



Multiracial sorority thrives at U. North Carolina

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(The Chronicle) (U-WIRE) DURHAM, N.C. -- Melissa Murchison-Blake arrived at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill wanting to belong to a sorority that didn't exist. So she formed it herself.

"I didn't want to choose black or white to be in a sorority," said Murchison-Blake, a UNC senior who is biracial. "People tend to treat others based on what classification they can fit them into, and usually that's based on race-it's always been frustrating to me that my race comes before who I really am."

Two years ago, Murchison-Blake got together with six other like-minded students to found a sorority that would embrace women from all nationalities and backgrounds. Theta Nu Xi, the materialization of those ideals, is the first such multicultural sorority in the Southeast.

The sorority-which now boasts 19 members-has become an active presence on the UNC campus, holding forums, parties and charity events.

"I think we have revolutionized the meaning of a sorority," said Geeta Kapur, a senior business major whose father is Indian and whose mother is Mauritian, Seychellwa, South Indian and French. "Until now, sororities have been based upon color lines."

Introducing that new definition to a greek community that has been traditionally polarized-with white sororities under the Panhellenic Council and black sororities led by the National Panhellenic Council-was not always easy, Kapur said.

"When we were first formed, people were very hostile to our whole concept because they thought we were a threat to them," she explained.

For example, Kapur said, several members of black sororities opposed Theta Nu Xi's practice of referring to their pledge class as a "line" and wearing line shirts-personalized shirts with the sorority's greek letters on the front and a number and nickname on the back-traditions borrowed from black sororities.

But attitudes are changing, believes Jean O'Dett, a white journalism junior who pledged Theta Nu Xi this year. "I feel the racial climate is improving, that the traditions that were based on race are being broken down," she said.

The growth of Theta Nu Xi has proved that there may be a need for more multicultural sororities, said Ron Binder, UNC's director of Greek Affairs. He pointed out that since he arrived at UNC five years ago, the number of "specialty" Greek organizations, such as Alpha Omega Pi, a Native-American sorority, and St. Anthony's Hall, a coed fraternity, has increased in number from one to five.

Theta Nu Xi has already begun to spread its organizational wings-a Beta chapter at North Carolina State University was established last year, and students at UNC-Greensboro have expressed interest in forming a chapter on their campus.

So will Duke be a part of this trend one day? Murchison-Blake said that although she had originally thought that Duke would be the natural second chapter, she had received the "run around" from University administrators.

"I have no reason to believe that a 'multicultural' sorority would not work at Duke," said Trinity junior Rae Miller, Panhel president, who acknowledged that the sororities at Duke "are not as diverse as the overall student population."

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