

One Woman's Story

October 19, 2006, 12:55 am

Filed under: *[Name withheld]*

I can't tell you what Dr. Jane K. Fernandes is like, since I never personally met her in my 1 ½ years at Gallaudet. But I can tell you how the system at Gallaudet - which she, as provost, was directly responsible for overseeing - failed me in several areas.

DPS: Six weeks into my freshman year, I went to DPS to report a sexual assault. I had difficulty communicating with officers because they couldn't sign, or understand me. No crisis counselor was provided. I sat for an hour waiting for DC police to arrive and when they did, no interpreter was available – a DPS officer interpreted instead. The officers told me they'd be in touch with me in about a week, and sent me on my way.

Faculty: Dr. Shirley Shultz Myers, responsible for the honors program, which my assaulter and I were in, found out about the situation and pressured me to meet with her and my assaulter. During the meeting, she implied that it was a misunderstanding and that we should "work it out" without involving Judicial Affairs or the police. Convinced nobody believed me and that my case wasn't "true assault" because I had been drinking, although my assaulter was sober, I dropped the police report. Dr. Myers would not sign the paperwork for me to move off the honors floor, also where my assaulter lived. My father had to come to campus and throw his weight around before Housing would let me move off without Dr. Myers' permission.

Judicial Affairs: I never heard back from Judicial Affairs about the report I filed with them. Two years later, I met with the head of JA, who would speak with me only after he had left Gallaudet himself, for fear of reprisals. He told me he did not get the report until three months after I wrote it, likely because Dr. Myers somehow obtained it, and after Dr. Myers conducted mediation - one of the disciplinary options for JA to dole out - no hearing could be held for my case since "disciplinary measures" already had been given to my assaulter. He said he privately reprimanded Dr. Myers, but I never knew why my report apparently was ignored because nobody would admit to me that mistakes were made.

Mental health services: I got no counseling to help me deal with the trauma of the assault. Instead, I was put on a waiting list. After two weeks passed, I threatened self-harm so I could be moved to the top of the list. My faculty mentor, Dr. Catherine Andersen, was the only one who truly helped – she escorted me to MHC and made sure I got to see a counselor. I also saw a doddering old psychiatrist who could not sign, but used an interpreter to tell me I was depressed, prescribed me Paxil, patted me on the head and dismissed me.

A year later: After a year and a semester of fighting a losing battle with my issues, I had a total nervous breakdown. I went to an RA asking to see a counselor. The RA called in a CRE, who called DPS, who called an ambulance. Bewildered, I said all I wanted was a counselor. DPS told me in halting sign that I'd be able to see one at the hospital. I consented and went, but no interpreter was there. After a series of miscommunications, I found myself in psychiatric lockdown for 60 hours, the first 30 of which I had no interpreter, TTY or even pen and paper. Nobody from Gallaudet called my parents, or called the hospital to check on me. Nobody would

tell my friends where I was. I was basically “missing” for those 30 hours until I got a TTY and called my parents to come get me out. Completely traumatized, I withdrew from Gallaudet and went home. No faculty or administrators ever contacted me or my parents.

I didn't realize that this was not normal for a university until after my first year at the University of *[state name withheld]*. Having refused to seek help from the school because I didn't trust anybody, I had another nervous breakdown. This time around, faculty members and administrators were in constant contact with me and my parents. The Dean of Housing – responsible for upwards of 10,000 students – spoke with my parents on the phone several times. He required me to see a counselor and have a treatment plan before I could return to University housing, and he personally e-mailed me every month the next semester to check on my welfare. He and several faculty members provided the support and encouragement for me to get the professional help I needed to recover completely.

It was then that I realized how broken the system at Gallaudet was, and how badly it had failed me. Although I've recovered from the trauma inflicted by my assaulter and by the system at Gallaudet, I still feel pain that I wasn't given what I needed there in the first place. I loved being a student there, and it still hurts that I had to leave what I considered a second home to find the support I needed to heal.

As provost, Fernandes was directly responsible for overseeing these departments that failed me, and failed several other women who experienced similar assaults on campus. In my 1 ½ years there, none of these departments improved significantly. Faculty members were not trained or equipped to deal with victims of assault. Mental health services were not increased or improved. DPS still does not sign adequately enough to deal with students who need help. Essentially, Fernandes allowed the continuation of a system that fails the campus community.

Gallaudet needs a leader who makes faculty, staff and students feel safe and secure on campus, and who ensures the system will meet their needs. A good leader holds administrators, faculty and staff accountable, and ensures they are trained to deal with situations appropriately. A good leader makes people feel comfortable approaching her about problems with those she is responsible for overseeing. A good leader creates an environment that fosters caring about one another and makes the campus community truly a community.

Dr. Jane K. Fernandes has proved to me beyond doubt that she is not that leader.

[...]



[Name withheld]-I have read your story and wanted to say that however different much of the circumstances are yet they are equally easy for me to understand as I can see similarity in our experiences... but only as a victim can. Thank you for sharing.

Comment by [jayherron](#) October 19, 2006 @ 10:39 pm

I was going to delete Roehm, but since you all replied, so be it.

Comment by Buck Naked Bison October 20, 2006 @ 12:17 am

k

Comment by bella October 20, 2006 @ 2:02 am

Hmm...DPS and MHC are under Admin and Finance, which falls under Paul Kelly, not Jane Fernandes. As provost, she was responsible for all things academic. So to blame her alone for the failings of these two departments would be remiss. Blame Paul Kelly as well.

:~)

So sorry you had to go through all that. Where were your friends to support you? You don't mention them. Such a terrible thing to endure alone...

Comment by CyanSquirrel October 23, 2006 @ 7:53 pm

[Name withheld], Thank-you for sharing your story. It is imperative that Gallaudet take notice of what happened to you (and others) and FIX THE SYSTEM. If the administration continues ignoring the reality of life for so many of its students on such a small campus they will find themselves being immediately dismissed as a post-secondary option by many bright Deaf, deaf and H-H young people who could benefit greatly by being there (and could benefit the college greatly by their presence.) Ironically and sadly, the very institution that is at the forefront of preserving Deaf Culture may well be the cause of its'accelerated fragmentation. Congratulations to you and your family for persevering and getting the help you needed to heal. You go girl!

Comment by Robin October 27, 2006 @ 4:53 am



[Name withheld], your story is important because it illuminates where Gallaudet is broken. It is a system that ignores the needs of individual students and attends only to what is good for the faceless community and its administrators.

Not only is a more humane administration needed, it also needs enlightened, well-supported staff with an eye to individual students' development and crisis needs.

Thank you, [Name withheld], for your courage to share your story.

D

Comment by [dianrez](#) October 27, 2006 @ 6:20 am

[Name withheld]

wow your story is extremely touching. i cannot imagine what you have gone through at all.

i HOPE THAT GALLAUDET FIXES THE SYSTEM. SHAME ON THEM...especially JFK AND IJK..

-AN PROUD MSSDER WHO SUPPORTS THE PROTEST TOTALLY!

Comment by MSSDER October 29, 2006 @ 5:38 pm



WRITE MORE !! our telling these bits about our experience have a remarkable effect on others who have been through the same things. It needs to be done to get others to raise thier 'voices' and to bring the awareness of the size of this problem of institutions being able to over ride us and keep our voices quieted...no longer [Name withheld] am I allowing them to keep me quiet-I appreciate your openness in this forum because we work as branhes on a tree and the more victims that stand back up and say we are'nt takeing this any more- will construct branches of thier own...and these branches will form a strong scaffold to allow us -those who have been victimized-a strong platform to stand upon.

There is a division in the classes-the social structure that governs over the smaller...has the ability to push things aside and under a cover,they don't want to recognize we exist.

Comment by [jayherron](#) November 11, 2006 @ 12:47 pm

Original article at: ((same domain name))/one_womans_story--original.pdf

Note (Sept. 15, 2015): In response to *CyanSquirrel's comment* (above). The essay writer's commentary is very correct, because the Provost is offically in a supervisory role over the VP of Admin & Finance at Gallaudet. See the third full paragraph on page 36 of the Fall 1989 issue of *Gallaudet Today*:

[http://gallyprotest.org/Gallaudet Today Fall 1989 pages 35 and 36.pdf](http://gallyprotest.org/Gallaudet_Today_Fall_1989_pages_35_and_36.pdf)

(If you are the original author of this essay above and want it edited in some way, or removed, please e-mail: info@saveourdeafschoools.org)