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Professor Oakes

### **Race Relations on Campus**

From dorm walls to in-person comments, hate speech has become a part of the college experience for minority students.

“People want to think campuses are immune to ‘isms’ because we’re more educated,” said Berenice Real, a graduate student at Hixson-Lied.

The ‘-isms’ Real is referencing is racism, colorism, ageism, sexism and a multitude of other discriminatory beliefs and practices.

Iowa State University has experienced its fair share of ‘-isms,’ especially racism. In the past year alone, a student reported a racist Wi-Fi name, found more than four white nationalist posters, posted a fake Iowa State Daily front-page featuring hate-filled messages on social media, wrote white supremacist messages across a sidewalk and posted a racial slur on Snapchat with an image of the Black Engineering building.

Hate speech has put a stain on campus race relations around the nation. With the First Amendment providing a safety net for those who wish to speak out, offensive or not, there’s not much to protect students who feel harmed by it.

“In college, we are influenced by greater society. People of color typically feel more unsafe. We are expected to conform to the white norm—can’t be too loud, can’t speak a certain language. It’s complicated,” Real said.

Real believes that hate speech, and in turn, race relations, has not always been poor on campus.

She noticed a shift in race relations at Iowa State in 2016 when President Donald Trump attended the Cy-Hawk football game. Some students felt very negatively about his attendance and organized a protest at the football tailgate. The protest ended with protestors being attacked both physically and verbally by tailgaters who disagreed.

“The political climate has made race relations more visible. Before the [2016] elections, people may not have seen it like that because no one got hurt, so it was not taken as seriously,” Real said.

Kenyatta Shamburger, the Director of Multicultural Student Affairs, has a different opinion. He believes that the race relations of today are similar to race relations when he first came to Iowa State in 2013.

“There have been challenges. The current [presidential] administration has said and done things that impact people differently. Rhetoric used nationally has emboldened people to say and act on their beliefs more publicly. However, race relations have not gotten worse since 2016. It may look like there’s been a significant change, but there has been more awareness,” Shamburger said.

For some people, the racial climate of the country, and now, college campuses, is not something they have ever worried about.

Catherine Dublinske believes this is especially true for students from small towns. She comes from Dunlap, Iowa, a town with a population of 1,042. Her high school was predominately white with five Mexican students, so Iowa State was her first foray into diversity. Prior to that, Dublinske did not pay much attention to what was happening to communities outside of hers.

When Dublinske came to Iowa State, it was election season. This made her nervous about attempting to become more culturally aware and mingle with students different than her.

Nevertheless, she did. As she became more involved in multicultural communities, Dublinske noticed the tension between multicultural students and white students.

“Around election time, it got more tense and more cliquey. There were the hate posters put up, so people ended up staying in their zones and trying not to say anything weird. I felt like me trying to be friends with black people was wrong because I didn’t experience the same thing when all these things were going on. I felt like I was forcing my way into a culture that I wasn’t supposed to be accepted to, and that I’d be seen as a white person trying to be black,” Dublinske said.

Student Government President Julian Neely also came to Iowa State from a suburban high school in Johnston, Iowa, that lacked minorities.

When he came to Iowa State, he had a goal to “find myself in my blackness.” He joined the Black Student Alliance, networked and quickly became a leader in the minority campus community. Neely attended anti-racism protests and rallies and experienced hateful sidewalk writings and incidents, which students brought up in student government meetings.

When Neely compares that year to now, he says that campus today is more aware of hateful incidents, but people are focusing on their personal development.

Whether incidents on campus are called to attention or not, Neely makes sure to constantly be a voice for the community. In his earlier years at Iowa State, he could be found speaking up and out against injustices. Now, as the first black student government president, he makes sure to elevate the needs of everyone on campus and not just the majority.

“When I first got here, student government was all white males—no students of color, LGBT+, disabled, variety of religions. I wanted to change that up and make it more representative of what campus looks like,” Neely said.

In his position, Neely is eager to address the concerns of students when tension erupts on campus regarding hate speech and incidents. He encourages students to text, call or email him, or attend the weekly student government meeting on Wednesday at 7 p.m. in Memorial Union.

If students are uncomfortable airing their grievances in public with student government, the Multicultural Student Affairs and Dean of Students offices are available. There are members of Dean of Students that sit on a campus climate team and respond to hateful events on campus and help students navigate what happened.

First Amendment specialist, Professor Julie Roosa, is also available to talk to students who experience harm from hateful incidents. She focuses on the side that the Multicultural Student Affairs and Dean of Students do not talk much about—freedom of speech. In relevant situations, Roosa educates students about what is and is not protected under the First Amendment regarding hate speech and incidents.

The university is unable to censor speech, even if it is hateful. The most Iowa State can do is stand by its policies that are put in place to provide safety to students, such as when, where and how something can be publicized on campus. There are bulletin boards available for the public’s use in certain areas and a free speech zone is in front of Park’s Library.

“Offensive speech is not good, but censorship is always worse. Outrageous, offensive ideas can be debated with the goal of good ideas rising to the top and bad ideas being drowned out,” Roosa said.

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