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FSU community protests two hate crimes in one month

🕒 March 15, 2019 👤 Bailey Morrison 📁 Crime, News, slider 💬 0



"Napkins Against Racism" in the McCarthy Center on March 1. (Donald Halsing / THE GATEPOST)

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A student in Towers was the target of a hate crime on Feb. 27. This is the second hate crime reported during the month of February.

At around 4:30 p.m. that day, a student reported a note to FSUPD after it was slipped beneath their door. A message was written on a napkin, which included racist language targeted at the Hispanic and Latinx communities.

The note read, "Morir s****."

This is the second hate crime to occur in Towers in the last two years.

Johnny Hurley, assistant director of residential education and area director of Towers, said in an email to the community that "this incident targeted a specific person who has experienced problems with a person or persons over time, and so, it is not believed to be a random act."

Sgt. Martin Laughlin said FSUPD questioned all of the students in the building the day the note was reported and though the act may not be random, the department is investigating the incident in the same manner as the other hate crimes.

When asked if FSUPD had any suspects he said, "We're working on it."

According to Laughlin, the cameras placed in Towers did not capture the perpetrator.

He said FSUPD is unable to share information with students regarding the investigation because it could potentially "taint the process."

He added, "We want to tell everyone, but we have to be mindful."

Millie Gonzalez, interim chief officer of diversity, inclusion, and community engagement, said the administration is planning



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several events to educate the community about implicit bias and the ways the FSU community can combat racism.

She said she is working with CEOAction, an organization that develops lesson plans for diversity and inclusion in the workplace to bring an interactive “tour bus” on campus and to host “interactive, immersive training.”

Glenn Cochran, director of residence life and associate dean of students, said during the 2018 fiscal year, 50 additional cameras were installed in residence halls across campus at a total cost of \$140,000.

He said, “This doesn’t mean people aren’t going to continue to do these kinds of things. But we want people to feel safe and students really seemed to want cameras to deter these acts.”

He said it’s “difficult” for FSUPD to narrow down a suspect list in regard to who slid the note under the door. “How fast could that really be? I think in about two seconds someone could slip a note under the door. And the cameras didn’t get that. So, if there’s not witnesses, it’s hard to determine who actually did it.”

He urges administrators, faculty, staff, and students to be proactive in combatting racism. “This isn’t just one person’s job.”

Cochran said he and other members of Residence Life routinely receive training and education to address issues of racism. “I’m constantly learning. I will never know everything – white privilege exists and racism exists, and I think we all have a hand in ending that.”

President F. Javier Cevallos said, “It is sad that a handful of individuals with their own hateful agendas are creating such a painful moment for so many students on the campus.”

He added, “We must continue to work together to reach the goal of being a truly inclusive campus. As I often say, the goal is to say that at Framingham State, we respect every single

member of our community. We together create our community. It is not the job of a single person, but the collective work of all of us.”

During the community forum held on March 6, Cevallos said a \$5,000 reward is still available to anyone who has information regarding the hate crimes. The reward was first offered after the string of hate crimes during the 2017-18 academic year.

Across campus, members of the community are using different creative outlets to express their outrage in the wake of the recent hate crime.

On Feb. 28, faculty and students gathered outside McCarthy with signs that had messages such as: “No Hate” and “Professors Against Racism.”

Zeynep Gonen, sociology professor, organized a protest in a response to the hate crime called “Napkins Against Racism” March 1. Students and faculty members wrote messages on napkins that are displayed in the McCarthy lobby.

She said she was inspired by artist Adrian Piper, who created post cards on which she addressed incidents of racism and sexism that she experienced.

The cards “compassionately expressed her anger, without being disrespectful or hateful. I thought it was a powerful work.”

Following the hate crime, Gonen said she felt “anger and frustration” and wanted to provide her students with an outlet to express their emotions. “So, I decided to take napkins with me [to class] and ask them to try to write directly to the person/people and tell [them] whatever they wanted to.”

She added, “I think the act of expressing anger directly is powerful and healing. I hope Napkins Against Racism gave this opportunity to many students to do that, and also changes the racist narrative that students of color on this campus were subjected to.”

She then brought the idea to other members of the Faculty Against Hate group, who also brought napkins to their classes and allowed students to write their own messages.

Hurley said resident assistants in Towers are organizing an event in response to the hate crime. He said the event, which will occur April 3, will showcase cultures from around the world.

Becca Moffat, a senior and resident assistant in Towers, said seven floors in the building will be decorated to reflect the customs and cultures of different countries.

She added, "It's an opportunity for people to ask questions and learn about cultures they previously may not have explored."

After the recent hate crime, senior Jesús Ruelas said he needed to find a creative outlet to express his frustration with the continued hate crimes. With a camera and 35mm film, Ruelas has begun photographing faculty, students, and staff to celebrate diversity on campus.

He said his project, which primarily focuses on the experiences of people of color, aims to highlight the inequity felt by people of color on campus. Ruelas believes the successes and experiences of people of color are not adequately showcased at the University.

During the photoshoots with each participant, he asks them to share their experiences of "racial tension," as well as stories of success and what they wish to see the community do in response to the recent hate crimes.

Ruelas started a GoFundMe to mitigate the cost of film with an original goal of \$100 and as of print time, he has raised over \$400, with most contributions coming from members of the FSU community.

Ruelas said he hopes to "start a bigger dialogue on campus. I want to celebrate these people. I want to eradicate intolerance. I want my community to be together. I want all my peers to live

a life where they do not fear to be judged by their appearance, background, religious, or sexual orientation.”



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