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Naval Academy

Forty-five sex assault cases involving mids reported

By EARL KELLY, Staff Writer

Despite an increasing number of reported sexual offenses at the Naval Academy and four recent allegations of sexual misconduct by midshipmen, the academy's oversight board heard yesterday that the school is making great strides toward accommodating women.

In an October report to the Brigade of Midshipmen obtained this morning by The Capital, the academy reported 45 allegations of sexual assault involving midshipmen from 2001 to 2005.

Of the 45 cases, 25 involved mid-on-mid violations, according to the report: one case was reported in 2001-02, seven in 2002-03, six in 2003-04, 11 in 2004-05.

The remaining 20 cases involved mids being victimized by non-mids or by military personnel not assigned to the academy.

According to the data, of the 45 reported total cases, 12 included unwanted touching, six involved other acts, and 27 dealt with "sex."

Data about punishment was incomplete in the report, except that it noted that "two midshipmen have been convicted at court-martial; brig time."

Academy spokesman Cmdr. Rod Gibbons declined this morning to confirm the data.

"Revelation of data contributes to revictimization and serves as a deterrent to victim reporting because of the risk of public disclosure," Cmdr. Gibbons said.

"The Naval Academy seeks to encourage reporting," Cmdr. Gibbons said, so that the victim can receive care and the perpetrator can be "held accountable."

"The superintendent has repeatedly stated that preventing and (detecting sexual misconduct) is a leadership issue and he and the academy's leaders take it to heart," Cmdr. Gibbons said.

At a meeting of the Board of Visitors yesterday, the academy's superintendent, Vice Adm. Rodney P. Rempt said he is working to make it easier for victims to report sexual crimes, and he would like to go further.

Adm. Rempt said, for example, that he wants Congress to amend the law to close Article 32 hearings to the public.

These are hearings to determine whether an accused is to stand trial.

"I don't know anything more chilling to a young lady who has the guts to come forward and report this thing in today's society, and yet is subject to an open hearing and a complete review of every sordid detail in a way that revictimizes them again," Adm. Rempt said. "This is a significant issue. This is a critical thing; it is beyond my ability to solve."

Academic Dean and Provost William Miller said at the board's quarterly meeting that women are filling important positions as the academy, and almost half the department chairmen are female.

The academy's sexual assault response coordinator, Navy Capt. Jennetta White, said there have been seven studies in the past 15 years about improving life for women at the academy.

There have been a total of 243 recommendations for making the academy more hospitable for women, Capt. White said at yesterday's Board of Visitors meeting.

Most of the recommendations have been, or are being, implemented, Capt. White said.

More female officers are serving at the academy, she noted: 68 now compared with 49 in 1991.

The number of women in senior officers' positions increased from nine to 15 in the past two years, and two of six current battalion officers are female.

Female mids make up slightly more than 17 percent of the 4,200-member student body, up from 10.5 percent in 1990. The two most recent classes inducted contain nearly 20 percent, Capt. White said.

Retired Marine Corps. Gen. Charles C. Krulak, the board's former chairman, said personnel changes are tactical in nature, but even broader strategic changes in the academy's male-dominated culture must be made if there is to be real progress.

"If you don't solve that, we are going to continue to be in the doo-doo," he said.

Yesterday's discussion of women at the academy comes as the school is involved in at least four cases involving sexual misconduct.

Midshipman 1st Class Lamar Owens Jr., is to undergo an Article 32 hearing in Washington, D.C., tomorrow on charges he allegedly raped a female midshipman in January in Bancroft Hall, the academy's dormitory.

The outcome of the investigation will determine whether Midshipman Owens must stand trial.

Navy officials have said that a second, unidentified, football player is being investigated for alleged sexual misconduct with a female midshipman in a Washington, D.C., hotel.

On Friday, the academy dismissed a sophomore member of the crew team for sexual misconduct with a female midshipman while on a training exercise in Virginia last summer.

The male midshipman maintains the sexual activity was consensual and he is being punished but the female is not.

In a fourth case, Navy Lt. Bryan Black, an instructor at the academy, is undergoing a court martial on the charge of conduct unbecoming an officer after he made vulgar and sexually explicit comments in the presence of a female midshipman.

One board member, U.S. Sen. Barbara Mikulski of Baltimore, spoke yesterday of the academy's historically male-dominated culture and a 1990 case where a female midshipman complained of being chained to a urinal in the dormitory.

"She felt she had been doubly victimized, once in Bancroft Hall, and once when the Naval Academy leadership at the time did not take her complaint seriously," Ms. Mikulski said.

Brigade Commander Midshipman 1st Class J.T. Kadz told the board he has seen significant improvements in the climate at the academy since he first enrolled in 1999. He resigned in the summer of 2001 to serve as a missionary in Korea for his church and returned to the academy in the summer of 2004.

"I have noticed that since I returned that the commandant and the superintendent have really stressed on how we treat each other and members of the opposite sex," he said. "In (Bancroft) Hall ... I really have really seen improvement. The way we are relating to each other has improved."

- No Jumps-

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