



Imani Shahid-El represents a group of students who voiced their opinions at a special assembly May 20.

Students Rally Concerning Racism at NCSSM

HUNTER TART
news editor

On Thursday, May 7, a group of about 75 NCSSM students staged a protest in front of Watts Hall. The students, primarily African-Americans, spoke to the director and the public about racial problems here on campus.

Senior student Imani Shahid-El served as the spokesperson for the group, which had planned the demonstration the night before at a Harambee meeting. The plans for the protest may have been spurred by the recent verdict concerning officers in the Rodney King case, as well as a judicial hearing here on campus. However, an involved student claims that the problems concerning this school have existed for quite some time and are definitely worth our attention.

During part of the protest, Director John Friedrich came outside to address the group of students. After explaining his belief that the chosen actions were of the wrong form to initiate changes, the Director was bombarded with accusatory questions from the students. He later stated in an interview that the students were justified in holding him accountable for their quality of education, recalling Harry Truman's famous quote "The buck stops here."

Also in this interview, Director Friedrich said that he will support the students' request for equitable treatment and respect for all members of the NCSSM community. He stated, "I'm recognizing the depth of the inequity problem on our campus," and affirmed his commitment to constructive change. Yet, he explained his initial disillusionment with the protest, which came without warning and without prior attempts at discussion. Accepting the necessity of group discussions for general changes in the community, he remarked that specific accusations would be better handled one on one with him.

Discussions did take place between the Director and a group of the involved students after the Thursday protest. Before the first meeting on Friday, May 8, these students

compiled an 8 to 10 page document comprising specific complaints by students about inequity at NCSSM. Kwame Manley, one of the student organizers, stated that, "the purpose of the document was to prove to the Director that there is indeed inequitable treatment on this campus and that these issues must be addressed." While the document is made up of citations of specific occurrences, its intention is apparently to obviate the need for general changes in the community rather than to accuse individuals who have acted unfairly in the past. The foreword of the document states, "this initial step towards the changing of campus policy will serve as a stepping stone on which NCSSM's African-American community will make its initial stride towards equality in all facets of the NCSSM experience."

The second discussion took place on Tuesday, May 12, for about three hours. Both the Director and the students agreed that this meeting was useful in beginning to outline actual solutions for the problems here on campus. Kwame Manley indicated that a two page list of solutions has already been drafted. The most immediate action to be taken will most likely be an all-school assembly held on May 20, although this is still tentative. The assembly would give students a chance to here professional and legal viewpoints of the Rodney King trial, as well as other racial problems in the nation. Also, administrators would be given a chance to communicate with the students about their involvement in the treatment of racial issues.

The protest, which received a 30 second report on the WTVD news Thursday night and coverage in Raleigh and Durham papers, communicated the dissatisfaction of the students at NCSSM to the surrounding communities. However, weeks and months in the future, it may be difficult to ascertain what changes evolved as a result of this demonstration. As the matter stands now, it appears that the cooperative discussions between the students and the Director have been far more successful in making progress on the issue than the shouting that occurred in front of Watts on May 7.

Kwame's Corner

Minority Life at NCSSM

KWAME MANLEY
columnist

NCSSM provides an opportunity for its students to develop into sensitive leaders of society. However, despite the school's claim of teaching such diversity and understanding, many minority students still find insensitivity within the community. If NCSSM is to be a true role model for society, the entire community must address minority students' concerns.

Most of the minority students interviewed agreed on the school's challenging academic program and high quality of teaching. Nonetheless, as Jody Cummings states, "Most minority students have no personal relationship with white faculty members." Outside of class, many minorities feel uncomfortable talking with faculty members. Mike Jones agrees, "The only teacher I have a personal relationship with is Mr. Cambeira." Most of the minority students believe it is necessary to have an adult in this environment with whom you can share your experiences. Kevin Pierce responds that even though he has no personal relationship with white teachers, a couple minority faculty members have "made it known that they [minority faculty members] would be there for you." Stacy Ebron agrees that in this environment "it's good to have a faculty member looking out for you."

The relationships between minority students and administrators are even poorer. Many minority students find administrators "out-of-touch" with them. Mike Jones blames the poor student-administrator relationship on the administration's "lack of interaction" with minority students. Derrick Gaines remarks, "The only time I've spoken with Director Friedrich was during a conference. And he's my academic advisor."

In addition to this isolation, many minority students feel the administration is insensitive to their needs. Udana Torian explains, "Administrators feel we [minority students] shouldn't complain too much or be too demanding. We should be grateful that we're here." When discussing the possibility of another cultural activity, Erin Locklear says, "The Administration made me feel like rules overrode my culture. They just like to have one little thing about Native American culture and just forget it." Sue-Jin McCoy believes the administration also stigmatizes minorities. After referring to negative comments and awkward stares she received from administrators, she remarks, "I thought people would be beyond that."

Many minority students also feel they have a poor relationship with resident advisors. "We just don't relate," one minority student explains. Dorm Assistant Derrick Gaines agrees, "When I try to talk to most white RAs, I feel so uncomfortable. They seem to only back up the system and give you handbook answers. All I really get from those RAs is a brush to the side." He later states,

"The black RAs act more like your brothers, instead of your fathers." Mike Jones says, "I only have relationships with the African-American RAs and those white RAs who try to understand my culture."

When asked whether there is a support system for minority students, most responded that there is nothing "organized." Jody Cummings explains, "The minority students here support themselves." Erin Locklear feels if minority students have a problem, they have to "ask who they can talk to about it and seek out that person for themselves." Alex Mathews believes an African-American support system can be found in AUF and Harambee. Udana Torian explains, "It's good to have a strong club like Harambee focused on us." Although most African-American students view it as a good support system, Dwayne Eatmon believes Harambee should "make a better effort to unite the African-American community." Sue-Jin McCoy feels other minorities don't need that strong support group. She explains, "I think other minority students have assimilated into white society well. Asians, in particular, have lost a lot of the ideals, morals, and culture values of their parents. They don't want support from other Asians."

Most of the minority students were eager to give recommendations on making life at NCSSM better. Almost all commented on the need of more minorities in our administration and faculty. Udana Torian states, "It's hard to feel part of this community when you rarely see African-American faculty members and administrators." Many minority students feel the number of minorities in the student body must also be increased. Jody Cummings states, "It bothers me that we don't have more Native American students here." Many minority students feel a minority affairs office would build a stronger support system. Erin Locklear believes this would also help her learn more about her culture. Shannon Fatuesi sees information sessions about different cultures as a way of "broadening the community's awareness." "You can never know enough about different cultures," she adds. Sue-Jin McCoy feels expanding the African/Latin American and Asian/Middle East Cultures classes would also broaden the community's understanding. Some minority students believe administrators, teachers, and RAs should attend sensitivity workshops to better deal with the diversity of our community. Mike Jones's overall recommendation is that "somebody, somehow should set the tone for our environment."

Indeed, aspects of our community must be improved to better the lives of minority students. As a community, let us face these problems straight on and try to address the issues, rather than avoid them. Let us also examine these recommendations and try, wholeheartedly, to implement them. For, as a role model for our society, it is neither our privilege nor our right, rather our responsibility to improve the lives of minority students.