Rape Complaint Called A Hoax

Student Admits Fabrication

November 22, 2002/By CHRISTOPHER KEATING And GRACE MERRITT; Courant Staff Writers

A female University of Connecticut student has admitted fabricating a story about a rape that heightened alarm recently at the Storrs campus, police said Thursday night.

The woman made the false report last week, describing an attack that closely resembled another incident near the former campus bookstore in the center of the campus.

In combination, the reports have caused concern and increased publicity around the campus. "Some students are nervous, and some are very calm. Some parents have been calling" the university, a campus spokeswoman said.

The student who falsely reported the rape gave only a vague description of her attacker, providing little for detectives to investigate and prompting them to question inconsistencies in her account, officials said.

A fellow student said the woman, whose name has not been released, has withdrawn from the university. But UConn officials were unable to confirm her status Thursday night.

"We don't plan to discipline or charge her," said Karen Grava, a university spokeswoman. "We're very sympathetic to her problems."

In similar hoaxes, women have been charged with falsely reporting an incident. But UConn police said that the case is closed, and "no further police action" will be taken.

The hoax came only days after an incident on Oct. 27 in which a woman reported that two men dressed in black and wearing ski masks sexually assaulted her in the darkness as she was jogging near the former UConn Co-op.

The case that turned out to be a hoax was said to have occurred about 11 p.m. on Nov. 2 at a well-lighted bus stop shelter on Gilbert Road. Prompted by inconsistencies in the woman's account, campus police asked her Thursday to sit for a second detailed interview to provide a clear account of what had happened.

"The victim then notified investigators that she had misrepresented her complaint," the police said in a statement. "She stated that her account was fabricated and that she had not been sexually assaulted. The original account was designed to be similar to a recent report of criminal activity at the Storrs campus."

Some investigators had questions about the woman's story from the beginning because witnesses in the area had not seen the events she described.

"The second one that was reported was in a very well-lighted area where there were three blue [emergency] phones and seven other phones in the area," Grava said of the hoax. "We would take any report seriously, but this definitely warranted a second look."
News of the hoax filtered out to students throughout the campus Thursday night.

A police statement about the false report was e-mailed Thursday to all students on the Storrs campus.

Earlier this month, some students had criticized campus officials for not being more timely in warning students about the incidents and for not providing full details of them. Some students complained that they learned of the reports from the news media, rather than the university.

UConn senior Neil T. Roach, a representative in the Undergraduate Student Government, was attending a meeting Thursday when Dean of Students John R. Saddlemire made an unexpected visit to inform students about the hoax.

In a telephone interview, Saddlemire said he did not know the woman's age, her year in the school, or where she lived. He said he could not confirm a report that she was unhappy at the school, and he said he was concerned about protecting her privacy.

``I'm not fully aware of why she took the action she did,'' Saddlemire said. ``In the long run, it's an unfortunate situation.''

The hoax, he said, will not stop the university from vigorously investigating other cases.

Roach, a senior, said he was told that the woman was confronted with inconsistencies in the case and, during a meeting Thursday with her father and university police, admitted that she had filed a false report. Roach said the woman no longer is a student at UConn.

``I find it shocking, and I also worry that while the second attack turned out to be false, that it will take away somehow from the other attack,'' Roach said. ``This shouldn't take away from the response to the first attack in terms of safety.''

Student body President Michael Nichols described the incident as unfortunate and said he was a bit skeptical from the start about the credibility of the second report.

``It didn't make any sense that it would happen at 11:15 on a Saturday night in an area where students live and that's well-lit,'' Nichols said.

In another case, one of the top UConn football players, starting safety Chris Meyer, has been arrested on a felony charge of evidence tampering in connection with an on-campus rape last summer involving a woman police said was intoxicated. Meyer, who practiced this week with the team, also was charged with interfering with an officer in the July 26 case.

UConn's athletic department has announced that Meyer, who has started 21 consecutive games and is the team's second-leading tackler, will continue to play football as the criminal case against him proceeds.