Hula No More: Lu’au Called Racist

By Steven Menashi

Alpha Chi Alpha Fraternity and Delta Delta Delta Sorority are racist and ignorant, some students are saying, because of a social event they planned for last weekend.

"It has come to our attention that Alpha Chi Alpha Fraternity and Delta Delta Delta Sorority are planning a lu'au party where people are encouraged to dress up like Hawaiians," wrote Omar Rashid '00, president of Lambda Upsilon Lambda, Dartmouth's Hapa fraternity, in a message to the Coed Fraternity Sorority Council. "Perhaps the worst of the members of the CFSC will tolerate bigotry, however, we Los Hermanos Incalificables [sic] de la Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity Incorporated will not be a part of any organization that does not represent its members who engage in RACISM/.

Rashid informed the CFSC that, if the Council did not penalize Alpha Chi Alpha for this act of incivility, "LULU would remove its membership in the CFSC.

Aaron Adams, President of Hoopu'a, the Hula Club at Dartmouth, also sent an E-mail message to the CFSC. "As native Hawaiians," he wrote, "I am deeply offended and hurt when I heard of the party that is being planned for Friday Night." He urged "all of you organizations to take action on this issue.

The lu'au event that was to be held Friday was neither registered with the College nor publicized on campus. Rashid and Adams learned of the party through an E-mail message that Kenneth Lenox '01, Social Chair of Delta Delta Delta Sorority, sent to members of his sorority. "The lu'au tonight sounds like a lot of fun," she wrote. "We're having a hana at alpha chi."

She asked party attendees to dress up "hawaiian style" and wear "hawaiian music." The message included plans for activities and drinks—"we're thinking vodka in watermelons and pineapples and stuff"—and a request that invitees invite several guests.

Rashid and Adams were sent to the CFSC at 11:28 pm and 11:45 pm, respectively. At 12:02 am, an E-mail message was sent to the campus from Eric Kelley, Summer President of Alpha Chi Alpha and Alexander Sophie Co-President of Delta Delta Delta.

Recently the members of AOA and DDD planned a joint social event incorporating Lu'au as a theme, they wrote. "It has come to our attention that this theme has offended members of the Dartmouth community. Out of behalf of AOA and DDD, we would like to apologize for any disrespect and harm our actions caused with. "The hope that change will take place," the two Greek societies and Hoopu'a "will host a forum about the misuse of culture and ethnicity on campus."

The apology was swift and surprising many students, who believed that the lu'au was not racist or offensive.

"I am a native German," said Philipp Saumweber '01, Summer President of Alpha Delta Delta Fraternity. "Since coming to Dartmouth, I have attended several events that have mimicked German customs, such as the German night at Westside [Birad] or the Oktoberfest party at Sig Fy. Those events were extremely fun. I feel the people were actually making an effort to try and show others the fun aspects of German culture. I was in no way offended. I believe that the people here at Dartmouth that are concerned about tolerance should be a bit more tolerant themselves and try out new experiences."

"The lu'au was not offensive," said Matthew Wilkines '01. "It cannot be defined as offensive because it does not make fun of the culture... nor belittles... any part of the Hawaiian culture," LULU's "call for disciplinary action is inexcusable. Being offensive is not illegal and if the College shelters its students like this, we are going to have a running battle in the real world."

"AAA and DDD had no right to apologize," added Wilkines. "I have talked with members from both houses and

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"Alpha Chi Alpha and Tri-Delta's apology followed a familiar formula: apologize, then host a community forum—never mind the merit of the accusation.

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and action will be taken." Alpha Chi Alpha and Tri-Delta "did not act in accordance with [Dartmouth's Principle of Community], and therefore there is no question that they must be punished and banned.

In addition to the punishment to be meted out by the CFSC, Eru welcomed further sanction by the College administration against Alpha Chi Alpha and Tri-Delta. "We expect that Dean Redman and Dean Larimore will also issue comments and may wish to heighten the punishment issued by the CFSC, and we support this possible intervention by the College."

Eru's comments, which Adofo-Mensah approved, ostensibly represented "the ideals of the CFSC."

"I'm sure many of you have been contacted by the Review (very quickly). DON'T RESPOND YET! Please blitz the CFSC account FIRST with anything you're thinking of telling the Review and let us look it over first—this is for all of our protection."

—CFSC SECRETARY ERIC ERU,
IN A MESSAGE TO CFSC MEMBERS

response was extreme and failure to evaluate the initial claim that holding a lu'au in a racist act. Many Greek presidents voted disassociation with Eru's position.

The CFSC, however, adopted the position not of actual offense that the lu'au party was planned, but of cowardice in the face of charges of bigotry—and a potential public relations disaster. Eru's statement was what the CFSC believed, but what Eru thought the College wanted to hear.

In fact, after a meeting with Dean of the College James Larimore and Dean of Residential Life Martin Redman, at which it was established that the College did not find the lu'au objectionable, the CFSC dropped its contention that any wrongdoing had been done. The CFSC cancelled its emergency meeting, which had been scheduled for Sunday night. Instead, the Council released a statement—the first public comment by the CFSC about the lu'au: "The Coed Fraternity Sorority Council deeply regrets this unfortunate incident. However, we believe that the way in which it was resolved demonstrates the type of relationship that needs to be formed among the CFSC system and other students and student groups. The CFSC, apparently, approached Alpha Chi Alpha for resolving the lu'au issue and for apologizing to the Dartmouth community. The Council, however, expressed no opinion on the lu'au itself, except to say that it hopes to prevent incidents such as this from arising in the first place. "The CFSC no longer plans to penalize Alpha Chi Alpha."

The Council's statement, however, fails to address what many students see as the real issue. Students at Dartmouth "were never really sure any- more it's their actions will fall within the range of the continually expanding range of offenses."

Many find on campus an environment of fear and intimidation, where students are afraid to express an opin- ion, or sponsor an event, that addresses issues of cultural diversity, race relations, or minority politics—especially when their opinion is an unpopular one. That perception was reinforced by the CFSC this weekend, when the Coun- cil instigatedly supported the protesters, and failed to defend Alpha Chi Alpha.