

U. of Toledo fires policeman jailed in killing

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TOLEDO

A University of Toledo police officer accused of killing a nursing student was fired after an investigation found that he harassed students and reported crimes that never occurred.

Chief Frank Pizzulo said yesterday that he recommended Jeffrey Hodge's dismissal after investigators discovered Hodge might have been "out of control."

University President Frank Horton approved the dismissal this week.

Hodge, 22, had been suspended with pay since his arrest Feb. 1 in the shooting death of Melissa Anne Herstrum, 19, of Rocky River. He is being

held on \$1 million bond in Lucas County Jail.

When Hodge was arrested, Pizzulo described him as a hard-working, diligent officer. He had been a police officer for six months, and there wasn't a clue he might be unstable, said Assistant Chief Joe Skonecki.

"All of this came to our attention after the fact, after he was arrested," Skonecki said yesterday. "There wasn't one complaint in his file prior to his arrest. Now we're getting complaints from everywhere, 'He was doing this, he was doing that.' . . .

"We should have recognized it, but we didn't."

The latest allegations against Hodge were contained in a letter from university police to his defense lawyer, Alan Konop.

According to investigators, Hodge broke departmental rules by waiting in parking lots of bars near campus for patrons to leave. Hodge then would stop them on suspicion of drunken driving.

Investigators found that Hodge called 9-1-1 twice Nov. 22 and reported two bomb threats against Horton. The president was moved to another location for a luncheon he was giving that day.

Hodge also allegedly called the home of student Michelle Haas in October, several hours after he arrested her on a drunken-driving charge. Her mother answered the phone and told Hodge that her daughter was still in jail.

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Hodge told Haas' mother that he wanted to talk to her daughter to discuss other possible charges. But her mother said it sounded as if Hodge wanted to ask her daughter for a date. Hodge is married.

Officers are not allowed to call suspects after they are arrested, Pizzulo said.

Pizzulo said Hodge reported a phony burglary at a vacant house near the main campus. Hodge also falsely reported a man with a gun on campus, he said.

Hodge is suspected of firing five shots from a semiautomatic weapon into a dormitory Jan. 20. One bullet nearly hit a sleeping student.

In addition, he is suspected of setting fires in several campus buildings over Labor Day weekend.

Konop said prosecutors were trying to trump up as many charges as they could.

"If they're so damn sure he has committed these other crimes, then why don't they just charge him with those crimes. It's so easy to come up with all these other charges after he's gone," Konop said.

Herstrum's family could not be reached for comment.

Hodge is charged with aggravated murder and kidnapping. If convicted, he could receive the death penalty. He has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Herstrum's body was found Jan. 27 on the university's Scott Park campus, about a mile south of the main campus. She was shot 14 times.