



sections

- [news](#)
- [entertainment](#)
- [sports](#)
- [viewpoint](#)
- [crimelog](#)
- [classifieds](#)
- [cartoons](#)

information

- [advertising](#)
- [jobs](#)
- [contact](#)
- [links](#)

[UTK Home Page](#)

UT lacks codes to deter hate speech

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UT presently does not have a code that would deter such an incident as what occurred last week at RT Warehouse, where members of Kappa Sigma darkened their faces and masqueraded as the Jackson 5 and Louis Armstrong.



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"UT does not have a hate-speech code at this point," said Bryan Coker, director of student judicial affairs. "Definitely some education needs to take place."

Coker said the incident has not reached his office, and he is unsure if it will.

"It hasn't really fallen with our area at this point," Coker said.

He said Tim Rogers, vice provost of student affairs, is currently investigating the situation and Kappa Sig.

About three years ago, the Student Government Association debated the need for a hate-speech code at UT, but the policy was never created, Coker said.

He does encourage students to look into setting up such a code.

"A lot of campuses have done it, and it's definitely something to look at," Coker said. "I think it, most appropriately, should start with the students."

UT is not the only school to have a blackface incident. Fraternity members at Auburn University, Oklahoma State University and the University of Louisville, where UT President John W. Shumaker was formerly president, have all been accused of racial insensitivity due to the use of blackface.

At Auburn, two fraternities, Beta Theta Pi and Delta Sigma Phi, were temporarily suspended for their actions last Halloween, and the 15 members involved were suspended from school.

Although there is no policy that covers disciplinary measures for situations involving obscene actions, Auburn could temporarily suspend the fraternities if a possibility of violation of university policies is suspected. Temporary suspension is notifying the fraternities that an investigation is taking place, Hardin said.

"It's like a time-out before we can take different action," said Jim Hardin, assistant director for student life at Auburn. "There was enough indication that we could have

serious problems, and we thought we had enough probable cause to temporarily suspend (the fraternities)."

Both incidents at Auburn occurred at parties. The Beta members were photographed wearing blackface and dressed in the letter shirts of a black fraternity, Omega Psi Phi. Three members of Delta Sig were portraying a lynching, with one member in blackface and a handmade FUBU shirt, one in hunting gear and another dressed as a Ku Klux Klan member. The member in blackface had a noose around his neck.

The incidents sparked a whirlwind of controversy.

"It was a nightmare here for six months," Hardin said.

Auburn, however, has no specific policy to punish those involved.

"It comes down to a First Amendment-type issue," Hardin said. "As long as it's covered under the First Amendment, you can't yank a charter for things that aren't mainstream.

"The school can't write a policy that violates First Amendment rights," he added.

Auburn has made no plans to outlaw that kind of behavior, Hardin said, but movements to educate students about racial sensitivity have begun.

"It brought light to issues that needed to be brought up," Hardin said. "It impacted that entire area (of diversity)."

After the incident on the Strip last week, Kappa Sig's national headquarters is currently conducting an investigation. At this time, no disciplinary measures have been taken, said Nick Wilson, the executive director for Kappa Sigma Nationals.

"We do not condone this certain inappropriate behavior," Wilson said. "There's certain conduct we expect our members to uphold. Men of honor do not do these things. Honor is that you treat people fairly at all times."

Rogers was unavailable for comment for the story, and the local Kappa Sig chapter declined to comment.

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