

The Widening Rift On Campus

African Students Feel Neglected — Others Wonder Why

By Kathryn Davis

Sprawled in the heart of southern Durham, North Carolina Central University is a picturesque blend of attractively designed landscapes, stately old structures and gleaming new modern buildings, surrounded by the hustle and bustle that characterizes an urban university. An aura of busy peacefulness covers the campus.

But this peaceful atmosphere masks an ever-widening rift between the university's foreign students, most of whom are black Africans, and the rest of the school's student body, mostly black Americans.

The rift appears not to be purposeful or vicious, actually nothing that better communications couldn't solve nicely. But the simplicity of solutions doesn't decrease the problem's seriousness, according to many of Central's foreign students.

There are 72 foreign students enrolled at NCCU this year, 55 of whom are Africans. Of that number, thirty African students are Nigerians. By comparison, Central had only seven foreign students twelve years ago. Most of the complaints come from the Nigerian students.

They say that the university's administration is insensitive to the unique problems of culture and adap-

tability these students face in this "new world". They also say that many black American students are cold and indifferent to their African classmates.

But both university officials and American students say the situation is more of a communications problem than anything else.

"Foreign students are recruited in the same manner as American students," said Carl Durham, Central's assistant director of admissions. "And we promise no more than the opportunity for an education."

On the student level, responses range from personal justification to indifference. Some students say they don't understand the Africans' culture and don't want to appear dumb by asking questions. Other students say they've never given the problem any thought, because they're too busy with school and work.

All of this notwithstanding, the problem is there, and a big part of it revolves around money. Many African students complain that there just isn't enough financial aid for them.

But, according to Dr. Glenn Martin, NCCU's foreign student advisor, the problem is just a little more complex than the mere shortage of financial aid for foreign students.

"Many students leave their country having falsified their financial status and, upon arrival at NCCU, find themselves without funds," Martin said. Most of our foreign students are either on student visas or exchange visas, which makes them ineligible for most types of federal financial aid because they are obligated to return to their native countries upon graduation."

It could not be established if falsifying financial information is a widespread problem among foreign students at Central or if any of the current students had done so. Information was also not readily available to determine how many foreign students now on campus are obligated to return to their native lands following graduation.

Martin went on to say that if a student has a permanent Identification Card, then the student is eligible for any available financial aid. All students can apply for the Chancellor's Scholarship.

But, according to AzuBike Chukwun Ifejuka, president of the

International Student Association at Central, money is not the only problem foreign students face. Ifejuka says other problems can be summed up this way: "NCCU encourages foreign student enrollment and then ignores them after they arrive."

The International Student Association (ISA) was formed in 1973 to create better understandings among people of all nations, and to provide a conduit through which problems facing Central's foreign student population could be solved. The organization's overall effectiveness could not be clearly determined and though ISA is a chartered campus group, receiving about \$200 annually from student fees, its relationship to other campus organizations does not seem to be clearly defined.

Specifically, Ifejuka says that NCCU offers no constructive programs for foreign students, and that housing is often difficult to arrange, forcing many foreign students to live in local motels for weeks after arriving in Durham. He also says no one helps foreign students to orientate themselves to the Durham area.

"We arrive in a strange country," Ifejuka said, "and have to ride a taxi with a stranger to a destination that we know nothing about, and even after we get there, we are just on our

own. And even worse than that, there are no campus activities geared to the foreign students' cultures, such as dance or cooking clubs."

According to Ifejuka, foreign students are also not told about other campus activities.

Durham responds: "NCCU recruits only the high scholarly foreign student and these students are made aware before they leave their country that they need individual sponsors, personal sponsors or scholarships."

Durham added that notices of campus activities are posted in a number of conspicuous places around campus, and that anyone who stays around the campus after classes can easily learn about campus activities.

Dr. Martin, who also organized the ISA, says finding housing is a problem for almost all of Central's off-campus students, and particularly for foreign students, mostly because they are not familiar with the area.

"But it is part of my job," he said, "to help them find housing, and to recommend foreign students for housing."

In addition to working with foreign students on housing problems, Martin also assists in processing travel documents, helping to secure visas, making sure visas are renewed an-

nually, and processing financial documents so students receive the money that comes to many of them from their country. Martin also helps students with personal problems, as well as helps them understand the various immigration and naturalization laws.

And while the problems foreign students have with NCCU's administration appear to be mostly a misunderstanding of various administrative procedures, the student problems are more intensely personal.

"We came to NCCU because it is a black school, believing we would be welcomed by American blacks," said Ifejuka, "but this is far from being true. In classes, black Americans sit next to us and they don't even bother to speak."

Many other Central students agree that there is a problem, but few offer any solutions.

"They (the Africans) are telling the truth," said Ms. Wanda Dixon, a psychology major. "I see students laugh at them because of their accents, and others seem to naturally follow suit. It's sad because I like them, and would really like to get to know them better."

Ms. Dixon believes that at least two



DR. MARTIN



Some Nigerian Students At NCCU

These five Nigerian students were gathering this week for a regular meeting of the International Student Association on the campus of North Carolina Central University. They are (l-r): Samson Okpata, John Edomobi, Carlos Onwuasonya, Azubike Ifejuka and Godwin Okpata.

Photo by Silas Mayfield

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