OPEN FORUM: Betsy Hearn, a senior, listens to speakers at Brown University last night during an open forum to discuss problems minority students are having at the university. The forum drew a large crowd that filled the auditorium in Sayles Hall.

Black students assert Brown is breaking 1975 agreements

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PROVIDENCE — Black students at Brown University yesterday accused administrators of failing to honor agreements forged 10 years ago and of ignoring a pattern of racial harassment on campus that has left black students afraid to walk alone at night.

The students, members of the Organization of African Peoples, donned black armbands and held an emotionally charged press conference at which they leveled charge after charge against administrators and made a series of demands.

AFTER PASSING out a list of 22 alleged racial incidents during the past three years, the students said that the university does not protect them, that they do not trust its security officers and that they will form their own protection service.

They contended that Brown has a high attrition rate for minority students, has few black professors or administrators to act as role models and has little interest in providing courses relevant to the black community.

They repeatedly refused to answer questions relating to their complaints or explain their demands.

They also refused to explain what they meant when they said they would protect themselves.

LATER IN THE DAY, three Brown officials appeared at a hastily called press conference to say that they respect the students’ emotions but don’t agree that campus security is ineffective and that the campus itself is racist.

They also said they are disturbed by the confrontational tone of the students’ statements and by their attempt to use the media as what Maurice Glicksman, provost, called “an external club with which to hit the university over the head.”

Officials who spoke included, in addition to Glicksman, Harriet Sheridan, dean of the college, and Eric Widmer, dean of student life. They said that they would meet with the students at any time.

THE THREE OFFICIALS said that they have tried to live up to the terms of a 1975 agreement and in some cases have succeeded.

In 1975, a group of minority students occupied University Hall for 38 hours. The siege ended when students accepted an administration promise to, among other things, increase the number of minority students, increase financial aid, beef up student services and hire more minority faculty members.

Glicksman said that the students who are protesting today seem unaware that the agreement contained a proviso that Brown would implement the agreement if it could find the money to do so. He said the agreement came at a time when Brown was eroding its endowment in order to pay off a deficit.

He acknowledged that there are fewer black faculty members than there were 10 years ago and said that is because there are few black Ph.D.’s. The number of black professors with tenure has increased, he said.

SHERIDAN said that Brown has increased the number of black students by 25 percent in the past 10 years, and that now 8 percent of the student population is black. She said she has 10 minority administrators in her department, seven of whom hold jobs that didn’t exist 10 years ago.

“The evidence just doesn’t bear out” the students’ complaints, she said. She said that 88 percent of all the students who enter Brown earn a degree within five years. The figure for the black population is 75 percent, she said.

THE STUDENTS accused university administrators of ignoring “violent verbal and physical attacks on Third World students.” They said they are harassed by white students at Brown, Brown security and Providence police.

They demanded increased security, better support systems, curriculums that addresses black and Latino concerns and a new Third World Center. They said that the only way to obtain their demands is through “creative protest,” but did not offer any examples.

STILL LATER yesterday, about 500 students attended a forum in Sayles Hall on racial harassment and violence. The forum was sponsored by a group called Spectrum, which describes itself as “a coalition for cultural and racial equality,” and by Widmer, the dean of student life.

Panelists were the Rev. Daryl Smaw, a former chaplain at the university; Barbara Tannenbaum, faculty member and co-founder of the Racial Awareness Communication Exchange; Matt Carroll, student council president; and Richard Gray and Ellen McClain, black students.