Four women have brought suit against Carleton College, charging that the college mishandled allegations of rape on campus.

The women, two current students and two who attended previously, say the college not only failed to provide a safe living and working environment but also failed to adequately discipline their attackers. The college has denied the allegations.

The plaintiffs are each seeking damages in excess of $50,000.

Carla Kjellberg, the lawyer for the plaintiffs, said each of the women was raped in a campus dormitory by one of two male Carleton students. She said the college knew of prior sexual improprieties by the assailants.

'Dangerous to Women'

"They knew that these men were dangerous to women, were a threat to women, and they took no steps to assure that they would not victimize other women on the Carleton campus," she said.

The plaintiffs say the college's lack of action led the men to continue criminal sexual conduct. "What it said to the men was that we are not going to take this seriously, and nothing's going to happen to you," Ms. Kjellberg said.

The suit also maintains that the college and its dean of students, Cris Roosenraad, mishandled the cases.

According to the complaint, the dean discouraged the women from reporting the incidents to the police, encouraging them instead to pursue action through the college's sexual-harassment procedures.

"They divert the women to the college procedures," Ms. Kjellberg said, "and then put them through a process that is more horrific than anything they would go through in the criminal-justice system."

Suspended for a Year

Three of the women pursued charges under the college's harassment policy. Two of these cases were heard by the college's judicial hearing board, which comprises four students, two staff members and two faculty members. The board found both men guilty of sexual harassment and suspended each for one year.

The third case was heard by Dean Roosenraad with the consent of all parties involved. The dean found the man guilty of
"advances without sanctions" and placed him on disciplinary probation for two terms.

Ms. Kjellberg said the dean's finding was less severe because the woman had admitted to drinking three beers before the attack.

"At the close of the hearing," Ms. Kjellberg said, "he lectured the woman, in front of the perpetrator, that it was her consumption of alcohol that led to the leniency of the sentence."

The college denied that it tries to divert women from the criminal-justice system.

"The policy has been to offer to help make contact with the Northfield police, and over time I've evolved a list of Northfield attorneys, and we're willing to help make contacts with them," Dean Roosenraad said.

Carleton's president, Stephen R. Lewis Jr., also defended the college's policies. "We were one of the first colleges in the country that had a policy that dealt with sexual harassment and sexual assault," he said, "and we've modified as the state of the art has changed."

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