

Event kindled sensitivity

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have learned much from those damn-ing brands.

"Everyone's looking at you like a skinhead," he said. "It doesn't feel good to be labeled like that."

The stereotype made members more sensitive to the concerns of stereotyped minority groups, Baker said.

Since the morning they awoke to a swarm of TV cameras across the street, Baker said his fraternity brothers agreed "we were wrong."

"Instantly, everybody knew it was a big deal and everyone would jump to the wrong conclusion," Baker said.

At the time, media reported fraternity members didn't realize the symbolism of a burning cross or how it would offend minorities.

Baker now denies those reports.

He and other fraternity members knew the terror others could associate with the symbol, he said.

The cross burned because the fraternity expected only its members to see it, Baker said.

The night of the cross burning, sheriff's deputies arrived at the pre-initiation ceremony to investigate a trespassing complaint. Deputies found no violation and left.

They also found no fire. But the next morning they found the cross's charred remains.

Soon, television cameras sat outside the Sigma Chi house, filming its staunch walls for evening news footage.

The following Monday, the university declared it couldn't punish fraternity members who had not violated a student conduct code.

The community responded with outrage.

The Rev. John Carter of St. John's Baptist Church called the first community meeting that night and set a precedent for community reaction.

Ricardo Garcia, then UNL's director of affirmative action programs, represented the university at the meeting. There, religious leaders and others accused the university of racism because it wouldn't condemn the event.

Garcia said he felt frustrated he and other administrators could not respond.

He wishes now he would have called together all the students of color to react through a large rally.

"They might have been pissed off and angry," he said. "But at least they would have been heard."

Even if the event led to violence, Garcia said, he "would be willing to stand up and take it."

The Rev. Don Coleman, director of Mad Dads, said most people at the university now would react differently if another "Sigma Chi" event occurred.

Last year, he condemned university leaders for failing to react.

This year, he said the community at large sees a more sensitive university.

UNL has been host to Coretta Scott King, Martin Luther King Jr. Day convocations and events, plus numerous forums, discussions and speakers designed to actively defeat racism.

About 10 months after the cross burning, the university joined Lincoln's religious and government leaders in sponsoring the first formal

One year after Sigma Chi: a student body changed

By BRAD DAVIS
Senior Reporter

It may have seemed impossible to say this time last year, but many people now say some students may have benefitted from Sigma Chi Fraternity members' decision to burn a cross.

Though last January's cross burning at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was painful and controversial for most involved, some say the incident helped to bring the sensitive issue of racism to the forefront of students' learning and discussions.

John Harris, special assistant to the vice chancellor for student affairs, said the cross burning gave him the chance to educate students about the Civil War and historical symbols.

He said students also learned about the consequences of their actions.

"The most positive effect was probably on the members of Sigma Chi," Harris said. "They got to see how one decision really can affect a lot - it can change your whole life. And that's what college is supposed to be about: learning and development."

The incident occurred one year ago today when, during an initiation skit, Sigma Chi members burned a cross in an abandoned field outside Lincoln.

Omar Valentine, chairman of the Afrikan People's Union political issues committee, said the cross burning helped to open the lines of communication among the greek system, minority groups and the university.

He said the APU continues to discuss the incident with the entire greek system, including Sigma Chi, to "understand where each other is coming from."

"We've opened up to each other, and take part in each others' activities," Valentine said.

Jess Sweley, president of UNL's Interfraternity Council, said the

cross burning brought the entire greek system together to focus on promoting campus diversity.

During last year's Greek Week festivities, Sweley said, representatives from all greek houses met to discuss their rituals to ensure "nothing in them could be perceived as insensitive."

He said sorority and fraternity members also attended events sponsored by ethnic student organizations and community groups.

Working to start the traditionally Latino Sigma Lambda Beta Fraternity is another way Sweley said the entire greek system was supporting diversity.

And although the greek system had worked to increase diversity and sensitivity, he added, more was still to be done.

"It's all a process," Sweley said. "We've taken the first steps, and we have to make sure to continue to work on things we're doing now. It's the first step in a chain of steps."

Association of Students of the University of Nebraska President Curt Ruwe said the cross burning uncovered formerly suppressed feelings about multicultural and racial issues.

"It created a situation on campus where we can start to tackle some of the issues that racism and hate cause," Ruwe said.

Valentine agreed: "Increased communication between the different groups is important, being that we all serve an equal part on campus."

"The first way to deal with a problem is to communicate."

For Harris, open discussions were the beginning of the healing for those hurt by the incident.

"As the healing continues," Harris said, "it's still a process. We can turn a negative experience into a positive experience, and I think we should look to do that."

"It woke us up. We're not in wonderland. We're in a place that has to be ready for the challenge of real-life issues."

community discussion on race. Moeser said the event, which Sigma Chi's Baker attended, formed in direct response to the cross burning.

But Coleman and Garcia said forums and speakers alone cannot end racist acts.

Coleman said students' education must change in order to improve the climate for minorities. Students will learn respect for minorities if they learn about minority leaders and history.

Students also can defeat racism through community service. Sigma Chi members volunteer every day at Lincoln's Saratoga Elementary School, he said.

Garcia said the university must develop a quick-response action team to deal with non-criminal disturbances.

And Coleman said he doubts such

an event will occur again - not on any Nebraska school's campus.

"Everybody has taken a page out of the history of the university and used it to say that will not happen here," he said.

But Garcia said Sigma Chi's cross burning didn't eliminate future racist acts; it raised people's awareness of them.

Racist acts continue on campus, he said, and some key leaders on campus choose only to wait for the offended students to graduate and "go away," he said.

"It's been a year of learning," Garcia said, "but the healing isn't completely over."

The burning cross lit a flame of desire to uncover and confront racism on campus, he said.

"And the flame is still burning."

Refund checks may be tangled up in red tape

By TODD ANDERSON
Assignment Reporter

Don't worry, your highly anticipated financial aid refund check has been found.

It's lying in a pile on a university or state bureaucrat's desk.

And while the slow administrative system grinds on, many students find themselves in difficult financial situations.

Andrew Muller, a junior political science major, said he hasn't been able to pay outstanding bills while waiting for his check to arrive.

"If I have to pay late fees because I don't have money from the university, who pays the late fee?" he said.

"It still comes out of my pocket." Robert Clark, director of student accounts, said the university generally tries to send out 5,000-6,000 student refund checks before the end of the second week of classes.

"It makes it easier for us and for students," he said.

But, he said, the process of distribution can take longer depending on each student's case.

The federal government, which sponsors the direct loan program, requires that all university costs be deducted from student financial aid before an account balance is refunded.

"It's a very cumbersome process that requires a lot of time from our staff," Clark said.

Then, the Office of Student Accounts requests the refund from the state, he said.

The requests are submitted in three groups, he said, and there is no method to determine in which group a student is placed.

Clark said the state's turnaround rate isn't bad, considering it manages the dispersal of all checks in the state university system.

From beginning to end, the process takes about 10 days, he said.

However, if any further charges are made to a student's account, the process can take even longer.

Under the new centralized billing system put in place three semesters ago, all university charges are filed with student accounts, including

"I don't know if the second (financial aid) check will ever come."

JESSE MADDOX
finance major

charges from the University Bookstore, UNL Housing, and Parking Services, for example.

Staff at Student Accounts once again review the student's account for further charges before finally sending out the refund check, Clark said.

If extensive charges exist, he said, the refund check is credited to the student's account.

For some, that means a new refund check is requested from the state.

Once again, students should expect to wait another 10 days before receiving their refund.

Muller said he recently added a class to his schedule, which might be the reason his refund was delayed.

But Jesse Maddox, a senior finance major, said he hasn't received his refund from the fall semester.

He said he filed his loan application in October, which delayed the process.

When he called Student Accounts last Friday, he was told to wait a week for last semester's check to arrive.

"I don't know if the second check will ever come," he said.

He said the system definitely needs to be improved.

"It's caused plenty of problems already," he said.

Clark said the system is relatively new and the university is looking at making some changes.

But, he said, there are no better alternatives to the current system.

"There's not ever going to be a good way to fight our way through this."

Shots help keep flu at bay, UNL health workers say

By IEVA AUGSTUMS
Assignment Reporter

This month's snowy weather isn't the only thing keeping people in bed.

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is detaining students and faculty from daily activities.

Linda Herrmann, director of the University Health Center, said the health center usually sees an increase of students with influenza before semester break, but in the past two weeks workers have seen a greater number of students, faculty and community members being diagnosed with illness.

Linda Rizzijs, nursing director, said students are the most susceptible to the flu, especially those who live in residence halls or group settings.

"Self-prevention is the key to not getting the flu," Rizzijs said. "Besides thoroughly washing your hands, the best way to prevent getting the flu is to receive a flu vaccine before the flu season begins."

Rizzijs said flu season usually is during the late fall and lasts throughout winter. The best time to receive the flu vaccine is in October or November, she said.

Lori Obrist, an immunization nurse said the health center, still has

the flu vaccine and will continue to administer the vaccine as long as they have it.

"Just because you didn't get a flu shot in the fall does not mean it won't help you out now," Obrist said.

Herrmann said students and faculty are advised to get a shot if they haven't yet.

"If you come in early and are diagnosed with the flu, we might be able to prescribe antibiotics for their symptoms," Herrmann said. "But people must remember the flu is a viral infection, so any medicine prescribed does not mean an instant cure."

Obrist said the main symptoms of the flu include a high fever, usually 102-104 degrees, headaches, coughs and pains, fatigue and sore throats.

"If you have the flu once, you are usually the first to request a flu shot the following fall semester," Obrist said.

She said last year's vaccine will not protect you against this year's flu and advises all those wishing to get a flu shot to stop by the health center. Most flu shot requests are fulfilled within 24 hours, she said.

This year, the shots are \$8. To schedule an appointment, contact the University Health Center Immunization Clinic at (402) 472-7414.

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