

Recent incident reveals underlying, ongoing racial tensions

Ethan Smith
News Editor

On the morning of Sept. 17, two female students, one Jewish and one African-American, woke up to a swastika, the acronym "KKK" and a sketch of male genitalia drawn on the whiteboard outside their room.

"I'm tired of it," said senior Immanuel Bryant, one of two founding leaders of Better Together, Elon's multi-faith learning community. "It used to make me sad, and sad for the person that did it. I see the person who did it as the victim because they need to be aware of what they're doing and realize what they're doing is wrong."

Despite this incident happening last Sunday, Vice President of Student Life and Dean of Students Smith Jackson didn't send an email to the Elon community to notify them of the incident, opting rather for an email titled "Bias Prevention and Response Initiatives and Campus Notices," reminding students and staff at Elon of the university's policies regarding these subjects.

Lynn Huber, associate professor of religious studies, said she hadn't heard about Smith Jackson's policy to no longer email students when incidents such as this one happen, and was shocked when she found out this was the case.

"Once I listened to his reasons for no longer addressing incidents through emails, I can understand his reasoning for it," Huber said. "Not that I necessarily agree with it."

Huber, along with the Department of Religious Studies, posted messages on the department's Facebook pages and website to address

what had happened.

"The department as a whole is committed to diversity," Huber said. "But we realize in saying we want diversity means doing and acting when there is an incident challenging it."

Bryant and senior Mason Sklut, the other founding member of Better Together, will hold a forum at 6 p.m. Sept. 26 in McKinnon Hall to facilitate a discussion among the student body regarding the incident.

"[SGA Executive President Welsford] Scott [Bishopric] reached out to Better Together and asked us to facilitate discussion about what happened and how we want to handle it as a student body," Bryant said. "We're asking people to keep the discussion going and we're addressing how to have a discussion about these topics."

Three seniors — Diana Abrahams, Sarah Holland and Paige Ransbury — wrote a letter to the student body and submitted it to The Pendulum (see page 15), calling for the student body to act.

"This is a student issue that will only be solved by students, and we believe the first step is simply to start speaking up for each other," the letter reads.

Chaplain Jan Fuller directly addressed the incident on the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life's website.

"This weekend, as the Yom Kippur holy day observances came to a close, ugly racial and anti-Semitic slurs were left on the white board on a student residence door," Fuller said in the message. "The two women students within identified as African-American and Jewish. This is an unprecedented act of anti-Semitism for our campus, accompanied by all-too-famil-

iar acts of racism."

Fuller continued the message by reminding students of Elon's commitment to diversity, and how this incident shows underlying issues at Elon and how the incident risks derailing Elon's efforts to be a more inclusive community.

"We are ashamed and offended that such a mindset of bigotry is present in our community, and has been outwardly expressed in this manner," the message said. "Our hearts are sorrowing for the pain of the students, and for the larger communities, who are being hurt by these actions and attitudes. Such actions and attitudes are not representative of our values at Elon. In a time of great hopefulness, as we live into becoming a community of 'unprecedented...commitment to diversity and global engagement,' which is our first strategic goal as a university, one act like this can derail our communal efforts."

This act is not the first racist incident that's happened on Elon's campus. In April, then-senior Blake Thompson found a note posted on the second floor of his apartment building that used the term "coon" — a racial slur for African-Americans.

That month, Thompson said racism on this campus doesn't happen in isolated incidents. Rather, it happens nearly every day. The incident in April happened less than a month before the school year ended, and the incident on Sunday happened within a month of students returning to campus.

"It's a series of micro-aggressions every day that makes it hard for those without privilege to be in this environment," Huber said. "This incident is just one more thing on top of it, just

one more punch."

Huber said she feels these incidents are happening among the student body for a myriad of reasons.

"It's a hate of the 'other' simply because they are the 'other,' and that's what we're seeing here," Huber said. "It's anxiety due to challenging the rightness of our own beliefs and ourselves, causing hatred of the 'other,' and it's important to remember that this hatred of the 'other' has persisted for centuries. This is the use of symbols to hurt others, and that has a long history. People don't realize how laden in history symbols are."

The timing of the incident made it have an even more significant meaning, Huber said.

"This event is coming right after Yom Kippur, which is the most important Jewish holiday, and one where Jews have been attacked in history during this holiday," Huber said. "I'm not sure if the person who did this realizes that, but even if it was a drunken action, it doesn't excuse the action and how wrong it was."

Bryant, a facilitator of the discussion happening on Thursday, said he wishes he could help those who perform these kinds of acts, and he feels as though campus is disconnected.

"It irritates me that I don't know how to help [the people that commit these acts]," Bryant said. "And it irritates me that they don't have any friends who say it's not okay for them to do those things. It feels like there are two different languages — there's inclusive language from the university, promoting diversity, and then there's exclusive language from the student body, saying they don't want people different from them to be part of their Elon experience."

OFFENSES TIMELINE

Sept. 8, 2011

Five white males in a convertible BMW yelled the N-word at an African American student crossing North O'Kelly Avenue, inciting the "Not On Our Campus" movement.

Nov. 15, 2012

A male in a red mini SUV yelled an Asian racial slur at a student as she crossed the street at the intersection of Williamson and Haggard.

Sept. 17, 2013

A note containing religiously and racially derogatory symbols was posted on the whiteboard of a Jewish and an African-American student.

Feb. 1, 2012

A male in a car at the light in front of McMichael yelled a homophobic slur at a student as he walked toward Moseley Center.

March 2013

Students wrote a racial slur on a note and posted it in the hallway of an off-campus apartment.