

European Students Didn't Know They Were Coming to an HBCU

Contributed by Denique Prout -- Black College Wire
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"I noticed there were only black people"

After transferring to North Carolina Central University, two international students found out something surprising — that NCCU is a historically black university. Martin Skogmalm, business management senior, and Bernard Schmid, physics senior, both came to NCCU to finish their final year of college. Before coming to NCCU Skogmalm studied at the University of Växjö in Sweden, and Schmid studied at the University of Stuttgart in Germany. "As I was looking at the pictures on the Web site, I noticed there were only black people," Schmid said. "So I guessed that the white people were the minority," he said. "It was a culture shock. If you're in Europe, it's the other way around," said Schmid. Schmid said that this surprise was not going to stop him from having a successful year. Instead, he relished the chance to meet new people and make new friends. "It's not strange, just a different feeling," he said. The same thing goes for Skogmalm. "The first thing I noticed was that there was a lot of black people here," said Skogmalm. "I got a really big shock. I thought, 'I'm at an all black school. and I'm going to be the only white person here.' But I like it. The people are really nice, and I think this is going to be a good year," he said. Skogmalm said he's used to taking classes in a big lecture hall with 200-300 students. Skogmalm said he loves North Carolina weather and plans to find a job in the state that fits his business management degree. "My international coordinator back at home told me that North Carolina was a good state," said Skogmalm. "Lots of job opportunities. Good climate. Friendly people. That really meant a lot to me." "I chose UNC-Chapel Hill as my first choice," said Schmid. "But I came here because this University, compared to all of the other universities in North Carolina, was the most popular one." Skogmalm and Schmid entered into an exchange program at their universities that allowed students to travel abroad at no cost during their final year. First they had to pass the TOEFL, a standardized test that measures your ability to communicate in English. "It's an English test that focuses on writing and speech," said Skogmalm. Taken on line, the test has a written and hearing part. Students have to score at least an 525 in order to be admitted into the school. Schmid has never been to the states before now, but has come as close as Canada. Schmid's father is a veterinarian and his mother teaches home economics in high school. Skogmalm's father works for a company that sells vegetable seeds to grocery stores and his mother works as a bookkeeper for a local official. Schmid said that NCCU is "very different." "The people are very friendly. Not that people in Germany aren't because they are . . . they just don't show it as much," he said. "People here will talk to you even if they don't know you," he said. "I also notice that insects here, like the butterflies, are really big. In Germany, we only see them near sewers." Skogmalm says that he has been to Florida once on vacation. "It was always a dream for me to come here," said Skogmalm. "From growing up in Europe watching American TV, to actually being here now — it's just really nice." Skogmalm and Schmid are roommates and live in Eagle Landing with two NCCU students from Durham. Skogmalm said that black people are friendly and nice, but they speak a little louder than white people. "It's all good," he said. Denique Prout writes for The Campus Echo, the North Carolina Central University student newspaper, which originally published this article.