

SUNY New Paltz students say racist signs spark needed discussion

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NEW PALTZ — The posting of several racist signs at SUNY New Paltz earlier this month has cast the college in a bright spotlight.

While students chosen randomly on Tuesday uniformly condemned the signs, some said the events and subsequent reactions have had positive side effects.

One such side effect is a campus-wide forum on racism titled "Can We Talk About It?" scheduled for Wednesday evening at the Student Union Building.

Junior Christina Sharp, a graphics design major, said the postings were "stupid — just ridiculous."

"It's incredible that anyone thinks this is funny or that it has any impact," she said. "If we want to go further as a society, we have to stop doing these really dumb things."

The postings could, she said, serve an ultimate purpose: "We need to know it, so we can get past it."

Junior Matt Zieger, a history major, said the postings came as a shock.

"Everyone I know was appalled by them," he said.

The popular theory among students was that the perpetrators were "kids" acting like jerks and succeeding at it.

Zieger said his history class had spent time discussing the question of racism, "and that was a good thing."

Junior Paul Fischer said he didn't see a problem concerning race relations, "and it's definitely not reflective of the school."

Sophomore Cameron Burkhart, a creative writing major, said he was surprised by the postings.

"But I, at the same time, while I think it was terrible, I thought the college handled it well — I'm appreciative of that."

Burkhart's friend, sophomore Manny Robertson, said he was less surprised.

"I come from a white-dominated upstate town. In high school, these kind of things happened all the time. Kids thought it was funny."

The college's willingness to "bring it all out in the open is a good thing." Both men said they're interested in attending Wednesday's forum.

Junior Cynthia Pimentel's response to the postings was restrained.

"I think the school's very liberal, but it's not diverse. Most African-American or Latino students are here mostly because of the Educational Opportunity Program, and that's been getting cut back. And if it weren't for that (program), the school would be mostly white people."

"It's sad we need a program to get kids from the city to go here."

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