

Harassment Plagues UCSC Minorities

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Charges that black, Jewish and other minority students at UCSC have been the target of threats, harassment and abuse have sparked an administration investigation into racism on campus, and led to the removal from campus of two students while the investigation proceeds.

Two Merrill students, said to be "punk rockers," are under interim suspension while charges against them are investigated. While they may attend classes, they are barred from the dorms, and are housed in motels in town. Their names were not available, but one was reported to be a woman, the other a man.

Michelle Gregory, 18, a Merrill freshman, said she had been called "nigger," spat upon, pushed and psychologically intimidated by the two students.

Simone Smith, 18, also a Merrill freshman, said that during a blackout last fall, two people jumped out of the shadows and pointed what appeared to be guns at her.

One Jewish student was threatened with castration, the women said, and a

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minority student had been tracked through a gunsight in the dining hall. There have been several other incidents of physical and psychological abuse and harassment.

One of the suspended students reportedly told a black student he was a "white supremacist," who hated blacks and Jews.

"There have been a variety of incidents in a variety of places," said Herman Blake, provost of Oakes College and chairman of the provosts' council which is investigating racism at the university.

"We are working on informing ourselves of the problems, and will act on incidents of racism."

A provosts' council statement released Wednesday apologized to students who said they were victims of racist abuse.

It said physical and psychological harassment of one group by an individual or group is "wholly unacceptable behavior and will not be tolerated in any college at UCSC. (It) will be viewed by us as a form of violence...and any individual or group engaging in (it) will be immediately subjected to disciplinary procedures which could lead to sanctions as severe as dismissal."

"We recognize that hostile attitudes exist on this campus and they are often directed toward ethnic, gender, racial or religious groups. We will...work to eliminate such attitudes through educational processes involving faculty and staff as well as students...."

Other incidents have been reported by a variety of people, he said. "It's not like these things are happening and being ignored. Other provosts reported problems that had already been dealt with."

Newly-appointed Merrill Provost Ralph Guzman said, "These are more than just allegations. Reports have been checked out and they are correct. There are grounds for taking the action I have taken (suspension), but there is a need for further inquiry."

"These are not just excitable, irresponsible young people. They have been deeply frightened and deeply hurt."

Guzman said the suspension was "not a judgment."

"The students were just asked to remove themselves pending informal or formal hearings."

In the hearings, the students may be exonerated, warned, censured, expelled for a certain time or indefinitely dismissed, according to Merrill spokeswoman Ann Lane.

Permanent expulsion is the most serious sanction that can be invoked. Any sanction must be reviewed by the chancellor.

While administrators said they did not know how widespread problems of racism were on campus, they agreed there is no evidence of organized racist activity or organizations there.

Gregory, however, said "It's not just these (two) students. A lot of students here are following them."

"There are not enough minorities up here so white students (nearly 84 percent of the student body) can learn we're people too. A lot of white students still live with their stereotypes."

Blacks make up slightly more than two percent of the UCSC student body.

Gregory, who along with Smith transferred from Merrill to Oakes College where the focus is on minorities, said the administration is working now to "make it very hard to practice racism."

"A lot of people here are interested in trying to reverse their thinking." "The majority of students are not racist," said Guzman. "They're sensitive kids. We're having problems at Merrill that no doubt exist at other colleges and universities throughout the system. They are not endemic to the whole college."