

Trying to find some peace in the calm before the storm

What once was a murmur of disapproval may soon grow into a roar of discontent.

When news of the alleged rape at Mayflower Hall broke last week, people could be overheard in every corner of the UI community discussing the horror of it all.

It wasn't the feelings of violation and betrayal from a sexual assault that had people talking. Instead, it was the feelings of violation and betrayal from the UI's handling of the alleged incident that had so many people upset.

Many people feel UI officials acted irresponsibly when they told *The Daily Iowan* that, while the incident was still being investigated, several factors were casting doubt on the alleged victim's truthfulness.

Some criticism of the UI has merit, while some is unfair.

"From what we understand, this report does not pose a risk for any students," Ann Rhodes, vice president for University Relations, was quoted as saying in the Feb. 9 edition of the *DI*. "There are inconsistencies in the girl's report, and we are looking for information that it really happened. It probably didn't happen as it was described in the report."

Instead of investigating a rape, as it should have done, the UI was impugning the victim, critics thought.

The alleged victim, who had resided at Mayflower but has since left school, says she was sexually assaulted around 12:30 a.m. on Jan. 25. But for whatever reason, a report wasn't filed with Public Safety until Feb. 1. That delay, the fact the alleged victim's mother filed the report and apparent discrepancies in the alleged victim's statements have led UI officials to wonder — aloud — what actually happened, if anything at all.

Further enraging some people is how the UI, full of doubt and yet still investigating, didn't warn Mayflower residents that a rapist may be on the prowl there.

UI officials, as some critics have correctly said, should be more mindful of the effect their words and actions may have. Publicly airing the private doubts about a rape allegation could dissuade future rape victims from seeking help.

If the UI doesn't believe a rape occurred after a full investigation, it should just say so. To do otherwise is unfair to the alleged victim and the UI community as a whole.

Until then, though, the UI should not comment on the merits of a claim while an investigation is still being conducted. Such comments are premature and inappropriate before all the facts are in. If UI officials feel confident that all the facts are in, they should then close the investigation, issue a report and let the public decide.

But people are out of line for suggesting that the investigation itself is what's offensive.

It's true not every rape is reported. But it's also true not every rape that's reported actually happened.

To be falsely accused of rape can destroy a person's reputation, branding that person a horrible monster. That's why investigating a rape allegation — and sometimes concluding that it's untrue — is an important and necessary practice.

In addition to being a horrible crime, rape is a cultural lightning rod. It's easy to get swept up into an emotional firestorm by a rape allegation, forgetting that the accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

The best way for the UI community to address this, or any, rape allegation is in a civilized manner, not with a roar.