

Date: April 20, 2009
To: All U.Va. Students
From: Allen W. Groves, Associate Vice President and Dean of Students (awg8vd@virginia.edu)
Subject: Statement on offensive behavior on and near Grounds

Members of the University of Virginia community:

This past weekend, the Office of the Dean of Students received reports of three disturbing acts on or near Grounds. A student was subjected to a racial slur shouted from a passing vehicle as she exited a store on the Corner. Two males were observed in an argument outside a Corner bar, in which one used a homophobic slur. A Lawn resident experienced two instances of sexually explicit language being scribbled on the white board outside her room. These actions came on the heels of an attack in early April by five males on a University student and his guest, in which homophobic slurs were directed at the victims.

None of these actions is acceptable, and each is incompatible with our community of trust. The University is no more immune from this type of incident than any other college or community, and we are grateful that they occur as infrequently as they do. There are limits, however, on our ability to prevent random acts of crude or hateful behavior, despite a vigilant community. (In none of these four recent cases do we have information that U.Va. students were involved in the unacceptable behavior.)

When a bias-motivated incident is reported, the dean on call responds within 24 hours, offers support, and begins an investigation, which includes reporting it to University Police. In some cases, charges may be pursued through the University Judiciary Committee and/or in the courts. In all cases, the safety of the University community and the safety and the privacy of the victim(s) are paramount. We encourage all members of our community to use the University's online notification system -- Just-Report-It -- to promptly report all bias incidents. (<http://www.virginia.edu/justreportit/>)

The University's diversity is one of its great strengths. Such behavior divides our community and creates unease. It is critical that we come together, confront and reject the offensive behavior, and refuse to be divided, much as the community did last week in response to the bias-motivated assault on our student and his guest. We move swiftly -- with the full support of President Casteen and Pat Lampkin, vice president and chief student affairs officer -- when even one member of our community is subjected to bias.

At the same time, we are a community in which the ideals of freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and freedom of the individual are upheld. As stated in the Standards of Conduct: "Here we are committed to preserving the exercise of any right guaranteed to individuals by the Constitution. However, the exercise and preservation of these freedoms and rights require a respect for the rights of all in the community to enjoy them to the same extent."

As University of Virginia students, you are obligated to conduct yourselves in a manner that is respectful of all members of the community. I ask each of you to speak out against bias-motivated acts and to defend your fellow students if they are targeted.

Allen W. Groves
Dean of Students