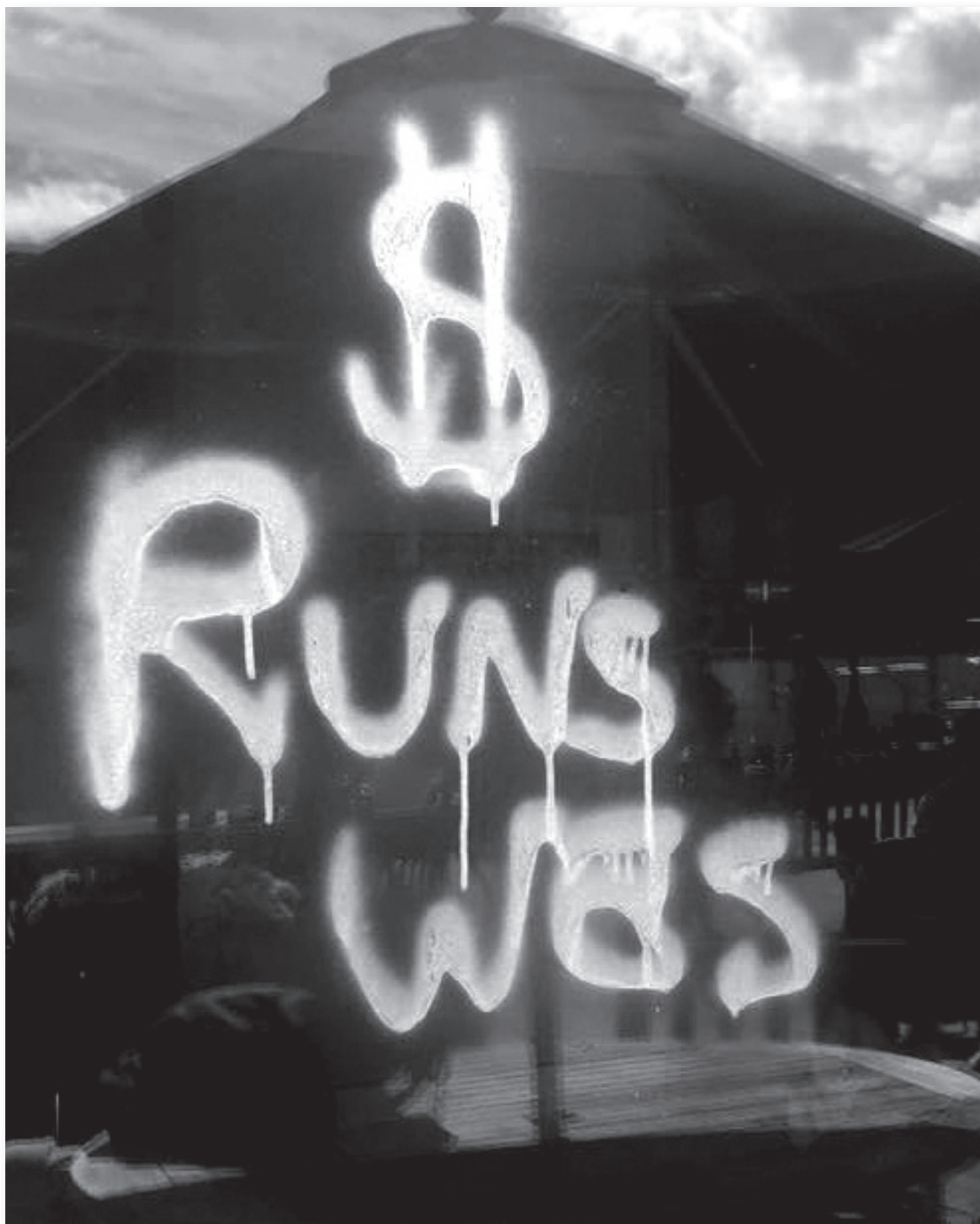


Disorientation



Spring 2017

EDITORS

Abby Cunniff

Paige Hutton

CONTRIBUTORS

Hailey Broughton-Jones

Spencer Brown

Grace Handy

Paige Hutton

Tedra James

Mira Klein

Alice Markham-Cantor

Taylor McClain

Henry Prine

Aviv Rau

Avigayl Sharp

Mya Valentin

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Recap of Last Semester

cw/tw: sexual assault and harassment

BOSTON GLOBE ARTICLE

In July of 2016, an email was sent to students mentioning that Dean Scott Backer was no longer employed by Wesleyan. It was not until October 1, 2016, when an article titled “Educators accused of sexual misconduct often find new post” was published in the Boston Globe that students knew the actual reason for Backer’s departure. In this article, it was revealed that prior to holding his position as an associate dean of students at Wesleyan, Backer worked at Vermont Academy where he allegedly asked a 15 year-old student to have sex with him. When the Boston Globe reached out to Wesleyan University for comment in the summer of 2016, a Wesleyan spokesperson denied that the school had had any knowledge of sexual misconduct in Backer’s past.

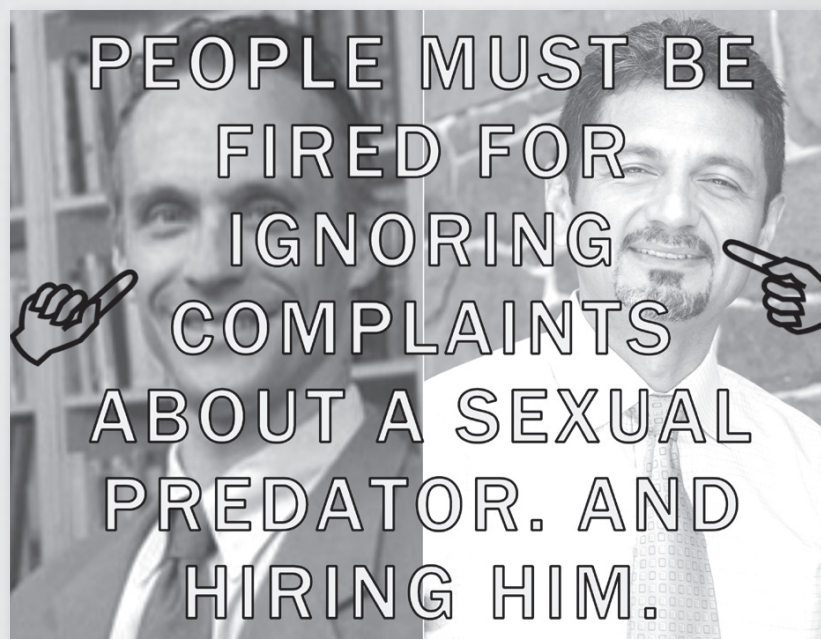
In his position as associate dean at Wesleyan, Backer was in charge of handling cases of sexual harassment and assault. This meant that a person who had used his position to advance himself sexually onto someone under his authority was now in charge of handling and adjudicating cases involving sexual predators.

Backer was infamous among students and many complained to the school about his vilification and disregard for the people who had been harassed or assaulted, but the school never took students’ claims seriously. Lexie Malico, a 2016 Wesleyan graduate and a survivor, reported that, during her Title IX case, she “felt that Dean Backer inappropriately asked leading questions that brought me and my character into question. It felt as though my perpetrator’s innocence had been decided before I walked in the door.” Chloe Murtagh, another 2016 grad and a member of the Survivor Network during her time at Wesleyan, said that under Backer, “[Survivors’] biggest complaints were really lenient sentences and, overall, people had this sense that their case wasn’t taken seriously.” At one point during his time at Wesleyan, Backer told a student who allegedly sexually harassed another student over text message (an act strikingly similar to Backer’s) that because the “allegations appeared to involve a ‘stupid drunken message a long time ago,’ which was an isolated occurrence as opposed to repeated behavior, it would not be ‘a serious Title IX concern.’”

TOWN HALL MEETING

In the wake of the news about Scott Backer, a town hall meeting was planned by a group of students. It was held on October 4th, 2016 three days after the Boston Globe article was published. Around 200 students showed up to the event, plus a handful of professors and reporters from campus publications. The discussion was divided into two parts: first, general feelings towards the news, and second, suggestions for concrete steps to be taken in reaction to the news. Many self-identified sexual assault survivors spoke at the event, along with other students and professors. A few popular sentiments emerged from the meeting. Many agreed that the school's (in)action in the case of Scott Backer was not an isolated case, but was the continuation of a legacy of a lack of accountability and transparency at Wesleyan. Wide distrust and anger toward President Michael Roth and Vice President for Equity and Inclusion/Title IX Officer Antonio Farias were voiced, and many demanded that they be fired. Students (mostly students of color and low income students) expressed anger and exhaustion that they put so much labor into work for Wesleyan offices such as Admissions and Equity & Inclusion, but do not receive the support Wesleyan purports to give its marginalized students.

The group came to a consensus to try and remove Roth and Antonio Farias from the administration, and working groups formed, including a campaign to improve CAPS services and the creation of a student union. Postering started the next day, calling for transparency and including the infamous list "SHIT ROTH AND FARIAS DO."



ADMISSIONS DAY INTERRUPTIONS

On October 10th, 2016 the Admissions office had an Open House where many potential and future Wesleyan students came to visit the school with their parents. The newly formed student union planned multiple actions to draw attention to the university's consistent lack of transparency, and accountability, focusing on the insufficient staffing in CAPS and sexual assault on campus. Informational posters covered the campus, students disrupted tours to tell potential students and parents about the issues the university refused to reveal, and Roth's planned address in Beckham Hall was met with a silent protest by current students. After a 15 minute introduction, Roth cut his presentation short and left hastily, unable to answer or confront the issues brought up by students. Students then led their own discussion about issues on campus and Q&A session with prospective students and their families so as to assert student-led accountability and transparency in regards to the actions of the Wesleyan administration. On the same day, almost every single campus tour was interrupted by another group of students highlighting administrative complicity in and sanctioning of rape culture with a performance art piece.

MELLON FELLOWS WROTE LETTER ABOUT FARIAS

As Title IX Officer and Vice President of Equity and Inclusion, Farias has humiliated numerous survivors of sexual violence and made outlandish comments about low income students, on top of his general failure to meet job requirements of supporting marginalized students. Below is an article written by the Mellon Fellows denouncing Dean Farias in October 2016.

“Antonio Farias represents for us the administrative power we aim to challenge and disrupt as we embark on our journey into academia. We believe refusing to attend this lunch if Farias is present is an explicit way that we can express our lack of support for him in his particular position, as well as the administrative failure of this institution more generally throughout history. As Mellon fellows who plan on entering academia, and who have political and ethical stakes in the work, we cannot reconcile attending this lunch with Antonio Farias, nor can we continue to implicitly support his participation in any Mellon program by remaining complicit in the face of such overt irony.

In keeping with the integrity of the MMUF program, which is predicated on values that promote and enable reparative social justice, we hope you will respect our concerns and take them seriously—which is to say, Farias’ role and level of participation within the program needs to be critically reconsidered to the extent that he is disassociated from the program completely.”

STUDENT UNION TEACH-IN

The Student Union held a tech-in at downstairs Usdan on November 5th equipped with zines, printed mission statements and timelines of activism at Wesleyan. Many students were confused about the actions that took place during admissions day, so this provided a space to discuss history of administrative failure, tactics to change administrative policy, and possibilities for the union.

B.O.T. ACTION

The student union hosted an action at the Board of Trustees meeting on November 19th, 2016 to demand BoT meetings be public. About 35 students filed into the Daniel Family Commons uninvited to demand transparency in administrative decisions that largely concern student life. Donna Morea, the chair of the board, informed the students that the meeting would not proceed unless the students left, and the meeting ended before it began. Board members moved to the Public Affairs Center and the students followed, where the meeting was once again adjourned before it began by President Michael Roth. Trustees headed to the Middletown Inn on Main Street which students were not able to find out or follow and the meeting was held there without any students present. A livestream of the day’s actions was broadcast in downstairs Usdan by the student-run blog Wesleying. On December 1st, 14 students received emails that they had been charged with 2 violations for participating in the action, one for “disruption” and one for “failure to comply,” although they never had their names or students IDs taken down and were never informed they were at risk for judicial points. An administrator told one of the students that class deans used the Wesleying video to identify the students. There was a hearing on December 8th and they all received judicial points for their participation in the action.