

Physician, heal thyself

By Elliott Wolf

QED

In 2006, Duke student Christian Kunkel, Trinity '06 founded the American Beerpong Association of America.

According to its Web site, the ABAA seeks to “embody all the greatness that is the sport and aim to aid its ascension to its rightful place in American lore.” In addition, “the ABAA fights for beerpong rights as it has been declared illegal to play this great sport in many bars across America.”

In 2007, Duke senior Kenny Larrey founded Duke Students for an Ethical Duke.

DSED was founded as a direct result of the lacrosse case and concerns about the subsequent administrative, faculty and community response. Its mission statement claims, “whenever hatred, racism, prejudice, slander, or plain administrative and academic incompetence manifest on Duke Campus [sic], we are listening not as personal advocates but as advocates of principle, fairness, and equality.”

Unfortunately, one of these redundantly named organizations has failed to live up to its stated mission. As further evidence of Duke students’ insatiable gusto for beerpong, it wasn’t the ABAA.

DSED has used campus events, guest speakers, public statements, blogs and published articles to raise awareness of the issues surrounding the lacrosse case. But despite its broad and very necessary organizational imperative, it has failed to articulate or enact any specific policy objective. It has succeeded in offering incessant criticism of President Richard Brodhead, with nothing constructive beyond, “he has an awful lot of explaining to do,” as the DSED blog states.

The administrative, police and community responses that DSED assails were all predicated upon individuals’ “rush to judgment based upon unquestioning faith in what a prosecutor had told them,” as described by Lane Williamson, chair of the Disciplinary Hearing Commission of the North Carolina State Bar. Thus, most alarming is DSED’s failure to internalize this principal catalyst of the “hatred, racism, prejudice, slander or plain administrative and academic incompetence” seen during the lacrosse case.

DSED, largely through statements by Larrey, has used hearsay, paraphrasing from anonymous sources, gossip, apparent misrepresentations and other questionable information to advance its arguments (sound familiar?).

The best and most recent example of this behavior came in Larrey’s recent article “The Last Straw,” published in the student publication *The Right Review*. Using only two vague references to secondary sources, Larrey made a variety of highly contentious claims without direct attribution.

Among them was the assertion that “administrators handed over troves of players’ confidential information that was later used to frame suspects and obtain indictments... [and] Nifong went out of his way to do favors such as his attempted cover up [sic] for this illegally leaked information.”

Larrey said of his article, “almost all of that is based on ‘Until Proven Innocent,’” a book by Stuart Taylor and KC Johnson.

Asked his thoughts, Johnson wrote in an e-mail, “the book presents no evidence that Nifong ‘went out of his way’ to do anything for the Duke administration.”

Larrey also stated authoritatively, “it was Duke that collaborated with police and [Alcohol Law Enforcement] to illegally raid student off campus houses without warrants—well in excess

of 100 instances—so that Judicial Affairs could subject them to Duke justice.”

His source: “I’m not sure if I can exactly tell you where I’m coming up with that.”

“Until Proven Innocent” was silent on the matter. But having extensively researched the relationship between Judicial Affairs and the Durham Police Department, I found no evidence that warranted such a statement. Larrey proceeded to chock up any ambiguity to “sloppy writing.”

A more extensive parsing of the ~~cl~~etis posted at <http://www.duke.edu/~egw4/>

DSED’s behavior is all the more remarkable following an Oct. 12 letter to the editor in The Chronicle, in which Larrey wrote, “if we are going to move forward in all of this, we must speak with accuracy and precision. We must be courageous in challenging untruths, but we must be prepared to substantiate our claims and accusations.”

As one potential and two currently pending civil suits against Duke and Durham progress, many details will come to light that may corroborate or refute DSED’s as-yet unsubstantiated claims. In the meantime, however, said claims are greatly undermining the credibility of all of us who want to see institutional change as a result of the lacrosse case and rapidly costing DSED support.

Michael Gustafson, assistant professor of the practice of electrical and computer engineering and a highly regarded commentator on all aspects of the lacrosse case, was originally tapped as DSED’s faculty advisor.

He has since dissociated himself.

“I am in favor of the concept of Duke students discussing ethics and ethical dilemmas and breaches,” he said. But he added that “I am not sold, as yet, that the organization so named is approaching it in the most constructive manner.”

“I told them that I will not be part of this lynch mob,” he said.

Johnson’s reaction to Larrey’s statements: “In my critiques of the Duke administration and Duke faculty, I’ve tried to be very precise in what I say, and always to have direct corroboration.... I believe that any serious critic of the administration’s handling of events in the past 18 months must adhere to such a standard.”

DSED is obtuse, but not off base. These issues matter, and they matter enough to do it right. Elliott Wolf is a Trinity senior. His column runs every Thursday.