

It's Official – USM is Out of Control!

A GUEST EDITORIAL

The [recent on-campus beating saga](#) involving Stuart Ramsey (the victim) and members of USM's Sigma Chi Epsilon fraternity [has been akin](#) to something ripped from *Law & Order*, whose own scripts are ripped from real headlines. The latest news in [the saga](#) is that Chase Gerard LeGarde [has been arrested](#) on aggravated assault charges and is already [out on a \\$15,000 bond](#). Jesse Bass of *The Hattiesburg American* [reports that](#) USM police believe that LaGarde acted alone in beating Ramsey outside the Sigma Chi Epsilon house on Nov-4-2010, despite the fact that Ramsey's father, Tom, told police early on in the investigation that his son was met by multiple assailants. USMPD chief Bob Hopkins disputes Tom Ramsey's allegation, saying that witness interviews and a videotape point to LeGarde as the sole assailant in the case.

Meanwhile, after grounding USM's Sigma Chi Epsilon chapter for at least two semesters, if not more, USM vice president for student affairs Joe Paul is now backtracking off his original remarks about the case to reveal a history of troubling episodes regarding this particular fraternity. Paul told *The Hattiesburg American's* Bass that "[t]his action [to ground Sigma Chi Epsilon] was taken based on an accumulation of incidents. There were instances of bullying and harassment, and allegations of hazing." Bass added that Saturday's (Nov-4-2010) incident with LeGarde is not the first involving assault, given that [an affidavit was filed](#) on Sept-9-2010 in the Forrest County Justice Court by USM student Zachary Ridge, accusing Steven Quaintance and Andrew Asaro, both members of Sigma Chi Epsilon, of simple assault. Ridge claims that Quaintance and Asaro forcibly placed him in handcuffs, and then kicked him and sprayed him with Lysol, before also damaging his personal computer. Ridge's father, Leo, told *The Hattiesburg American's* Bass that it took some convincing to keep Zachary from leaving USM. Zachary Ridge's affidavit also states that he was pressured to forgo any legal charges against members of Sigma Chi Epsilon. The attorney for the alleged assailants in the Ridge case, Jonathan Farris, told *The Hattiesburg American* that there are reports of USM police officers pressuring USM students to file charges against members of Sigma Chi Epsilon so that the Martha Saunders administration can have the fraternity removed from campus. This particular case is set for court on Jan-19-2011, which promises to keep USM in the news for the foreseeable future.

USM's Paul also told *The Hattiesburg American's* Ed Kemp that [the final straw](#) in the decision to remove Sigma Chi Epsilon from campus for at least two semesters was the fraternity brothers' failure to cooperate with USM police in the investigation of the Ramsey beating. This definitely begs the question: Where are the obstruction of a police investigation arrests? Paul added, in his interview with Kemp, that Sigma Chi Epsilon have in the past violated USM rules on alcohol, bullying, and harassing (hazing), calling the fraternity's failure to discipline itself an unsettling aspect of this fraternity's record.

Clearly, Paul's charge that the fraternities should police themselves is about as out of touch as one can be in this day and time. To think that this statement comes from USM's *vice president for student affairs* is about as troubling as any other aspect of these stories. Paul also stated earlier that an assault case like the Ramsey one had not happened on campus in quite some time. However, thanks to Bass' diligent reporting, we know one happened around Sept-9-2010. I guess that means that in Paul's world about 90 days is *quite a while* when it comes to measuring the time between on-campus beatings and assaults. Sadly, *The Hattiesburg American's* editorial staff is less sophisticated than its reporting staff, given its decision to pen [an editorial column](#) entitled "Beating draws swift action from USM." I suppose the editors have already forgotten that it was Tom Ramsey, Stuart's father, who brought the story and accompanying photos to *The Hattiesburg American*, not USM officials. Not only that, I guess we are, in reverse-Paul fashion, left to conclude that 90 days and two on-campus beatings later, an arrest *in only one of the two cases* qualifies, at least for *The Hattiesburg American's* editors, as "swift action."

If you haven't seen the photo of a beaten-down Stuart Ramsey that was printed in statewide (and perhaps national) media, then you should do so soon. In addition to a broken hand suffered during the assault, Stuart's left eye is swollen shut by the pounding he took at the hands and feet of LeGarde. One online reader of *The Hattiesburg American* also notes that the blood stain on the Sigma Chi Epsilon parking lot is another sight to behold. Clearly, Ramsey could've been killed in the Dec-4-2010 assault. Luckily, his eye is healing, and broken hands can be fixed. Still, long-term repercussions from trauma to the head, like the massive blows Ramsey must have suffered that evening, are always possible. One can only pray none arise in the weeks and months to come. If, however, the beating had gone further south than it appears now to have gone, would editorials praising "swift action" be around today. I seriously doubt it. Despite what the local paper's editors believe, the action against LeGarde is too late to be a deterrent – too many beatings, and too much time had already passed when

Hopkins made the arrest. Sadly, USM's Greeks have already learned that the USM administration, from Paul to Saunders, lacks the will to govern the campus in an appropriate manner. Ramsey and Ridge have already paid a price for that lack of will. Others, all unnamed at this point, probably have as well.