Students push the envelope

By Randy Townsend

Rider students fed up with the negative images of African Americans portrayed by the media recently flexed the might of their pens as part of a 50 school letter-writing campaign targeting media companies. The Black Student Union (BSU) met on Tuesday in the Multicultural Center and stuffed envelopes with letters that outlined a series of complaints. The letters were sent to 40 of the largest media conglomerates, BSU President Reggie Walker said that many people fail to make a distinction between the seriousness of an artist and their entertainment value.

"It's time for us as a young-ner generation to step up and do something," said Walker. "For someone who doesn't grow up around black people, the images could mislead them to think that this is how all black people act."

The Neo-Underground Railroad Conductors (NURC) introduced the campaign at January's Black Leadership Conference in Crystal City, Va. The media outlets were targeted because they choose what they want to air. "You can't bring the likes of Tia Tabour, BSU social chair, has gone to past the three leadership conferences, all of which resulted in little action addressing the issue.

"This was finally something that was done by my peers. We were at the conference with me," said Tabour. "I definitely wanted to support them and I do believe that it's time to combat these images."

Black Entertainment Television (BET) was cited by BSU members as a vehicle for negative images. BSU vice president Tyneisha Jones said the whole excuse is that these stereotypes make money, "so we've got to stop buying into it.

"I feel that the images are denigrating a human race to sex, drugs, violence and the exploitation of women, which affects the institution of marriage and family structures," said Jones.

Walker said BET has done its job on both going against stereotypes and, at the same time, airing shows that are directly in line with the stereotypes.

"BET has done its part in creating positive images of African Americans in that it was the first black television channel that we had and gave us an outlet to see ourselves when we could not see ourselves in the mainstream media," said Walker. "But BET has also contributed to the very same stereotypes that we've been fighting."

The campaign was fueled by an incident at Atlanta's Spelman College, which drew an invitation to rapper Nelly in response to the release of his controversial song and video, "Tip Drill," which offended many students by depicting women as strippers.

In support of Spelman's protest, Essence Magazine launched the "Take Back The Music" campaign. BSU member Mallory McCarthy said she's offended by the way that black women are portrayed in music videos. "That's how other people look at black females, like they are sluts and this is what they wear and this is how they dance," said McCarthy. "That hurts me because I know I am not like that at all."

One way for the stereotypes to improve in the media is by having more minorities controlling the images.

"We know our struggles," said sophomore Tyneisha Jones. "It would give us an opportunity to put us in a light that we want to be seen in as opposed to someone who doesn't know our struggles trying to portray what we want to see us."

Walker said that we're looking at the past's recycled stereotypes. "The 'Coon' from the "

Strengthening relationships," said Meer. "What I have done previously in my career is make better relationships."

Meer thinks Rider is already a good university, but improvements could be made.

"Rider is a great university already," said Meer. "Rider does need to expand the flow of resources to it. It needs to reach out to the alumni."

That is Meer's job, to gain support and gain contributions from past students, who, according to him, are excited but don't know how to give money.

"There are very excited alumni out there," said Meer. But, "people don't give the money and then connect with the school." Meer suggests that he will go anywhere to gain past students support.

"We need to visit alumni where they want to be visited," he said. "Sometimes alumni have resources from corporations. According to Meer, sports is another way in which Rider can gain more contributions. Better the sports teams do, the more money the school could make."

"Athletics is often the window into making money," said Meer. "It's easy to pick up the paper and see the Broncos beat Manhattan."

Currently, at the University of the Pacific, in Stockton, Calif., Meer heads a 42 person division where he has achieved a great level of fundraising success. He achieved a 24 percent increase in the number of undergraduate alumni making contributions over the last four years.

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