

Four students suspended over Obama stunt: Confessed to hanging an effigy of the candidate

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Four students at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon, confessed to hanging an effigy of Senator Barack Obama from a tree on campus and were suspended for up to a year, school officials announced September 30. The students' names were not released. Other sanctions include community service and multicultural education, which must be completed before the students can return to campus, said Brad Lau, vice president of student life.

The 3,355-student Christian university, which was founded by Quaker pioneers in 1891, stopped short of expelling the students. The campus is "a redemptive community, and we allow for the possibility of change," Lau said.

The students were singled out during a campus investigation in late August as those responsible for hanging a life-size cardboard cutout from a tree on campus with a sign saying "Act Six reject." Act Six is a scholarship program for students, many of whom are minorities, chosen from Portland high schools for their leadership qualities.

"These students were very sorry and deeply grieved by the impact of this event," Lau said. "Regardless of their intentions, the image of a black man hanging from a tree is one of the most hurtful racist symbols of our history." Lau declined to name any possible motivation for the four students' actions.

The FBI is continuing its investigation into possible civil rights violations in the incident, including whether the display intimidated minority students in a way that would prevent them from exercising their federal rights, an FBI spokesperson said. - *Religion News Service*