

February 14, 2010

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Racial Graffiti Found in Gummere

By Andrew Thompson

Last semester, Gummere residents were taken aback by a series of fecal smearings in several of the dorm's bathrooms and the basement. It appears that at the start of this semester Gummere was hit once again by a different act of vandalism.

According to Dean of the College Greg Kannerstein '64, on the morning of Friday, January 23, a housekeeper discovered two separate but related displays of graffiti in a Gummere bathroom.

Kannerstein declined to disclose the specific hall in which the graffiti was found due to reasons of confidentiality. Students' Council Co-President Will Harrison '10 concurred.

"Everyone should be aware of this," said Harrison. "It's important for reasons beyond that it was in Gummere; it's a problem because it's something that shouldn't be accepted in our community."

Kannerstein described the first item of graffiti as "a usual tagging." The second item of graffiti, Kannerstein said, was "a crude racist epithet [with] an arrow pointing to the tagging."

Due to the fact that the two examples of graffiti were different colors, Kannerstein said they might have been made by two different people, but "we don't know for sure."

Counting the four incidences of human fecal matter Gummere suffered last semester, the new incidence of graffiti is the fifth serious act of vandalism in the dorm this year. However, Director of Safety and Security Tom King said he does not immediately consider the incidents to be related.

"With the fecal matter there's a pattern," King said. "Other than that they're in the same dorm, I don't really see [these incidents] connected. That's not to say that they're not."

Kannerstein said that as part of the investigation, OneCard access logs of the night before had been checked, "[in order] to see if anyone came to the dorm who wasn't a resident there."

However, Will Harrison said that the log checking had been "inconclusive."

Of the theory that a Gummere resident was behind the incident, King said: "It's reasonable to assume that it's a higher probability, but perspective is important. [It's] pure speculation."

Assistant Director of Safety and Security Nora Nelle said that as part of the investigation, "We've forwarded [this instance of graffiti] to the police."

"We have a [police] contact who specializes in graffiti, who would know if this was a pattern that was going on in the outer community as well," said Nelle.

On Friday, January 30, representatives of the Dean's office, Housekeeping, Safety and Security, along with Students' Council Co-Presidents, Will Harrison and Harrison Haas '10, and Honor Council Co-Chairs, Sarina Schwartz '11 and Anastasia Nikolis '11, met to consider the "next steps to investigate past incidents this year and to prevent future occurrences," according to Kannerstein.

Kannerstein added that a protocol for students to follow in order to immediately report vandalism and graffiti was being developed and would be announced sometime this week.

Harrison Haas said, "This isn't a policy for apprehension and capture, it's just a policy to respond."

"There's a difficult solvability factor," said King. "But our best chance is to get as much specificity as we can...the sooner we get there."

Nelle said that there was a problem with investigating the graffiti incident.

"We don't have enough information. We don't want to minimize [the issue], but we don't want to escalate it," she said.

Kannerstein wrote, "While we want very much to find out who did what, we do not intend in any way to violate individuals' privacy rights."

He said that for that reason measures such as installing security cameras and check-in areas for dorms or limitations on access did not seem acceptable.

However, Kannerstein wrote that if such a point were to be reached where "clear danger to health and safety exists, we will review all possibilities."

King said: "I don't know how you stop it. Even if you have every student as your eyes and ears, you're not in the bathroom with somebody."

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