

Vigil held in support of sexual assault survivors

Organizers said the rally was not a forum to express opinions about Frohnmayr's decision

By Laura Cadiz
Higher Education Editor

More than 100 people gathered outside Johnson Hall Friday morning to hold a candlelight vigil in support of rape and sexual assault survivors. The vigil was spurred by University President Dave Frohnmayr's decision to remand two sexual misconduct cases involving University student Dontá Graham-Preston to the University Appeals Board.

"You can break the silence by being here today ... by continuing to support the issue by advocating for survivors," said Caroline Padgett, staff attorney for Sexual Assault Support Services.

Supporters, mainly women, held candles and signs reading, "Believe in women; believe assault happens," and "One in three women are assaulted in college. I want, I need, I deserve protection."

Some who spoke at the vigil shared their experiences of being sexually assaulted or raped, and representatives from Sexual Assault Support Services offered tips on how to comfort survivors. Organizers pointed out that the rally was held to support rape survivors, not as a political forum to express opinions about the Graham-Preston case.

"Blame me for not fighting," one rape survivor said. "Blame me for not going to the police. Blame me for being in his bed. Blame me for having prior sexual relations with him. Shame on you for not holding him accountable for his actions. Shame on you for thinking it is okay for him to cover my mouth and be inside



Supporters of sexual assault and rape survivors gather in front of Johnson Hall Friday morning

me. Shame on all of you who think that rape is only rape if you are kicking, screaming and being beaten. If I wasn't raped, then you tell me what rape really is."

ASUO Multicultural Advocate Robert Wasson was one of three men who spoke at the vigil. He said he didn't plan on speaking, but when he saw that no other men were contributing, he felt obligated to do so.

"I'm here this morning as a man with a message for other men — we must recognize that we live in a rape culture, and we must begin to work against it," he said. "We, as men, have a responsibility to speak out against this nightmare. Support survivors. Support the women here and the women in our lives."

Wasson's main role at the vigil was to ring a bell every six minutes that symbolized the number

oftimes a woman is raped or sexually assaulted in the United States. He rang the bell from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. outside Johnson Hall.

"The bell is a way for me to be up here and honestly give me time to think about it, to refine my arguments" he said. "You have to think about it every six minutes. I get to think about it for three hours straight."

Student Senator Jenna Wasson called the turnout of so few men "pathetic."

"Ninety-nine percent of all rapists are men," she said. "It's men who can stop rape."

Some people at the rally were critical of the ASUO, saying that it didn't act soon enough in showing support for rape survivors, specifically the women who brought charges against Graham-Preston. The vigil was also sponsored by

Project Saferide, YWCA, Sexual Assault Support Services, Unwanted Sexual Behavior, Womenspace, Mother Kali's Bookstore, the Jewish Student Union, the Women's Center and Hillel.

"I think that there has already been a lot of damage done," said one of the women who brought the charges against Graham-Preston. "There's been enough discussion and enough confusion around this case that a long time ago [the ASUO] could have reacted to not let the issues and rumors get blown out of proportion."

ASUO Vice President Ben Unger said the timing of the vigil seemed right, that to hold it anytime earlier would seem odd, and anytime later seemed too late. He also said the ASUO has been proactive since fall term, pointing out that they distributed urinal



Candles burn to show support.

screens in men's bathrooms that read, "You hold the power to stop rape in your hand."

"It's too bad that this didn't happen sooner," Jenna Wasson said. "But it's nice to see the ASUO acknowledging the need for this kind of event."

Linda Hoover, assistant dean of student life, said it saddens her that it took the issues surrounding the Graham-Preston case to bring the issue of sexual assault to the forefront. "Sexual assault deserves to be at the forefront of campus discussions at all times," she said.

Unger said the ASUO was not currently discussing any further actions, but they are not taking the "wait and see" attitude.

"This is by no means the end of this discussion on campus," ASUO Federal Affairs coordinator Melissa Watson said.

Appeals: Student now taking classes at Portland State to graduate

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can't be at a place that would rather uphold its political agenda than its humanity. I keep hearing backlash every single day. I'm angry that people don't educate themselves about this issue."

Frohnmayr remanded one of

the cases, which involved an incident that occurred in March, because Graham-Preston did not receive his right of cross examination. He remanded the other case, which involved an incident that occurred in January 1997 with a different woman, because

of a lack of specific findings that supported Hearings Officer Floyd Prozanski's decision to consider evidence concerning the woman's recovered memory. The woman testified that she blocked the incident from her memory and did not recover it

until she engaged in sexual intercourse with her boyfriend in April, according to Prozanski's final order.

Graham-Preston was charged with two counts of sexual misconduct and found in violation of the previous Student Conduct Code

over the past year. He appealed both cases and was denied. The original sanctions were expulsion from the honors college and suspension from the University until one of the women, who is a sophomore, is no longer a student at the University.

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