach the Office of Student Life.⁹ The Associated Students Board of Directors is extremely disappointed that this is the culture that WWU is creating.¹⁰¹¹

Faculty members have conveyed to the Vice President for Enrollment and Students Services that

¹ Protecting Students from Sexual Assault. *United States Department of Justice*.

<https://www.justice.gov/ovw/protecting-students-sexual-assault>. March 1, 2017.

² Fields, Asia & Caleb Huisingh & Erasmus Baxter. Student Convicted of Sexual Assault Readmitted. *Western Front*.

<http://www.westernfrontonline.com/2017/05/16/student-convicted-of-sexual-assault-readmitted/>. May 16, 2017.

³ Criscione, Wilson. Students Decry WWU Sexual Assault Reporting Process: Investigation Underway. *Bellingham Herald*.

<http://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article42031710.htm>. October 31, 2015.

⁴ Place, Laura. WESTERN SEXUAL ASSAULT NUMBERS INDICATE UNDERREPORTING. *Western Front*.

<http://www.westernfrontonline.com/2017/05/16/western-sexual-assault-numbers-indicate-underreporting/>. May 16, 2017.

⁵ Saul, Stephanie. When Campus Rapists Are Repeat Offenders. *New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/24/us/when-campus-rapists-are-repeat-offenders.html>. January 24, 2017.

⁶ Associated Press. Feds investigate WWU's Handling of Sexual Assault Cases. *Komo News*.

<http://komonews.com/archive/feds-investigate-wwus-handling-of-sex-assault-cases-11-20-2015>. November 2, 2015.

⁷ Criscione, Wilson. Students Decry WWU Sexual Assault Reporting Process: Investigation Underway. *Bellingham Herald*.

<http://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article42031710.htm>. October 31, 2015.

⁸ Criscione, Wilson. Students Decry WWU Sexual Assault Reporting Process: Investigation Underway. *Bellingham Herald*.

<http://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article42031710.htm>. October 31, 2015.

⁹ Fields, Asia & Caleb Huisingh & Erasmus Baxter. Student Convicted of Sexual Assault Readmitted. *Western Front*.

<http://www.westernfrontonline.com/2017/05/16/student-convicted-of-sexual-assault-readmitted/>. May 16, 2017.

¹⁰ Maxwell, Zerlina. Rape Culture is Real. *TIME*, <http://time.com/40110/rape-culture-is-real/>. March 27, 2014.

¹¹ Dastagir, Alia E. 13 Reasons Why A Conversation About Rape Culture is as Important as One About Suicide. *USA TODAY*,

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/05/03/13-reasons-why-conversation-rape-culture-important-one-suicide/101141694/>. May 3, 2017.

sexual assault cases have been mishandled. It has been cited that the Dean of Students, Ted Pratt said that this sexually motivated assault is a just "bad decision" that "interrupts" the journey of the person engaging in sexually motivated assaults. Similar language was used in the past where the Dean of Students, Ted Pratt had said, "Crying does not indicate a lack of consent because it could mean different things."¹² A survivor was even asked if the accused student had "climaxed."¹³

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, as many as one in five women are raped or sexually assaulted in college. If those numbers held true at Western, about 1,600 of more than 8,000 current female students would be victims of sexual violence over the course of a four-year college career. That would translate to an average of roughly 400 instances per year.¹⁴

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights in April investigated the school's handling of sexual violence cases. WWU is one of more than 100 institutions¹⁵ in the country under investigation for their non-compliance with Title IX standards, which prohibits discrimination based on sex in any federally funded education program or activity. As of Sept. 30, Western is also under investigation by the Office of Civil Rights for the school's treatment of students with disabilities. According to local news sources, the complaint accuses WWU of not handling Title IX cases appropriately,¹⁶ of silencing survivors of sexual violence by dismissing their cases and refusing to recognize harassment, and of discriminating against and under serving students with disabilities.¹⁷ During the investigation, Western will be on a list that includes more than 100 colleges and universities undergoing similar inquiries. Since 2015, Western is the fourth Washington college or university (Along with Whitman College, WSU, and UW) to come under investigation in recent years under Title IX.^{18,19}

According to the WWU, "Western Washington University is committed to providing an environment in which students, staff, and faculty can learn and work free from all types of sexual misconduct." The AS hopes that

¹² Criscione, Wilson. Students Decry WWU Sexual Assault Reporting Process: Investigation Underway. *Bellingham Herald*, <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article42031710.htm>. October 31, 2015.

¹³ Criscione, Wilson. Students Decry WWU Sexual Assault Reporting Process: Investigation Underway. *Bellingham Herald*, <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article42031710.htm>. October 31, 2015.

¹⁴ Postelwait, Rachel. Higher Risk of Sexual Assault During "Red Zone". *Western Front*. <http://www.westernfrontonline.com/2016/11/22/higher-risk-of-sexual-assault-during-red-zone/>. November 22, 2016.

¹⁵ Ulmer, Nick. Survey Helps Western Address Sexual Assault. *Western Front*. <http://www.westernfrontonline.com/2016/06/02/survey-helps-western-address-sexual-assault/>. June 2, 2016.

¹⁶ Associated Press. Western Washington University Under Review Over Handling of Sexual Violence Report. *The Oregonian*, http://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/index.ssf/2015/04/western_washington_university_2.html. April 30, 2015.

¹⁷ Criscione, Wilson. Students Decry WWU Sexual Assault Reporting Process: Investigation Underway. *Bellingham Herald*, <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article42031710.htm>. October 31, 2015.

¹⁸ Associated Press. Western Washington University Under Review Over Handling of Sexual Violence Report. *The Oregonian*, http://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/index.ssf/2015/04/western_washington_university_2.html. April 30, 2015.

¹⁹ Long, Katherine. Feds Investigate 2nd Report of Sexual Violence at Western Washington University. *Seattle Times*. <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/education/feds-investigate-2nd-report-of-sexual-violence-at-western-washington-university/>. November 17, 2015.

WWU honors that commitment. Although we acknowledge that those convicted of certain crimes should be punished and allowed the chance to reform and be re-integrated and provided with a chance to better themselves, they can do that at a different institution than the one they committed the assault at.

The readmission of this student convicted of sexual assault is a slap in the face to advocates for survivors, survivors themselves, and is a testament to the general complacency that plagues campuses across the United States.²⁰

The Associated Students has an obligation to protecting and serving its students. We feel it is our responsibility to bring these concerns forward to the student body. The Associated Students resolutions ^{21,22,23} and Charter (2010), signed by the AS Board and the former University President Bruce Shepard, details the authorities granted to us by the Board of Trustees and the Washington State Legislature. Among these responsibilities are:

- (1) Promoting the general welfare of students,
- (2) Representing student interests to the University Administration, and
- (3) Fostering students' rights.

We believe these reports are relevant to all three.

We have gone through every tier of the university, short of the Board of Trustees and the University President, and the result has not changed: students are still being harmed²⁴ and the university is not taking sufficient action to stop it.

The Associated Students is reaching out to all students to demand transparency and demand that the Office of Student Life and the Office of Dean of Students handles these cases in a manner that is respectful of survivors and puts their interests and their health first.²⁵ This decision goes against everything the students of Western Washington University stand for. This decision actively works against vulnerable student populations.^{26,27} Those that commit sexual assault are a threat to all students at Western. The AS board and students at Western Washington University

²⁰ Perez-Pena, Richard. 1 in 4 Women Experience Sex Assault on Campus. *New York Times*.

https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/22/us/a-third-of-college-women-experience-unwanted-sexual-contact-study-finds.html?_r=0. September 21, 2015.

²¹ Associated Students Of Western Washington University, Board Of Directors - A Resolution Supporting Students Equal Access to Health and Safety, 2012

²² Associated Students Of Western Washington University, Board Of Directors- A Resolution Emphasizing Campus Safety Regarding Advocacy Work Regarding Police Accountability, 2015

²³ Associated Students Of Western Washington University, Board Of Directors- A Resolution Regarding Consent Resolution, 2015

²⁴ Associated Students Of Western Washington University, Board Of Directors- A Resolution Supporting Students Equal Access to Health and Safety, 2012

²⁵ Associated Students Of Western Washington University, Board Of Directors- A Resolution Supporting Students Equal Access to Health and Safety, 2012

²⁶ Saul, Stephanie. When Campus Rapists Are Repeat Offenders. *New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/24/us/when-campus-rapists-are-repeat-offenders.html>. January 24, 2017.

²⁷ Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics - RAPE, ABUSE, & INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK. *RAINN*. www.rainn.org/statistics, 2016.

will continue to oppose such decisions that have the potential to harm our student body.²⁸

This is a commitment to hold you accountable.

The Associated Students of Western Washington University Board of Directors.

AS President, Stephanie Cheng

AS Vice President for Academic Affairs, Erick Yanzon

AS Vice President for Activities, Alexander LaVallee

AS Vice President for Business and Operations, Mary Moeller

AS Vice President for Diversity, Aleyda Cervantes

AS Vice President for Governmental Affairs, Bryce Hammer

AS Vice President for Student Life, Wayne Rocque

²⁸ **Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics - RAPE, ABUSE, & INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK. RAINN.**
www.rainn.org/statistics, 2016.