

Stanford student rally hits handling of racist graffiti

University urged to take tougher public stance

By Bill Workman

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About 150 Stanford University students, mostly ethnic and racial minorities, demonstrated yesterday against what they viewed as the university's poor handling of a recent rash of racist graffiti on campus, urging administrators to take a tougher public stance against hate crimes.

"Stanford does not prevent hate crimes as it could be by educating, advocating and embracing the values of all our diversity," graduate student Eric Hakama of the Stanford Student Diversity Coalition told the rally.

The protest stemmed from disclosure last month of a series of white supremacist and racist slogans and slurs against Asian, African and Arab Americans and Latinos that were found scrawled in several buildings, including the undergraduate library.

No one has been arrested, and campus police have no apparent leads, although some officials suspect the graffiti was the work of a Stanford student.

Campus administrators and investigators came under fire from minority student leaders and oth-

ers for refusing to reveal specifically what was written on the walls, a position apparently taken by the university and police in part to spare the feelings of members of the targeted groups.

However, student protest leaders made clear yesterday they saw that approach as part of an attempt by Stanford to downplay acts of intolerance that surface periodically on campus, even though Stanford President John Hennessy denounced the racist vandalism in a letter published in the Stanford Daily, the student newspaper.

"Of course, it's an embarrassment for hate crimes to happen at Stanford, but Stanford has to face that," Hakama said in an interview during the half-hour demonstration.

Despite the harsh tone of some student speeches, the demonstration, one of a series of events conducted by a consortium of ethnic student organizations this week to discuss racism and sexism, got a surprisingly upbeat response from some officials.

Marc Wais, dean of students, praised the student leaders and said they had been invited to be

partners with campus officials in updating a 3-year-old Stanford policy for dealing with racism and other acts of intolerance.

He said they had also been asked to send student representatives to a quarterly meeting he and other administrators routinely hold to discuss the "the campus climate."

At the same time, he defended the university's handling of the graffiti incident. "Stanford is not insulated from what goes on in the greater society, although we try to prevent and diminish this from happening," he said.

Asked why students and others weren't allow to learn what the graffiti said, Wais replied the university was concerned that going public with the information could either compromise a police investigation or even encourage future graffiti.

"We are not hiding anything; there is no conspiracy," he said. However, he added, waving in the direction of several TV crews covering the rally: "Sometimes we think (whoever) is putting up the racist graffiti may be gratified to see it on TV or in big headlines."

A Stanford detective added to the mood of controversy a few weeks ago when he criticized communications professor Laura Leets for displaying photographs of the offending graffiti on a Web site she has created to survey campus reaction to the racial slurs.

Leets and her Web site have been embraced by critics of the administration for providing people with an option for learning the nature of the offending words and reflecting on their own feelings.

Meanwhile, some students used the rally to also protest Stanford's planned merger of its language, literature and culture studies departments.

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