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Hate crimes aren't 'isolated' incidents

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• *Hate crimes aren't 'isolated' incidents*

To the Editor:

The recent statement by university administration officials that the anti-gay hate crimes on this campus are isolated incidents reveals more concern for public relations than for the safety of gay, lesbian and bisexual students.

While it may be true that no organized group is behind the death threats here, thousands of hate crimes against gay people are reported every year, and many more go unreported. In that context, the ugly incidents at the University of Maine are not isolated at all; they are part of a national epidemic of hate. The *reported* hate crimes on our campus may not be the only hate crimes.

If Casey Belanger had been expelled last fall for threatening to kill a gay man, Kirk Daigle might have thought twice before crashing into a student's room in the middle of the night while yelling homophobic taunts and bragging that his best friends had killed Charlie Howard. What a chilling reminder that violence breeds violence.

No one can estimate the damage done by such brutal intimidation of a student, either to the victim himself or to other

students who now must think very carefully before they put a pro gay sign on their dorm door or car. And damage is also done to the fabric of our academic community. Free inquiry in a nonviolent atmosphere is something we take for granted. Two violent student haters will not change that atmosphere by themselves. But the ugly forces they unleash may change us in some subtle and unforeseen ways.

Until students who threaten to kill gay students are expelled, we will not have a "zero tolerance" policy on homophobic hate crimes.

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