UCT under fire over rape

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INSTEAD of pushing students to change their behaviour to avoid rape, the University of Cape Town should be tackling the sexism and rape culture on campus, says the UCT Survivors group.

It was responding to confirmation by the university yesterday that a 28-year-old student had been “brutally attacked, assaulted and raped” near Rhodes Memorial on Tuesday evening.

This is the fourth attack in the area since November.

“Although we cannot be certain, all indications are that the attack has similarities to three previous recent attacks that occurred near Rhodes Memorial and that the assailant might be the same person involved in these other cases,’ said UCT spokesman Gerda Kruger.

“The student was running along the bicycle path in the area near the bridge of Princesse Anne Drive in Newlands when a man attacked her, threatened her with a knife, assaulted her severely and forced her into the bushes and towards the Rhodes Memorial area.”

After being held captive for some hours, the woman escaped. She was admitted to hospital.

Kruger asked “all students and staff — and women in particular — to avoid walking or running alone at all cost”.

The UCT Survivors group criticised the university’s response.

“The statements that UCT sends out every time someone is sexually assaulted always carry the same message to female students in particular — ‘make sure it isn’t you next time’. Pushing students to change their behaviour to avoid rape is saying make sure the rapist targets someone else.

“It creates a culture of victim-blaming, instead of promising to tackle sexism and rape culture on campus. There has been no promise of campus-wide sensitisation and education for staff members, workers and students about gender-based violence,” the group said.

UCT spokesman Elijah Moholola said: “[The statement] in no way implies that a survivor of rape or any other crime should be blamed or feel responsible for what has been done to them.”

In addition to beefing up security, UCT has set up a sexual assault response team headed by Associate Professor Sinegugu Duma.

Counselling of rape victims has been outsourced to the Rape Crisis Centre.

Centre director Kathleen Dey said: “I don’t believe UCT is equipped to deal with the situation. There is not going to be an overnight change but they need to develop a policy and protocol.”

Police spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Andre Traut said it was too soon to link the case to other attacks. Last month the police issued a photograph of a suspect, Patrick Hlomane, also known as Mthunzi Makamba, who they believe may be linked to at least one of the attacks.

Stellenbosch University has announced the appointment of a task team to look into “rape culture” after the rape of a female student at a residence last month.