Police: Union student's rape allegation not true

Union College rape report deemed false, police said.

Kathleen Moore | October 8, 2013

City police say a Union College student's report of being raped on Foster Avenue was untrue.

The woman, who was not identified, told a story so graphic Union College security sent out an alert to all students and professors early Sunday. Police interviewed her at Ellis Hospital and multiple detectives were assigned to the case.

But security camera footage and witness accounts proved her story was false, police said. College security sent out another alert Tuesday telling students no sexual assault had occurred.

Her story frightened many students. She told security officers that as she walked down Foster Avenue toward Nott Street, she was grabbed by three young men, one of them roughly 16 years old. They dragged her away and raped her, she said.

The implication was that a gang of strangers had attacked her. That sort of rape is extraordinarily rare, and detectives sprang into action to find the assailants.

“Our detectives were involved because of the seriousness of the allegations,” Schenectady police spokesman Lt. Mark McCracken said. “The college took it very seriously.”

But the story began to fall apart almost at once. Police said when they went to Ellis Hospital, she spoke with uniformed officers but balked at talking to a detective. By Monday, they had labeled her as “noncooperative” in their notes, said Sgt. Matthew Dearing, another department spokesman.
Meanwhile, campus security was investigating, as well. Footage from off-campus security cameras Union College paid to install showed her walking down Foster Avenue toward Nott Street alone, according to Schenectady County District Attorney Robert Carney. No one even approached her along the way.

Witnesses also provided information indicating nothing happened to her that night, according to campus security. By Tuesday morning, security officers were certain the woman had not been assaulted, spokesman Phillip Wajda said.

“It was clear that the allegation was false,” he said.

By midday Tuesday, the police investigation shifted whether to arrest her. McCracken said police asked Carney whether they should charge her with making a false report. But Carney said that since the woman reported the incident to campus security, not police, she would not be charged.

McCracken said the student was dismissed Tuesday and sent home. She lives outside the state, he said. Wajda said federal privacy laws prevented him from discussing any possible discipline for making a false report, but denied the student was expelled.

A Schenectady woman did not get off as easily in a similar case last year. In that case, police said Nicolia Steed reported a stranger had raped her. She signed a written statement, and hospital officials collected DNA evidence, which helped police locate the man, they said.

But investigators said they discovered Steed had the man’s number in her cellphone, leading them to suspect it wasn’t stranger rape, as Steed had alleged. After the man was arrested, she confessed they had had a brief consensual relationship and took back the allegations, police said.

The charges against the man were dropped, and Steed was arrested on a misdemeanor charge. The outcome of her case could not be determined Tuesday.