

SIUE: Racially-and-socially-charged incidents on campus part of "national trend"

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EDWARDSVILLE - Last Friday, a flyer was placed on the campus of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) advertising "Identity Evropa."

Identity Evropa has been identified as a white-supremacist group by many organizations, identified itself as "a generation of 'awakened Europeans.'" According to its website, Identity Evropa "rejects the ideas identities are 'mere abstractions to be deconstructed.'" The group also claims to oppose people who defame members' heritages and culture. It also states "every other people" are "asserting their identities," and warns "without action," it will have no choice but to "resist" its "dispossession."

The flyers placed around campus from this organization state: "Our Generation. Our Future. Our Last Chance.," and feature a man with the microphone attachment of a megaphone near his mouth. The logo for Identity Evropa is on the bottom of the flyer.

On its own website's "FAQ" section, Identity Evropa claims to be a "fraternal organization for people of European heritage located in the United States that participates in community building and civic engagement."

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), however, has identified the group as a "white supremacist group focused on the preservation of 'white American culture' and promoting white European identity. It states Identity Evropa promotes this message of white European supremacy through distribution of fliers, posters and stickers - especially on college campuses.

This was echoed by SIUE Executive Director of University Marketing and Communications Doug McIllhagga, who said such fliers are appearing on several university campuses across the country.

"They are popping up all across the country," he said. "The flier is from a group categorized as a white supremacist group. There are three different areas on campus where people can post things freely. Administration has responded as these have popped up, and they do not support this group nor their policies."

According to the ADL's website, Identity Evropa's slogan, "you will not replace us," reflects that group's belief the white race is "doomed to extinction" by what it believes is a "rising tide of color," which Identity Evropa attributes to be "controlled and manipulated by Jews."

To put its message into action, the group has participated in protests against Muslims and immigration, and have joined events organized by other white supremacist groups.

Another incident occurred two Fridays ago without obvious racist overtones. A group called "Campus Reform," which claims to be America's leading site for college news, brought a large inflatable ball to the quad and invited students to write anything they wanted on it in the name of free speech. On its website, it describes itself as "a watchdog to the nation's higher education system," claiming to expose biases and abuses on college campuses across the nation.

McIllhagga said the group brought the inflatable ball to campus, and it caused police to be called. He said the group did not file for permission to conduct the activity in the quad, adding the large inflatable ball caused students' paths to be blocked.

That path blockage caused some students to call the SIUE Police Department, McIllhagga said. He said some students also called because they felt as if they were being "coerced into signing a document."

On its website, Campus Reform commented on the incident and posted a video of the police intervening and the partakers of the free speech ball complying with the officers' requests. McIllhagga agreed the group moved the ball to the grass out of the area he said would require additional permissions after being asked to by police.

Campus Reform, unlike Identity Evropa, is not identified as a white supremacist group. It is a project spearheaded by the Leadership Institute, which is an institute dedicated to training conservatives in campaigns, fundraising, grassroots organizing, youth politics and communications, according to its website.

"Students, staff and administration are dealing with a wide variety of social issues," McIllhagga said of the incidents. "This administration at SIUE is dedicated to providing the safest, most inclusive environment possible to our students and staff. We're working to make things better, but nowhere is perfect."

Former incidents on campus also reflect these issues. In September, a note was found on a student's door in Cougar Village, a housing complex on campus. It contained a racial slur. McIllhagga said SIUE Police are still investigating that incident.

The university has placed a reward for a full semester's tuition to anyone who provides information leading to an arrest in that case. McIllhagga confirmed that reward is still in place today, adding no one has stepped forward to turn in the individual.

While not as directly racist, The Rock - a staple on the campus - was painted with a Confederate flag - a symbol a growing number of people are decrying as favorable to slavery and racism. The Rock is available for students to paint at any given moment, McIllhagga said in a previous interview with Riverbender.com. After hearing several students report the incident, the flag was quickly covered by something else, he said.

Since then, students from SIUE have taken to social media and reporting to Riverbender.com The Rock has been covered with several pro-and-anti-Trump slogans in a sort of paint war.

In the future, McIllhagga said the university will be constantly improving to make it more inclusive for all students.