OSU students hope just saying ‘hi’ will promote good will

By Tim Doulin
Dispatch Higher Education Reporter

Mark Harris knew that just saying “Hi” isn’t enough to ease all the tensions felt by people of different races and cultures living together at The Ohio State University.

But he hopes it’s a start.

“There are many different people here on campus, and many of them do not understand each other,” said Harris, a senior from Toledo and president of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity at OSU.

“Your understanding of each other, you’ve got to get to know each other. To get to know each other, you have to start by saying ‘Hi.’ You have that first interaction, and then it goes on from there.”

Yesterday, Harris and other students outside the Ohio Union and on the Oval handed out about 4,000 yellow buttons that read, “Just Say Hi.”

The promotion was part of Just Say Hi Week, which was co-sponsored by the fraternity and the African-American Heritage Committee, a student organization.

The week culminates with a picnic outside the Drake Union from 6 to 10 tonight.

“I don’t want to put people in a room and lecture to them. They get that all day,” Harris said. “Something like this is just laid back and gets people together.”

Tension heightened on campus last school year when a white female student told police a black man raped her on the Oval. The student later pleaded guilty to making a false report, a misdemeanor.

“That type of stereotyping and racism shouldn’t be tolerated, whether it is against Africans, Asians or Europeans,” said Rob Goffner, a sophomore from Cleveland. “We are all going to the same school and pretty much we have the same wants and needs and goals. We should show respect for our cultural needs.”

OSU officials noted more incidents of harassment of blacks, homosexuals and Jews on campus last school year.

Shahed Niaz, a senior from Bangladesh, said a friend visiting from his homeland was beat up by four men as the two walked to a bar on N. High Street last spring.

“Which? Their nationality, Niaz said.

“We didn’t even do anything to provoke them,” he said.

But Niaz likes to remember Columbus and OSU as a place where people went out of their way to help him learn to speak English when he arrived in the United States in 1987.

“I think the average Ohio person is very friendly,” Niaz said.

Fabianne Worthy, a freshman from Columbus, thinks the “Just Say Hi” campaign is a good way to let people know that a lot of friendly people frequent campus.

“Ohio State is so big, it is easy to get lost. You need something like this to help form a bond with students.”

Fabianne Worthy
OSU freshman

Stephanie Jackson, center, gets hug from Steve Grady, who was distributing “Just Say Hi” buttons. Monique Scott, left, was passing out buttons, too.

Junior from Columbus.

“We are just trying to do our small part and hope that the larger effort can be accomplished by us all working together,” he said. “Sometimes it is the simple ideas that are the best.”