



Patrick Henry College
Initial Response to Report of Independent Review Committee
Statement of Michael Farris, Chancellor
August 5, 2014

This winter, the *New Republic* published an article alleging that the administration of Patrick Henry College mishandled allegations of sexual assault in past years. The article focused on two incidents involving allegations of non-consensual contact between a male and a female student.

The college administration responsible for student life consists of our Dean of Student Life who reports to the Provost. The Provost, in turn, reports to the President. The President reports to the Board of Trustees.

In order to provide as much independence as possible, I, as Chancellor, took the initiative to create the Independent Review Committee to provide the College with guidance concerning the policies and practices of PHC with regard to such allegations.

My comments today are in two categories. I will respond to the concerns about the process raised by the IRC. Additionally, I will give a brief and preliminary reply to the substance of the work of the IRC.

As detailed below, the College leadership believes that we have fully and reasonably cooperated with the IRC. We have given the IRC direct access to every past and present student and the ability to receive confidential information from them directly with no intervention by the college in any way.

However, our response to the issues concerning the process should only serve as evidence of the true independence of the IRC. Even though there have been some elements of criticism of the college's approach, I am very glad that the IRC has had the freedom and willingness to do so.

We do not want these side questions of process to detract in any way from the substantive work of the IRC.

We believe the substantive work of the IRC is excellent. We are very much impressed with the quality, thoughtfulness, and thoroughness of the suggestions. It will take the Administration and Trustees some additional time to assess and implement these suggested policies and practices. While we cannot determine the exact content of future policies until further study and internal discussions, I will say as Chancellor that I would expect our future path to be in substantial accord with the suggestions made by the IRC.

Our goal is to ensure the safety and well-being of all of our students. We believe that the work of the IRC will prove to be critical in ensuring continued improvements for student life at Patrick Henry College.

Michael Farris, JD, LLM
Chancellor, Patrick Henry College

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Farris", written in a cursive style.

Additional Comments about the IRC Process

It was clear that the purpose of the Independent Review Committee was solely to provide guidance concerning future policies and practices. The College did not believe that it was appropriate or possible for any such committee to conduct an investigation that would review disputed factual allegations from incidents that were several years old at the time of the *New Republic* article.

Accordingly, the Independent Review Committee was given the task of proposing changes and improvements in the College's approach in handling any future allegations of sexual assault or harassment.

The College recognized that some degree of factual investigation would be necessary for the IRC to be able to be fully informed as to current practices and policies. Accordingly, the administration gave considerable amounts of information and latitude to the IRC.

The most important information the college administration made available to the IRC was direct access to all current students. Through the Alumni Association, which had two officers as members of the IRC, this investigatory group had direct access to all past and present students. The IRC report accurately describes, at least in general terms, other important information disclosed by the administration including interviews, written documentation, and more.

The IRC's report expresses some level of dissatisfaction with the College's disclosure of information. The College was guided by three principles in its disclosures:

1. Protecting the privacy of both victims and alleged perpetrators.
2. Maintaining a forward-looking orientation rather than attempting to recreate disputed events from past years.
3. Providing sufficient information to the IRC to allow it to be fully capable of proposing appropriate changes to our policies and practices.

The IRC report appears to indicate that there are additional incidents of sexual assault or harassment than those previously known by senior college administrators. Nothing in the report suggests that these additional incidents were disclosed to our Dean of Students. It would appear that a lower level Student Life employee, a Resident Director, allegedly mishandled an incident previously unknown to senior administrators.

I personally urged the IRC to inform the President or me if they discovered information that any of our employees had failed to disclose to us additional incidents. While we did not ask the IRC to investigate employee misconduct, we made it clear that the President and Chancellor would do so if any such activity was discovered by the IRC.

The College again extends its thanks to the IRC members for their tireless efforts and ongoing contributions to the Patrick Henry College community.