

Arrest in On-Campus Beating; Fraternity Shelved

HATTIESBURG - The USM police department [made an arrest](#) on 8-Dec-2010 of a suspected assailant in [the recent campus beating](#) of USM freshman Stuart Ramsey. USM senior Chase LaGarde (pictured below), a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon, turned himself in after learning that a warrant had been issued for his arrest in [the 4-Dec-2010 assault](#) of Ramsey, a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon.



Chase LaGarde

According to *The Hattiesburg American* and *WLOX-TV News* of Gulfport/Biloxi, LaGarde is being [charged with aggravated assault](#), and he is currently in the Forrest County Jail awaiting an initial court hearing. The Martha Saunders administration has also decided to suspend Sigma Phi Epsilon from the Hattiesburg campus, a move that prompted the national chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon to revoke the USM chapter's charter. USM officials have given Sigma Phi Epsilon members until 10-Dec-2010 to vacate the fraternity house they now occupy.

[Still speaking officially](#) for the USM administration, USM vice president for student affairs Joe Paul told media outlets, "[t]his action to close this fraternity comes not only from the apparent involvement of a member in an assault that occurred this weekend, but because of this chapter's failure to govern its own members and comply with university rules over time. These actions are immediate and for a yet undetermined amount of time. We will begin conversations with the national organization and alumni chapter early next year to determine how and when Sigma Phi Epsilon may return to campus." Sources tell USMNEWS.net that Paul's choice of words, particularly the phrase "failure to govern . . . and comply with university rules *over time* [emphasis added]," appears to contradict his first public statements about the fraternities involved

in this matter. At that time Paul remarked that the campus had not seen an assault of this kind in a long while, and [he also noted](#) that there was no documentation of an ongoing feud between Sigma Chi Epsilon and Sigma Alpha Epsilon. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that Paul's interview with *The Hattiesburg American's* Jesse Bass (linked just above) was the perfect time to mention the ongoing problems with USM's Sigma Phi Epsilon, yet he neglected to do so. Instead, sources note, the early hours of the investigation had Paul sounding more worried about managing USM's image than about exposing the facts of this particular episode. The fact that Brian Warren, the Sigma Phi Epsilon national fraternity executive director, informed *THA* [that he knew](#) that the USM fraternity chapter "has demonstrated a *pattern* of irresponsible behavior [emphasis added]" also supports sources' view that Paul, and USM, appeared more interested in image management in the early hours of the investigation.

Meanwhile, the victim's father, Tom Ramsey, told *The Hattiesburg American's* Jesse Bass and Mike Blount that Stuart's "once-swollen-shut eye" had healed enough to open, and that it suffered no permanent damage. The elder Ramsey also used the interview with *THA* as an opportunity to publicly criticize the USM administration's approach to campus safety, stating "I sent my son to college - I didn't think I was sending him to a prison yard." Sources tell USMNEWS.net that Ramsey's public outrage with the USM administration about this episode is exactly the type of bad press that USM cannot afford. According to them, parents of current and prospective USM students are watching the institution very closely these days.