

# Bizarre happenings make news at Harvard

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The Boston Globe

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Harvard University has made a lot of news since it was founded in 1636, but it has never had a year like this.

Some of the news has been tragic: a deadly helicopter crash at a Harvard boathouse, a fatal overdose at a Harvard-affiliated hospital, now a brutal murder-suicide in a Harvard dormitory.

Some of the news has been embarrassing: Two Harvard students ripped off a fund for leukemia patients; a Harvard-affiliated doctor bilked Children's Hospital; the college inadvertently admitted a high school student who had killed her mother.

And some of the news has been simply bizarre. The president of the university took a three-month leave because of fatigue. Singapore's police chief was mugged during a visit to campus. A wild shootout erupted during an armored car robbery in Harvard Square.

"It's been a long and strenuous year," said Joe Wrinn, who will complete a one-year stint as acting director of the Harvard news office next month. "I am very, very tired."

## Murder one?

In the latest case, investigators are trying to determine whether Harvard junior Sinedu Tadesse planned the murder of her roommate, Trang Phuong Ho. Tadesse, 20, a premed student, stabbed Ho, 20, then hanged herself from a shower rail May 28, authorities say. They said they now believe Tadesse sent a photograph of herself to The Harvard Crimson on May 23, along with an anonymous letter warning that the woman in the picture would be involved in a "very juicy story." They are awaiting results from fingerprint tests and further interviews before they say for sure.

Harvard officials are quick to point out that in some ways, this has been a great year for their 359-year-old institution.

The admissions office received nearly 18,000 applications for 1,600 undergraduate slots, a record. The alumni office launched a \$2.1 billion fund drive, and has raised nearly \$900 million already. The annual US News & World Report poll of the nation's leading colleges still had Harvard at the top.

But by any measure, Harvard has faced an unusual amount of adversity since the school year

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**JAMES FALLOWS**  
author and Harvard alumnus

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began. Even before the murder-suicide, The Harvard Crimson had prepared a year-in-review magazine on the university's travails. The title: "Feeling the Heat: Harvard in the Media."

## Strange days

"It certainly has been an unusual year," said author James Fallows, who graduated there 25 years ago. "But these things are always going to get more publicity when they happen there. Harvard is constantly under the microscope."

Of course, no one claims the string of bad news is anything but a coincidence. In fact, Harvard has ended up in several major stories that had nothing to do with the university.

The state police helicopter that fell out of the sky in February just happened to land on a Harvard boathouse. The armed robber who exchanged gunshots with a Wells Fargo security guard in March just happened to pick Harvard Square to make his move.

"That has nothing to do with Harvard, except that it happened in the Square," said Harvard Provost Albert Carnesale, who found himself serving as acting president and provost as well as dean of the Kennedy School of Government during President Neil Rudenstine's three-month leave. "You could find bad things associated with Stanford, too."

Even among the events that did involve Harvard as an institution, there is no connecting theme.

## No real problem

The Gina Grant case, in which a high school senior was denied a Harvard education because she had killed her mother in South Carolina, involved an admissions decision. The thefts from the Jimmy Fund and Children's Hospital involved two seniors and a wayward doctor. Rudenstine's abrupt decision to take a leave was unprecedented, but it

hardly indicates a deep systemic failure.

"The year has been straight out of a picaresque novel, but there's no underlying problem," said Michael Barrett, a former state senator and gubernatorial candidate who graduated with Fallows in the class of 1970. "It's more like getting hit with a handful of family tragedies in one year. You're dazed and baffled, but you're still fundamentally solid."

Still, when Wrinn agreed to run the news office for a year, he expected to deal with announcements for faculty appointments, Nobel prizes and the like.

Instead, he has fielded questions about a mysterious virus that struck 225 students who had dined on Harvard food. And about John Mack, the Harvard psychiatrist who has appeared on Oprah Winfrey's show to talk about space aliens.

Last week, as calls from *Gerardo*, *Hard Copy* and the rest of the media continued to pour in, Wrinn tried to put the latest tragedy in perspective. It is unspeakably sad, he said. But it could have happened anywhere.

"These are sensational events, but things don't change at Harvard," said Theda Skocpol, a professor of sociology and political science. "Harvard endures."