

UPD investigates 'racist and discriminatory' letter sent to BSU president



Oliver believes letter is response to 'progress' BSU has made on campus

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University Police is investigating a "racist and discriminatory" letter sent to Black Student Union President Micah Oliver on Thursday.

The letter uses racial slurs and accuses several organizations, like the NAACP and the Black Lives Matters movement, of being racist. Although UPD says the letter does not pose a direct threat to Oliver, it has run a number of assessments regarding the text of the letter, fingerprints and the physical letter itself. And as a precaution and per protocol, UB has shared the letter with the Federal Bureau of Investi-

gation (FBI).

"The sending of the letter is not a crime under NYS [New York State] law," said UB Spokesperson John Della Contrada in an email. "However, racist and discriminatory behaviors or conduct have no place at the University at Buffalo and will not be tolerated."

The letter, though mailed to Oliver, addresses the University of Missouri board of trustees and was sent from an O'Fallon, Missouri address. The letter is signed with the name Richard Ganter, but UPD said it could not trace the letter back to that name. UPD has been in contact with University of Missouri Police and O'Fallon Police.

Oliver and UPD believe this exact let-

KAINAN GUO, THE SPECTRUM

BSU President Micah Oliver received a letter Thursday containing racial slurs and accusing colored organizations of being racist. Oliver believes the letter is a result of the progress BSU has made on campus this semester..

ter was sent to numerous organizations because of the address that was used and errors within the text. Oliver said the sender's motive may have been to "shake up" BSU.

"I've been very active in the public and with students, maybe on a level that most BSU presidents haven't been," Oliver said.

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KAINAN GUO, THE SPECTRUM

Black Student Union members protest President Satish Tripathi's annual State of the University address in October. BSU President Micah Oliver believes the letter was sent to him and BSU in part because of the actions BSU has taken this semester in light of the "White Only" art project.

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"So I've made myself intentionally accessible for things like this because that has been BSU's strategy for making the progress that we have this semester."

Since the "White Only" art project controversy in September, BSU has held an open forum to discuss diversity on campus and the university's policies regarding the project, as well as a peaceful protest at President Satish Tripathi's annual State of the University address. The organization also staged a walkout in support of the black students at the University of Missouri after racial tension sparked protests there last month.

"[BSU has] kind of set a new standard for student associations at this university," Oliver said. "But what comes with embarking on new territory are new challenges as well and that's what we're seeing."

The letter was originally sent to Capen Hall, as that was where it was addressed. It was then sent to the Student Association office because the letter was addressed to "Micah Oliver President Black Student Association." Mark Sorel, SA administration director, opened the letter and called Oliver to the office to explain the content of the letter.

"I think it was responsible that they called me and told me they had opened the letter although my name was on it," Oliver said. "I take no offense to that."

Oliver said he chose not to read the letter Thursday and opened it Friday.

According to Della Contrada, UPD was notified Thursday and started an investigation immediately. Deputy Chief of Police Joshua Sticht and Investigator Timothy

Thompson reached out to Oliver, who was given the case number that night to check the progress of the case at any time.

Della Contrada said UB will respond promptly to protect the safety and well-being of the entire campus when "acts motivated by hatred, discrimination or bias occur."

"Diversity, inclusion and mutual respect are strongly held values of our university," Della Contrada said. "We are committed to upholding these values at all times so that everyone in the UB community can study, teach, work and conduct research in an environment free of discrimination and bias."

Oliver said his next step after reading the letter was to "be transparent" with the general student body. He said it felt right to share the letter and it was not an effort to "be progressive" or receive any personal satisfaction.

BSU posted the letter on social media and people immediately responded and reached out to Oliver concerned for his safety.

But Oliver said he's never felt unsafe at UB and has never felt the need to request special accommodations. He said UPD and SA's first concern was his safety when the letter was brought to their attention.

"I have been comfortable and I've felt very normal through this experience," Oliver said. "And I hope it's not because I've become desensitized to these things but because I am confident in my safety on this campus."

He said that when speaking to other news outlets across the country regarding the letter, he realized there are other organizations similar to BSU that received a similar letter.

Oliver said he wants all students who want to feel welcomed and included at UB, to recognize that this letter is a "societal response" to the work BSU and other students on campus have done to create an inclusive environment.