‘Blackface’: student activist group apologises to duo

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OPEN Stellenbosch (OS) yesterday apologised to two Stellenbosch University students they had accused of “black-facing” after the pair dressed up as aliens for a fancy dress party.

The student activist movement had slammed the two students and called for their expulsion after a photograph of the students – both covered in dark purple paint and wearing silver foil hats and shoes – was posted on Instagram on Friday night.

One of the students, Poekie Briedenhann, said she and her friend were dressed up as purple aliens and not blackfaces, for a residence party.

The photograph sparked a social media outcry under the hashtag #blackface.

Blackface is in reference to white people who paint themselves black to poke fun at black people.

In an apology, Briedenhann took full responsibility for the incident at the “Stellar Space” party held at the university’s Heemstede residence.

SU spokesperson Susan van der Merwe said the two students were suspended from the residence pending the outcome of an investigation.

Briedenhann has also been relieved from her duties as a student mentor.

The statement from OS reads: “We wish to retract our statement of Friday, February 5, 2016, with respect to the mistaken incident of blackface that occurred at Heemstede residence.

“We hereby apologise to the two students involved, who were suspended from their residence.”

SU vice-chancellor Wim de Villiers appealed to all staff and students to allow the investigation to run its course yesterday.

“Stellenbosch University cannot act on comments or photographs in the media, on social media, or individual opinions.

“The institution is obligated to investigate accusations in accordance with its Disciplinary Code for Students,” he said.

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