Daniel Messel pleads guilty to battery, interrupts victim during hearing

By Hannah Boufford | [Published](https://www.idsnews.com/article/2018/04/daniel-messel-pleads-guilty-to-battery-interrupts-victim-during-hearing), Indiana Daily Student

Daniel Messel, already serving 80 years for the murder of IU student Hannah Wilson, was sentenced to 15 years in prison Tuesday for attacking another student.

Messel, 52, originally faced five charges stemming from a night where he allegedly threw a law student to the ground, sexually assaulted her and punched her in the face — hard enough to make her spit blood and knock the contact out of her eye. The woman addressed him in court.

“You’ve had power over me for quite some time,” she said. “You don’t have it anymore.”

Messel pleaded guilty to an amended charge of felony battery resulting in serious bodily injury. The other charges, including one of rape, were dropped, and the sentence will be served concurrently with the 80-year one from the Wilson murder.

Messel interrupted the woman multiple times in court as she spoke. He said he did not want to hear her “fantasy” unrelated to the battery charge.

Judge Marc Kellams pointed at Messel and told him to stop interrupting the woman.

“I will have you gagged and bound to your chair if I need to,” he said.

The student continued to recount the attack and its effects on her.

According to court documents, in the early morning of September 1, 2012, Messel drove the then-law student to a wooded area in Monroe County and attempted sexual contact with her while driving. He then pulled her out of the car by her hair and threw her to the gravel ground. He removed her underwear — which police found at the scene later the same day — while she fought him.

Messel put his penis into her mouth, according to the document. The woman was able to push him away before he then punched her in the face.

Messel left the scene, taking her purse, shoes, phone, credit card and driver's permit with him, according to the document. The student got help from residents at the nearest house who called police, and she was taken to the hospital for a sexual assault examination. DNA from the attacker was found under her fingernails.

The woman said in court Tuesday this was something she knew he had done before and would do again.

Over two and a half years later, Wilson was found dead April 24, 2015 — three years to the day before Messel’s Tuesday court appearance. In August 2016, Messel was found guilty for the murder of Wilson. The woman from the 2012 attack read testimony from the case and found it “eerily similar” to her own, according to court documents. The DNA found under her fingernails — which was not enough to test in the FBI’s program in 2012 — was tested against Messel’s DNA on file and matched.

Robin Wilson, Hannah Wilson’s mother, sat in the courtroom Tuesday. She said she had known about the case since the DNA report and couldn’t believe the sentencing was on the three-year anniversary of Hannah’s death.

“That may have all been directed by Hannah,” she told the Indiana Daily Student after the hearing. “She may have wanted it this way.”

Robin said she went to the sentencing because she wanted to hear Messel admit guilt to something and to hear that Hannah’s death wasn’t in vain.

After the sentencing, Robin and the woman hugged. Wilson said the pair live close to one another and planned to get together.

“The best way to honor Hannah’s memory on the anniversary of her death,” Robin said, “was what transpired in that courtroom.”

Robin noted even though Messel seemed to struggle in admitting to the battery charge, she said it was good for her to hear him own something.

At the beginning of his appearance, when Kellams asked if he understood the charges he was facing, Messel denied some.

“I understand the charge,” he said. “I understand it’s not true.”

Messel ultimately pleaded guilty to the amended battery charge. The prosecutor said as Messel would already likely be spending the rest of his life in jail from Wilson’s murder, it was more important to the state and woman that Messel took responsibility for his actions.

Messel said he had no recollection of the event but was pleading guilty based on the facts presented in the case’s documents. He will serve eight years for the battery charge and seven more for being a habitual offender.

When the woman addressed Messel, Robin had tears in her eyes as the woman spoke about the experience. As a first-year law student at the time, she tried to go back to classes but faced questions about her black eye and other injuries. She said she considered dropping out and felt unsafe and damaged.

The woman said she still finds herself looking over her shoulder and locking doors in fear of being attacked again. She said she had become the subject of victim blaming.

“Daniel Messel, not me, deserves all the blame.”