

Campus racism is returning, officials say

By Amie DeFrain and Cindy Wostrel
Staff Reporters

According to representatives from numerous Nebraska colleges and universities, racism is following a national trend by re-igniting and becoming more visible on campuses. At the Hilton Hotel May 24, nine representatives met with the Nebraska Advisory Committee (NAC) to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in an open-public forum. Ten NAC members asked the representatives to express what incidents of racial harassment and violence have happened on their campuses and then suggest possible solutions to increase the reporting of such incidents and how to end attacks.

Gary Hill, NAC chairperson, said the forum, "Bigotry and Violence on Nebraska College Campuses," was designed for the NAC to get information and suggestions from the representatives.

"We have no conclusions; at this point, we are merely a fact-finding unit," Hill said.

Elizabeth Millar, a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said she has been assaulted because of her race.

Millar, who is black, said she was hit over the head by a white woman last fall in the Nebraska Union.

She said the woman, whom she had never met, apparently was offended by a statement Millar made to a newspaper reporter earlier in the year.

Millar said she reported the incident to the campus police, but the woman was only cited.

UNL Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs James Griesen, who spoke later in the day, said he had not heard of the incident.

Millar said she also has been accused of "stealing" another woman's boyfriend and singled out in a class for being absent one day.

"Being a minority you have to double-think. Anything you do, people will say 'Un-huh, that black person did it.' It's to the point that you have to be more mature than they (intolerant people) are," Millar said.

Marcee Metzger, intrapersonal violence counselor to residence halls at UNL, said she has seen religious intolerance in dorms this past holiday season when Christian students coerced Jewish students to participate in Christmas festivities.

Metzger said racial and bigoted incidents against gays and lesbians,

blacks and other minorities are becoming more visible and violent.

Because of this, she said, students she has talked to do not want to talk about, let alone report, the incidents.

Jack Kay, chairman and associate professor of speech communications at UNL, said he sees racial bigotry in the speeches his students give in class.

But Jimmi Smith, director of Multi-Cultural Affairs at UNL, said "there has been a definite decrease in physical violence on campus."

He said that compared to 1968, when physical attacks on racial minority students were at a high, racial violence is almost nonexistent, he said.

"(But) I think that there is lots of room for growth" in the treatment of minorities, Smith said.

"There is still suspicion that there is something else operating that merit in job decisions," he said.

Dora Olivarez-Bahr, president of Developing Realistic Educational Activities for Minorities (DREAM), said racism is so subtle that it's difficult for students to identify it. If they can detect it, they often don't know where to report it, she said.

Ascension Hernandez, civil rights analyst for the central regional division of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, said the NAC needed to know if the universities had places for students to report incidents of racial violence or harassment.

All, except Griesen, could not name a specific place and person to contact to report the incidents.

Griesen said that at UNL students should talk first to the class instructor. If that fails, they should file a complaint with Brad Munn, affirmative action officer, he said.

Donald Burger, conciliation specialist for the Community Relations Service (CRS) of the U.S. Department of Justice, said later in a telephone interview that there isn't a place for Nebraskans to report incidents of discrimination.

Burger said cases from Nebraska are usually reported directly to CRS by students, college officials or police chiefs.

At the open forum, Burger said his organization monitors crimes motivated by the victim's race, color or national origin.

He said that of the 36 racially motivated incidents that have happened in the last three years in a four-state region of Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska, only three took place in Nebraska.

Burger said possible reasons for a lower reported number of cases in Nebraska could be the low number of minorities in the state, lack of follow-through by the police, little encouragement for students to report incidents or little racial tension in Nebraska.

CRS will try to establish several "control campuses" at several Nebraska campuses, Burger said. CRS will compare the number of racially biased acts at these institutions with schools in Iowa, Kansas and Missouri, he said.

Kay suggested that faculty and students develop a "communicative dimension" about racism.

"We need to know how to communicate about racism," Kay said.

According to Kay, people possess an "ostrich mentality" in which they don't report racial violence because they fear being found out by those whom they report.

Students and faculty, he said, must learn to talk about racial bigotry and learn how to deal with the growing problem. Students also must be encouraged to report acts of racial violence, he said.

Griesen said he wants to make the UNL staff more sensitive to the frustrations of minorities.

Minority and non-minority students may perceive an action differently, he said. Faculty and students who aren't minorities must be aware of possible minority perception, he said.

"My own belief is . . . there is a very low incidence of discernible racism (at UNL)," he said.

Hernandez said that even though the commission invited many Nebraska universities and colleges to the forum, only UNL, the University of Nebraska-Omaha and Metropolitan Community Colleges of Omaha were able to send representatives to the forum.

Hernandez said there were several reasons why some institutions weren't represented. Some were unable to find someone to represent the institution after school was out, no incidents of tension or violence had been reported on their campuses or publicly presenting information was not possible at the time.

Hill said the information presented at the forum was tape recorded

and is being written up into a report by the commission's central regional office located in Kansas City, Mo. The report is due to come out in 30 to 60 days.

The report then will be returned to the committee for review and possible follow-up interviews with the presenters, Hill said.

After that, the report, along with two others on the same topic from Missouri and Kansas, will be sent to the U.S. commission for further review, he said.

"We wanted to pick a topic that was similar to other states' so that we could compare (our information) with theirs," Hill said.

"It also has more of an impact if (the information) comes from several sources," he said.

Hill said it is difficult to say that racism in Nebraska is a big "problem." He said many people have their own perceptions of how to define the word problem.

"As people become more equal in numbers and having the same opportunities, then people that have underlying prejudices . . . become more visible," Hill said.

Student phone prefix changes

From staff reports

Students living on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus have new phone prefixes.

The new prefix was changed from 472 to 436. All residence halls and most fraternity and sorority members now have 436 prefixes.

According to the UNL Telecommunications Center, the university made the change because they were running out of possible 7-digit combinations beginning with 472.

Administrative offices will continue to use the 472 prefix. The prefix

switch cost nothing, according to telecommunications.

B	E	G	S	D	A	T	E	R	D	A	Y	S
A	C	R	E	E	C	O	L	E	A	N	O	A
W	H	A	T	S	C	H	E	A	P	L	A	Y
L	O	B	A	R	I	D	A	L	T	O	S	
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Q	U	A	R	T	E	R	N	O	T	E	S	A
U	N	S	A	Y	O	R	E	L	D	I	E	
A	I	T	S	P	A	R	E	S	L	A	N	A
F	D	R	I	O	N	S	M	O	N	E	L	
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	A	S	H	E	A	E	R	O				
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T	E	S	S	P	A	T	S	M	E	A	T	

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