

Addressing the issues?

Middlebury College President Olin Robison has finally addressed the issue of Paul Cubeta and the alleged sexual harassment which precipitated his retirement. In a letter addressed "To the Middlebury College Community," dated November 8, 1989, Dr. Robison confirmed what many people have suspected: That the Middlebury College administration continues to refuse to acknowledge that the 1988 sexual harassment hearing was handled badly.

Dr. Robison said early in his letter that "there is often a tension between the public's desire to know and the College's responsibility toward its constituent members." Dr. Robison disregards entirely the concerns of the thousands of people who make up the Middlebury community. Students, faculty and staff are all part of this private institution. We are as much "constituent members" of the Middlebury community as anyone else. We have the right to know of sexual harassment cases when they are heard, without the divulgence of specific names or allegations. While the college has a responsibility toward those constituents involved, it also has a responsibility to the wider Middlebury constituency.

The Burlington Free Press reported in no uncertain terms that College English professor Robert Hill approached Dr. Robison in the mid-1970's and said, "that Cubeta was harassing male students." Is this the statement that Dr. Robison is addressing when he obscurely wrote that "we are from time to time made vulnerable to allegations about what may or may not have been known by a particular person at a particular

time?”

When Dr. Robison wrote that “at no time to my knowledge has the College failed to respond swiftly and decisively to charges of sexual harassment,” he seems to be manipulating semantics sufficiently to gloss an important issue over: What happens when there are no specific charges of sexual harassment, but there are general warnings concerning an individual’s conduct? The Campus agrees that “to act on the basis of hearsay is indefensible and immoral.” However, it is not hearsay when a member of an academic department raises a valid concern regarding the conduct of one of his colleagues.

Dr. Robison’s open letter concludes: “Our response to such charges [of sexual harassment] will continue to be immediate, fair, and consonant with the principles of Trust, responsibility, and integrity that give meaning and substance to this community of learning.”

Well, according to at least one student involved in the 1988 Paul Cubeta sexual harassment hearing, the administration’s response to “such charges” was neither “immediate,” nor “fair.” The Campus believes that the administration’s handling of the case brings up serious doubts as to Middlebury College’s perception of the “principles of trust, responsibility and integrity.” As for “meaning and substance” in “this community of learning,” these phrases are becoming increasingly unclear.