

Rolling With It: UVA's Response to *Rolling Stone's* "A Rape on Campus"

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Executive summary

In November 2014, the University of Virginia was rocked by allegations, made by Rolling Stone Magazine, of a brutal on-campus gang rape. The article in question recounted the story of Jackie, a first year student at UVA who accused members of the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity of her vicious rape. An investigation about the rape allegations ensued and shortly after Rolling Stone retracted the article as evidence accumulated in contrast to Jackie's claims. In the following months UVA began making strides to open the dialogue about sexual misconduct on college campuses. By actively participating in the conversation about on campus sexual assault, UVA was able to become a leader in the fight to make America's public universities more safe.

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Organizational Background

Founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819, the University of Virginia (i.e. UVA) is considered by many to be one of the most prestigious public institutions in the country. In fact, the *U.S. News & World Report's* 2016 ranking of America's public Universities ranked UVA

third nationally. The University officially opened for students in 1825 with a faculty of eight workers and a student body numbered at a mere 68 people (University of Virginia). That number has drastically risen in the past 200 years and the University now enrolls approximately 21,800 students.

As with all Universities, the main objective at UVA is to educate students. Education, however, is not the only service that UVA provides. Serving as a public hospital, the UVA Medical Center provides much needed medical support, research, and care to the greater central Virginia area. In 2013 alone “the Medical Center admitted 28,802 inpatients and handled 795,423 outpatient visits, 60,810 emergency visits, 19,512 surgical cases and 1,572 live births” (Virginia.edu, 2015). This as well as employing approximately 6,500 citizens at the medical facility full-time truly exemplifies the UVA mission statement, which reads:

“The University of Virginia is a public institution of higher learning guided by a founding vision of discovery, innovation, and development of the full potential of talented students from all walks of life. It serves the Commonwealth of Virginia, the nation, and the world by developing responsible citizen leaders and professionals; advancing, preserving, and disseminating knowledge; and providing world-class patient care.”

Currently Teresa Sullivan is the University President, with Thomas Katsouleas acting as current Vice President and Provost. Sullivan was elected President in 2010 becoming the first acting female President of UVA. Over the course of her five years in office the University's endowment has risen to upwards of 5.3 billion dollars, and currently has a \$2.78 billion budget for the 2015 fiscal year.

Communication Structure

The communication department at UVA is actually its own independent entity within the university. The department is led by Vice President for Communication and Chief Communications Officer, David Martel. Within the communications department at UVA, there are two separate divisions; Market Communications and University Relations (University Communications).

UVA is a part of a very wide and large communication network with many different publics existing throughout the entire world. The University communications department actually lists its Goals, Audiences (publics), and the strategies that the University will use to fulfil those goals. For example, tactics of “all identified audiences” include; Key market advertising (Richmond and the Washington region), National advertising, and International advertising (UVA University Communications - In Support of the Cornerstone Strategic Plan, n.d.)

The individual audiences that UVA lists follow as: Respective faculty recruits and academic peers, Targeted prospective recruits and their families (state, national, international), Current faculty, staff, and students, Alumni communities: Virginia based; national, Philanthropy and donor communities: alumni and non-alumni, Citizens of Virginia, Government and public policy leaders (state and national level), Business leaders (local, state, and national levels), and media: digital, print, and broadcast (UVA University Communications - In Support of the Cornerstone Strategic Plan). All of these audiences have a different procedure for how the university will handle them tactically so UVA can achieve its’ overall goals.

Each audience includes separate tactics for paid media (print and digital media - Washington Post), earned media (Editorial board), owned media (Virginia.edu publications), and social media (“leverage relevant University stories on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram,

Vine, and other emerging platforms to elevate interest and institutional awareness). Publics such as student recruitment, current faculty, staff, and students, alumni relations and citizens/voters in Virginia include a tactical Assessment as well differences for each public (UVA University Communications - In Support of the Cornerstone Strategic Plan).

The UVA communications department also lists its' priorities, which include; executive strategy, Earned media strategy, Brand platform campaign, Visual identity, University web domain redesign, AccessUVA, Rotunda restoration, Continuous talent recruitment of faculty and staff, UVA Today, Community relations, Good ole app, Social media content and strategy, Social media engagement, UVA YouTube channel, Comprehensive reorganization, Communications cabinet, University advancement separation, Benchmarking key metrics, and Local Philanthropy (UVA University Communications - In Support of the Cornerstone Strategic Plan).

Industry Analysis

Leaders and Competitors

UVA is consistently rated as one of the top universities in the nation. In terms of public universities, it is considered an industry leader along with the United States Naval, Air Force, and Military academies. According to a study done by College Factual in 2015, UVA was ranked as the fifth best public university, outranking renowned colleges such as the College of William and Mary-Williamsburg, VA, the University of California-Berkeley, CA, and the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, MI (Cahill, 2015). Although is it amongst the leaders in the public university industry, recent reports state that UVA is falling behind its competitors. The firm that UVA hired to analyze their presence in the industry, stated “[UVA] is allowing to slip away the

opportunity created by last summer's leadership crisis, to assert in a very public way what it stands for and where it's headed" (Johnson, 2013). He suggests that UVA works in improving the undergraduate student experience and hire more faculty members to assert their role as a top competitor in the public university industry and to distinguish itself amongst the top ten best-ranked colleges.

Recent Trends

UVA is joining an industry-wide coalition called the Coalition for Affordability, Access, and Success. Over 80 public and private universities are bannng together to improve the college applications by developing a free online platform of tools that will streamline the application process and make it more accessible to all students. The coalition hopes to create an ongoing process that students can begin at the start of their high school career and document their scholastic achievements through high school. The goal is to foster a college-going mindset and culture in underrepresented ethnic groups and low-income families. The initiative will allow students to begin using these resources in the summer of 2016 (McNally, 2015).

However, many universities' efforts of developing a culture of college-minded individuals has resulted in an industry-wide drop in acceptance rates in 2015 (Admission Statistics, 2015). Across the nation, college acceptance rates dropped as low as 5% this past year, the lowest in history. UVA only accepted 28.5% of applicants, compared to their 39% acceptance rate in 2005 (Admission Statistics, 2015). Overall, the industry is becoming more competitive for students looking to attend 4-year universities.

Industry Issues

Sexual assault on college campuses has long been an issue of the industry. However, in recent years the issue has become more prevalent and more publicized. In a report commissioned

by the United States Department of Justice, the number of women self-reporting cases of sexual assault on college campuses has risen 16% since 1996 (DeMatteo et al., 2015). There is little data to represent undergraduate men in the issue, but it is believed that the statistics of their sexual assault history has risen as well. This issue is detrimental to the industry as it can be image ruining for universities.

Market Analysis

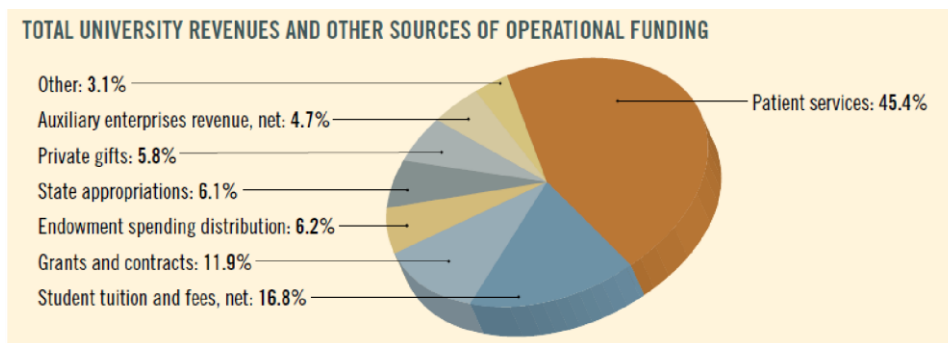
The UVA is a well-known institution with a rich history within the roots of ty and renown can be seen in its student body of more than 21,000 graduate and undergraduate students. The College itself is a nonprofit institution that is state and publicly funded, relying primarily on endowments and the revenue from their medical center for their functions and expenses. For any nonprofit, most income is usually put towards future and current expenses. This will make their financial analysis based around the change in their “net position”, not their “net profit” (Diely, 2013).

Financial Analysis

Below is the statement of revenues and expenses for UVA in the financial year of 2012-2013. It is important to note that these figures on the top are operating revenues and cash flow the university generates itself. The bottom the middle figures are endowments and investments. All graphs are taken from reports published by UVA itself.

SUMMARY OF THE STATEMENT OF REVENUES, EXPENSES, AND CHANGES IN NET POSITION <i>(in thousands)</i>	2013	2012	INCREASE (DECREASE)	
			AMOUNT	PERCENT
Operating revenues				
Student tuition and fees, net	\$ 432,347	\$ 410,739	\$ 21,608	5.3%
Patient services, net	1,165,690	1,146,773	18,917	1.6%
Sponsored programs	305,432	313,559	(8,127)	(2.6%)
Other	187,440	183,095	4,345	2.4%
Total operating revenues	2,090,909	2,054,166	36,743	1.8%
Operating expenses	2,433,251	2,374,176	59,075	2.5%
Operating loss	(342,342)	(320,010)	(22,332)	7.0%
Nonoperating revenues (expenses)				
State appropriations	155,679	145,412	10,267	7.1%
State stabilization (ARRA)	—	508	(508)	(100.0%)
Gifts	147,984	132,196	15,788	11.9%
Investment income	564,511	205,747	358,764	174.4%
Pell grants	11,677	12,017	(340)	(2.8%)
Interest on capital asset-related debt	(53,160)	(31,046)	(22,114)	71.2%
Build America Bonds rebate	8,496	8,750	(254)	(2.9%)
Other net nonoperating expenses	(16,517)	(11,570)	(4,947)	42.8%
Net nonoperating revenues (expenses)	818,670	462,014	356,656	77.2%
Income before other revenues, expenses, gains, or losses	476,328	142,004	334,324	235.4%
Capital appropriations, gifts, and grants	77,852	81,322	(3,470)	(4.3%)
Additions to permanent endowments	12,411	24,920	(12,509)	(50.2%)
Total other revenues	90,263	106,242	(15,979)	(15.0%)
INCREASE IN NET POSITION	566,591	248,246	318,345	128.2%
NET POSITION - beginning of year	6,515,329	6,267,083	248,246	4.0%
Net effect of change in accounting principle	(5,595)	—	(5,595)	(100.0%)
NET POSITION - END OF YEAR	\$ 7,076,325	\$ 6,515,329	\$ 560,996	8.6%

The largest revenue stream for UVA is patient's services from the UVA medical center taking up nearly half of all revenue. The second is from their student's tuition which makes up only 16% of its total operating revenue or \$21,608,000. In 2013 their total operating revenue of a little more than 2 billion was matched with a total expense of a near 2.5 million giving them an operating loss. However, this is not uncommon for a college as investments and donations can cover the rest.



Market Share

When looking at the market share of a university, it is important to note that education is the service it provides and its student body is a constant and consistent consumer base. It is also a privileged service in that though many apply and demand for this service, not all are given it. In fact, UVA only accepts nearly 30% of their received applications on average (Profile | Office of Undergraduate Admission,n.d).. It is estimated that in the U.S, almost 20 million people will go to college in 2015 (NCES, 2015). This gives UVA a small share of the broad market. However, in Virginia, UVA, JMU, and GMU enroll and educate nearly 58% of all in state college students (Enrollment Trends, 2007).

Future Analysis

These facts and figures show UVA in a strong position in its market. However, they were published before the 2014 Rolling Stone article and the ensuing crisis. UVA has not issued any financial statements for the fiscal year of 2014- 2015. Further research will be required to note any correlation with the article's publication, retraction, and UVA's response to a change in their net position and enrollment rate.

Description of Issues

On November 19th, 2014 *Rolling Stone* magazine published an article recounting a brutal rape, which occurred in the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity house at the University of Virginia (UVA). Subsequently, a national debate ensued as university President Teresa Sullivan suspended all on campus fraternity organizations. Controversy surrounding the validity of the article began, and over the months that ensued and the *Washington Post* began to raise major questions about the contradictory accounts of events. The University's ability to protect their students came into question as well as their sexual assault policies. Finally, after Columbia University released a study outlining the journalistic missteps put forward in the *Rolling Stone* article, it was retracted. Before that, Charlottesville police announced they could find no evidence that the rape occurred. While the victim still claims the assault happened, UVA put forward a lawsuit against the *Rolling Stone* for the validity of the article. This scandal put the issue of on-campus sexual assault in the national spotlight, with UVA as the main face of the issue.

Timeline of Events

- November 19, 2014: Rolling Stone publishes an article, written by contributing Editor Sabrina Erdely, titled “A Rape on Campus: A Brutal Assault and Struggle for Justice at UVA” which discussed a woman named Jackie who says she was the victim of a violent fraternity gang-rape
- November 22, 2014: President Teresa Sullivan suspends all fraternities on campus, as well as asking Charlottesville Police to investigate Jackie’s rape
- December 5, 2014: A Washington Post report raises major questions about the narrative presented in Rolling Stone
 - o Phi Kappa Psi says that the timeline of events in the article were very skewed, no date function, no fraternity pledges in the fall
 - o Jackie's friends tell the *Post* that they're beginning to doubt her account based on the fact that she finally identified her alleged attacker and he was in a different fraternity than originally stated

- o A man with that name tells the *Post* he knew Jackie's name, but never met her, never a member of PKP.
- o “Andy” confirmed that Jackie said that “something bad happened” in fall of 2012. He and two friends ran to her help, they said she was “really upset, really shaken up,” but did not appear to be physically injured and did not want to go get help at the time.
- o Emily Renda says she met Jackie in fall of 2013 and they instantly bonded because they had both been raped at a fraternity party. She claims Jackie initially told her she was attacked by five men, then changed the number to seven months later.
- o Rachel Soltis, Jackie's former roommate, says she noticed emotional and physical changes in her during the fall of 2012.
- o Jackie says she asked Erdely to be taken out of the article at one point, but she refused and said the article was going forward.
- o Jackie tells the *Post* she doesn't know if her attacker was a member of Phi Kappa Psi, but she knows the attack took place in that house because a year later, "my friend pointed out the building to me and said that's where it happened." "I never asked for this" attention,. "What bothers me is that so many people act like it didn't happen. It's my life. I have had to live with the fact that it happened — every day for the last two years.
- December 10, 2014: The existence of the assailant “Drew” begins to come into question. The *Post* confirmed no student by that name has ever been enrolled in the university
- January 12, 2015: Police Say They Have No Reason to Believe That Rape Took Place at Phi Kappa Psi
- March 23, 2015: Charlottesville, Virginia, police announced. "We're not able to conclude to any substantive degree that an incident occurred "That doesn't mean something terrible didn't happen to Jackie ... we're just not able to gather sufficient facts to determine what that is."
- April 5, 2015: *Rolling Stone* Retracts the Story
- May 13, 2015: UVA Associate Dean of Students Nicole Eramo Sues *Rolling Stone*

Case Analysis

Public Responses

Student's initial responses to the rolling stone article were a mix of frustration, confusion, and anger at the situation. In student interviews conducted by the on-campus publication, The Cavalier Daily, most students set blame on the Rolling Stone journalist for working in a “self-serving way” and for “throwing Jackie under the bus” after the article was retracted (Robinson, 2014). However, not all students were appalled by Rolling Stone article, but instead believe that

the article brought needed attention to the issue. Second-year College student Ben Lowery (As cited in Robinson, 2014) said “I think it’s good that there’s now national spotlight on this issue of sexual assault.” The buzz surrounding the article brought the issue of sexual assault on college campuses to the nation’s attention, something students have been trying to do for years.

Similar to Lowery’s opinion, faculty responded to the article as a call to action. Only a few days after the article broke headlines, staff from a variety of departments held rallies and open discussions on how to improve the university’s policies on sexual assault. The discussions allowed students to voice their frustrations and for faculty to listen thoughtfully on the University’s rape culture (Higgins, Williams, Nagy, 2014).

The topic of the Rolling Stone article along with the surrounding controversies and the chilling narrative quickly fostered a lot of media attention. Local and national news sources were actively reporting as the article was retracted and the details of Jackie’s story were being investigated. The media’s first responses to the article garnered negative attention for the university. UVA’s first responses to the article ignored the negative media attention and depicted grief for survivors of sexual assault, seriousness towards the issue, and reassurance that further investigation would ensue (De Bruyn, 2014b).

Communication Plans

After the Rolling Stone article was published, the internal response within the UVA governing body was quick and timely. Within a day, President Teresa Sullivan condemned the act done by the perpetrators and insisted that UVA has and continues to make the safety of their students a top priority. This outlines the base UVA’s communication and crisis management after the article came to attention. President Sullivan and other member of the UVA Governing body had the daunting task of reassuring all key publics including the entire university

community, students, parents and the media of the safety within their campus. The allegations within the rolling stone article were graphic and disturbing to most who read it, and many media outlets condemned UVA for allowing such a tragedy. Many of the governing bodies with UVA set in motion campaigns and communication plans in order to handle these allegations and the negative portrayal that followed.

Key Publics

The UVA communication structure lists all of their key audiences on the department web page. The list includes; Respective faculty recruits and academic peers, Targeted prospective recruits and their families (state, national, international), Current faculty, staff, and students, Alumni communities: Virginia based; national, Philanthropy and donor communities: alumni and non-alumni, Citizens of Virginia, Government and public policy leaders (state and national level), Business leaders (local, state, and national levels), and media: digital, print, and broadcast (UVA University Communications - In Support of the Cornerstone Strategic Plan). In this certain scenario, the university reached out to many of these publics. After the Rolling Stone article came out, the initial statement was from President Teresa Sullivan to the “University Community.” Which would include many of the individual publics that UVA identifies on their communication web page like; current faculty, staff, and students. Messages were sent to the “university community” multiple times throughout the campaign. Other publics identified separately throughout the campaign are as follows; UVA law students, UVA alumni, UVA students, UVA parents, UVA college community, alumni and friends of UVA architecture, and UVA Board of Visitors.

Communication Team

Teresa Sullivan Became the spokesperson and leader of this campaign. In fact most of the communication on the crisis from the University came from speeches, press releases, emails, and Memos created by University spokesmen such as, the president, the rector George Martin, several deans, and the Office of University Communications. Soon after, President Sullivan created the Ad Hoc group on University Climate and Culture. This group spearheaded the reforms and policy changes UVA implemented after the publications]

Goals and Objectives

Official goals and objectives have not been released by the university, but the main problems the governing body had to address were very clear. First off, the parents, children, and media needed to be told that UVA is doing everything it can in order to keep their students safe. Secondly, sexual assault on campus became a national issue after the articles, publication with UVA in the spotlight. The University has to make sure it not only condemned the crime itself, but also will work to prevent it. Other objectives were more internal such as President Teresa Sullivan and her Ad hoc group promising major policy changes by June of 2015.

Research

Several months after the Rolling Stone article was published, UVA partnered with the AAU to participate in their Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct. Surveys were distributed on campus in the month of April, 2015, and with a response rate of 26.4%, about 7% higher than the national average, UVA showed its commitment to an open dialogue on the issue of sexual misconduct. However, the findings of the surveys painted a grizzly scene of how UVA students perceive the university's commitment to stop sexual misconduct. Of the students surveyed, “41.9 percent of students believe it is very or extremely

likely that a fair investigation would occur” (UVA Today, 2015) in the event of a report of sexual misconduct, the AAU average is 49.2%. Even more troubling is the fact that, “28.2 percent of students said it is very or extremely likely that campus officials would take action against the offender; the AAU average is 44.6 percent” (2015). This is all rather interesting, seeing as another key finding of this survey was that 12.9% of UVA students, “reported experiencing sexual misconduct by physical force, threats of physical force, or incapacitation” (2015), only slightly higher than the national average of 11.7%.

The findings of this survey and other direct, on-campus interviews, acted as a catalyst to start several initiatives and campaigns to end sexual misconduct on UVA’s campus. Programs such as the “Hoos Got Your Back” campaign, which promotes bystander advocacy, and the “Not On Our Grounds” initiative, which is, “dedicated to ending sexual violence in the University community through a series of training programs, awareness campaigns, prevention efforts and reporting guidelines” (2015), are several examples.

Materials and Releases

In the weeks that followed, UVA sent out over 20 press releases addressing each public affected by the situation including, students, parents, alumni, faculty, law enforcement, and community members. The first statement regarding the Rolling Stone article was released just a few hours after the article was published, the following 20-plus statements were released within the following month (De Bruyn, 2014b). In their press releases, UVA gave material on the many on-campus groups dedicated to the cause of sexual assault and provided resources for more information on their initiatives to end sexual violence. The spokesperson for the situation changed as the university addressed their many publics. The most prominent spokesperson was university president Teresa Sullivan, however the alumni association president, the faculty senate executive

council, the student council, and the board of visitors also gave statements. In addition to actively releasing statements, UVA offered counseling to students, and held many forums in which students, faculty, and community members were able to voice their thoughts on the situation. To evaluate the campus climate, UVA partnered with Association of American Universities (AAU) to survey students, while on-campus news publications interviewed directly with students and staff members (Higgins, Williams, Nagy, 2014).

Policy Adjustments

Talk of sexual misconduct policy change emerged in the statements released by the university and in the forum discussions. Policy change was mentioned in the media as well, local news sources discussed the need for policy change at UVA, while the national discussion focused on reforming sexual violence policies across all college campuses. After the article was published, UVA set an interim zero-tolerance change to their policy, which was previously last revised in 2011 (De Bruyn, 2014a). As of July 1st, 2015 UVA has enacted a new policy for sexual misconduct that covers steps for both the university and its community in regard to handling and reporting sexual violence. The updated policy incorporates input from over 600 commentators including proposals from the Ad Hoc group for University Climate and Culture arranged by President Sullivan. It also complies with recent changes with the federal Title IX act, Clergy act, and Violence Against Women act (U.Va., 2015). As this is the first semester in which the new policy has been in effect, there is no information on its effectiveness or the public's responses to the changes.

Strategies & Tactics

The press releases, actions and statements from UVA listed in the de Bruyn article show the strategies the university put in place throughout their communicating during that time. Their

strategies were indeed reactive to the information over time as the allegation began to come into question. For instance, in the time directly after the article, UVA focused their rhetoric on condemning the alleged actions, and relaying their commitment to ensure the safety of their students. Many of the spokesmen listed had similar rhetoric as President Sullivan. Some of the main tactics that show this include the formation of the Ad hoc group on University Climate and Culture and the adoption of the Zero tolerance policy against sexual assault (de Bruyn, 2014c) and calling for a police investigation into the allegations. After the alleged assault gained national attention, a call to action came from students and media. (Dematteo, 2015).

UVA knew that some form of punishment and action was needed, however, since the investigation had not proven or found any substantial evidence at this time. UVA implemented that tactic of banning the Phi kappa Psi fraternity and all fraternity social activity to make sure action were called. Although, after the validity of the allegations came into question, this tactic was criticized by students. The rhetoric included in statements and releases evolved as the story gained national attention. UVA became a figurehead in the issue of sexual assault on college campuses. The university used this attention to advocate for change and attention to the issue. Many students viewed UVA's media attention as a welcomed call to this growing issue. Even when the allegations came under scrutiny, UVA carefully retained rhetoric condemning sexual assault and how to prevent it in the future while at the same time bringing attention to the inconsistencies within the article. Finally, policy changes listed above came into effect to show parents and external publics that UVA had and is working towards a safe campus. President Sullivan also personally met with students in order to hear and address claims of sexual assault and campus climate (de Bruyn, 2015b).

Final Response

As more evidence accumulated denouncing the story depicted in the initial *Rolling Stone* article, and as the University actively and openly communicated with their publics, attitudes towards the issue began to change. The statements given by the university along with the active progress to reform rape culture on campus reinstated trust from the students and faculty. Media coverage shifted blame from UVA's failure to protect its students to journalistic failure on behalf of *Rolling Stone* magazine. Nonetheless, the news coverage thrust UVA as a spearhead for the rape culture problem on college campuses. However, UVA stepped into the role of advocating for sexual misconduct policy change and followed through with their proclamations, thus earning them positive attitudinal outlooks with their key publics.

Conclusion

After the article was published, the governing body of UVA were faced with several crisis. These included a negative portrayal in the media, becoming a national figurehead in the issue of sexual assault, and a concern in their ability to keep their students safe. Their response was quick and was composed primarily of press releases and statements from University leaders such as President Teresa Sullivan. The rhetoric in these messages was carefully managed to maintain a strong stance against sexual assault while bringing to attention to revelation on inconsistencies within the article. Despite the negative portrayal on the national level, Uva retained support from students and its local community in this time of crisis. Finally, Uva was able to use its spotlight as a “call to

action' to help to help in the fight against sexual assault and continues to spread a message of caution and safety.

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