

Claude Lague
Dean - Faculty of Engineering
University of Ottawa

March 19, 2008

Re: Engineering Students Society's *Oral Otis* newspaper column issue

To Mr. Lague,

The Ottawa Coalition To End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) would like to comment on the issues raised around the March 14, 2008 *Oral Otis* newspaper column "Ask the Keepers."

OCTEVAW is a coalition of agencies and individuals working together to end violence against women in our community. We are comprised of area women's shelters, sexual assault agencies, community and counselling agencies working with women and children, university researchers, victim services, the police and other concerned community members.

As a community we are deeply disturbed by what we have heard has been published in the *Oral Otis*. Violence against women is a worldwide epidemic and according to the UN is the most shameful and pervasive human-rights violation. It is in no way to be taken lightly or made humorous.

Young women between the ages of 15-24 are at greater risk of sexual assault than women at any other age. (*General Social Survey on Criminal Victimization*, Statistics Canada, 2004) This group of women is most likely to be on university campuses where violence does occur.

OCTEVAW expects that the Faculty of Engineering and the Engineering Students Society will take this issue seriously and in response make positive reparations to the Ottawa community as a whole.

We feel this can be accomplished by dedicating the next edition of the *Oral Otis* to public education within the Faculty on violence against women issues, with ways to participate in its end. A statement should be included that assures the Ottawa community that any material which promotes or alludes to violence against women and children and/or sexism will not be published by the paper in the future.

A faculty-wide fundraiser to raise money for a local sexual assault centre in the Ottawa-area could be organized as a gesture highlighting your commitment to ending violence.

All first-year undergraduate engineering students would also benefit from participating in a mandatory educational session on violence against women, sensitizing them to the seriousness of the issue with the aim of decreasing sexual assault incidents on campus.

Finally, we would encourage the Faculty to promote and attend the Sexual Violence Awareness Week from March 25th to 28th, 2008 organized by your University of Ottawa's Sexual Harassment Office. A calendar providing information about the various activities of that week can be found at: www.harassment.uottawa.ca.

OCTEVAW is willing to provide guidance to the Faculty regarding the progress of these initiatives and will be keeping an eye on the steps that local university and college campuses are taking to address violence against women. As a community, we believe that we can work together to end violence experienced in the lives of classmates, colleagues, friends, family members, neighbors, and all other women. Violence against women can and must be stopped.

Please feel free to contact the OCTEVAW office at any time.

Sincerely,

Erin Williams
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