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The Charlotte Observer

Local News

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Mock bake sale ignites racial tension, anger

Race, gender 'pricing' will serve as a protest of affirmative action

FRED KELLY
Staff Writer

A mock campus bake sale by students who oppose affirmative action is flaming racial tension and debate about free speech at UNC Charlotte.

The College Republicans student group is protesting at 10 a.m. Tuesday by pretending to sell cookies and brownies priced according to the buyer's race or gender. Members say the sale will illustrate how affirmative action is unfair.

Minority student groups, angered that the university has refused to stop the event, have vowed to stage a demonstration.

Similar bake sales on campuses around the country have sparked heated confrontations between white and black students.

And members of the College Republicans chapter at UNCC have been threatened with physical harm, said Elizabeth Beck, regional director of the N.C. Federation of College Republicans.

UNCC will assign a campus police officer to the mock sale to stop any potential trouble, said Michele Howard, dean of students, who acknowledged the issue has escalated racial tensions on campus.

But the school will not stop the bake sale because "this is a free speech issue," Howard said. "(College) is a forum for debate on issues."

The College Republicans is a national group with chapters throughout the country for college students who support the Republican Party. For the last two years, the 110-member chapter at UNCC has staged a mock bake sale to protest affirmative action. The students do not actually sell anything, but do put a price list on table in the

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center of campus.

It reads that baked goods are \$5 for white men and less for other groups. In one instance, it says baked goods cost \$1.25 for black women and 50 cents for under-represented minorities.

The goal is to prompt discussion on how affirmative action policies used by colleges for admissions and hiring amount to reverse discrimination, Beck said. "When people first see it they get upset, but once they hear what it is about, they understand."

But minority student organizations say the mock sale is racist.

About 40 minority students came to a student government meeting to complain.

"A lot of people are mad," said Kalin Griffin, president of the UNCC chapter of the Chi Upsilon National Latin Sorority.

"It's offensive."

UNCC has roughly 20,000 students, and 25 percent of them are minorities. Natasha Ashe-Suber, a UNCC spokeswoman, said the college stopped using race as a factor in admissions in 1997.

The U.S. Supreme Court split on the issue in 2003 verdicts involving the University of Michigan. The high court voted to uphold the university's law school affirmative action policy but struck down the policy for undergraduate admissions.

Some colleges have shut down the sales, outraging free-speech advocates.

"These college administrators are more interested in order than (free speech)," said David French, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education.



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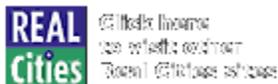
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