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BOSTON COLLEGE

Some Boston College students said they fear the response by administrators runs the risk of chilling free speech on the campus. Pictured: Gasson Hall.

By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 20, 2014

Boston College students are facing reprimands for failing to obtain proper permits for a recent protest over the deaths of black men in Missouri and New York at the hands of police.

Some students said they are concerned that the response by administrators runs the risk of chilling free speech on the campus.

About 60 students participated in a “die-in” on Dec. 9 to protest the decisions not to charge the officers in the two deaths. But the demonstration in St. Mary’s Hall, a residence on the Chestnut Hill campus for the university’s Jesuit community, was not properly permitted, said university spokesman Jack Dunn.

The Black Student Forum, a student group at BC, had applied for a permit the day before but withdrew the request after learning it had submitted the application too late, Dunn said. BC requires applications to be submitted 48 hours before a demonstration.

“We understand students’ frustrations over the events of Ferguson and Staten Island,” Dunn said. “No one is opposed to students protesting, but there is a policy clearly outlined in the student code of conduct that pertains to all students” requiring them to get a permit.

BC officials said that nearly two dozen of the student protestors received letters this week from Associate Dean of Students Richard DeCapua requesting to meet with them by the beginning of next semester and notifying them that they would be “subject to possible disciplinary outcomes.”

Cedrick-Michael Simmons, a 22-year-old graduate student at BC who participated in the protest, said he was shocked to read the letter.

“If there’s any place that would you think would be . . . right there with us protesting, I would think it would be BC,” said Simmons, who plans to meet with the dean after winter break.

“I think this letter is a good example of why students feel that their interests are not heard or met, particularly for students of color,” he added.

The Boston College Graduate Student Association issued a statement, signed by dozens of students, condemning



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the university's threat of disciplinary action.

Some, including Zack Muzdakakis, a 19-year-old sophomore who participated in the protest, said they worry that BC's handling of the matter and the threat of possible discipline may prevent students from speaking out in the future.

"I'm concerned about the rights of students," said Muzdakakis, who has not received a letter from the dean.

"I think students should have the right to protest, especially in a Jesuit institution where these ideals of being men and women for others are so ingrained."

He and other students also said that getting approval from BC to host protests or other events can be difficult.

"A lot of student activist groups have run into trouble getting permits or getting recognized as student groups," Muzdakakis said.

Dunn said the university has approved permits for several other protests on the same issues in recent weeks, including a die-in at BC's Newton campus Dec. 9, which "took place without incident."

Complicating matters, the protest at St. Mary's Hall took place just after renovations were completed, delaying movers who were scheduled to install furniture in the building, Dunn said.

BC officials said that in the building's 95-year history, a protest has never been held inside the building, describing it as "a place of prayer and solitude."

However, some students said they thought it was fitting to hold a protest there.

"It was kind of symbolic to tie it to the Jesuit ideals of helping those who are marginalized," Muzdakakis said.

Dunn said that administrators have met with some students already and the dialogue has been "constructive."

"For first time-offenders, the outcome is likely to be a warning or an educational exercise," said Dunn.

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