

Racist incidents, protests spread at UC campuses

By CHRISTINA HOAG, Associated Press
Tue Mar 2, 9:47 pm ET

LOS ANGELES – A firestorm over racially and ethnically charged incidents at several University of California campuses spread Tuesday as UC San Diego announced a KKK-style hood was found on campus and students in Los Angeles and Irvine demonstrated against intolerance.

"What kind of campus promotes an environment that allows people to think it's acceptable to target people for their ethnicity, gender or sexuality?" said Corey Matthews, one of about 200 mostly minority UCLA students who held a lunchtime rally. "It's something about the tone of the environment that allows this."

At UC Irvine, about 250 people gathered for a "student solidarity speakout" to condemn the recent spate of racist incidents at UC San Diego that targeted black students and another incident last month at UC Davis, which targeted a Jewish student with a swastika carved on her door, said Marya Bangee, an event organizer.

The protests came on the same day UC San Diego announced the discovery of a white pillowcase fashioned into a KKK-style hood — the third racist incident around the campus in as many weeks — and a day after UC Santa Cruz officials found an image of a noose scribbled on the inside of a bathroom door.

Officials found the hood, which bore a hand-drawn circle and cross, on a statue of children's book author Theodor Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss, outside the main campus library late Monday. A rose had been inserted between the statue's fingers.

Detectives were analyzing the pillowcase for fingerprints and DNA evidence, a university statement said.

UC San Diego Chancellor Marye Anne Fox vowed to punish the culprits to the fullest extent of the law. "We will not tolerate these despicable actions," she said in the statement.

The hood came on the heels two other UC San Diego incidents: a February off-campus, student-organized "Compton Cookout" party that mocked Black History Month with ghetto stereotypes; and a noose found hanging from a library bookshelf last week.

UC San Diego campus police said they had completed their investigation into the noose incident and turned their results over to the city attorney on Tuesday for possible hate crime charges.

One of the students responsible for the noose apologized to the university community in an anonymous letter published Monday in the campus newspaper. She said the noose was formed while she and friends were playing around with a piece of rope and had no meaning as a lynching symbol.

The student said she is not black, but is a minority.

The incident also is under investigation by law enforcement agencies, campus spokeswoman Judy Piercey said.

Although UCLA students said no racial incidents had occurred recently on their campus, in 2007, a fraternity held a "Tijuana Sunrise" party that mocked Mexican-Americans with stereotyped images, they said.

The incidents are disturbing and most likely the work of "outliers" using offensive and outrageous behavior to gain notoriety, said Brian Levin, director of California State University's Center for Study of Hate and Extremism in San Bernardino.

He said surveys show young people are less prejudiced than ever, but "these things touch a nerve, and these folks know it."

UCLA demonstrators called on administrators to institute a required ethnic studies course that would teach students about other cultures.

"It would be a very strong and powerful statement for diversity," said Kent Wong, a speaker at the rally and director of UCLA's Center for Labor Research and Education.

At UC San Diego, officials were already moving to create a more tolerant environment after meeting with black student leaders, Piercey said.

Initiatives include recruiting more minority faculty, instituting a mentoring program, creating an African American Resource Center, and ensuring funding for the diversity office, Piercey said.