The Importance of a Diverse Faculty

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Why is a Diverse Faculty Important?

In recognizing the importance of a diverse faculty, I would like to stress the vital role that leadership plays in promoting “change” and in clearly articulating core, academic values. These are important times for higher education in many ways. We need to lead and we need to prepare others to lead.

Part of the role of leadership is to instill genuine respect for the diversity of intellectual opinions, and ideas, and a diversity of community at our universities. We cannot achieve the widest and best range of carefully reasoned, independent views—all the while recognizing the role of consensus and community—without a diverse faculty. A diverse faculty and their many and unique contributions are an essential part of what makes us better able to discover, to teach, and to learn.

Indeed, in his October 2003 State of the University Address, President Bruininks of this University offered as one of the core values of our University: “Diversity in discourse, thought, and theory, as well as in the different cultures and backgrounds of faculty, staff, and students.”1

In his eloquent dissent in Abrams,2 Justice Holmes wrote of the marketplace of ideas and stressed that each of us should be vigilant in protecting the expression of ideas, unless there is a clear and present danger that such expression might incite violence.
Another part of our responsibility, as leaders, is to create an environment that is indeed “eternally vigilant” and willing to learn and to listen to others. To use another of Justice Holmes’s aphorisms, we all are working with “imperfect knowledge” in life’s “experiment.”

I would like to add that the tone of disagreement (and agreement) is just as important too. Wide-ranging, probing, civil discourse is essential to our progress as a university community and as citizens of this country and the world.

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*—truly a landmark case. You may recall in *Brown* that the Court stated: “education … is the very foundation of good citizenship.” Last year’s Supreme Court decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, in which the Court addressed the issue of whether race may be used as a factor in student admissions to the University of Michigan Law School, is in many respects as historic and as potentially transformative as *Brown*. For the first time, a clear majority of the Court held that racial diversity in higher education is a “compelling governmental” interest. Race, now, can be taken into account in the admissions process, even without a demonstrative showing of past discrimination.

Importantly, the Court reasoned that the use of race in this way is a “public good” as it allows people of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds to fully participate in our democratic experiment—in what we call our Republic. As a public good, the long-term consequences of having a diverse student body are clear: education creates positive benefits for the whole of society, as well as for the specific individual receiving the education.

Investing in “human capital” is one of the most important values of any society and one of the most effective means to promote democratic understanding and social
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justice. In many respects, our constitutional democracy depends on an “inclusive” approach to achieving a well-educated, engaged citizenry. In *Grutter*, Justice O’Connor wrote:

> In order to cultivate a set of leaders with legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, it is necessary that the path to leadership be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity. All members of our heterogeneous society must have confidence in the openness and integrity of the educational institutions that provide this training.  

So the Supreme Court has now sanctioned, as constitutional, diversity as a compelling interest in the selection of university students. Importantly, given the educational context of its decision in *Grutter*, perhaps we could, and should, expect the Court to reach a similar result in the hiring of faculty of color. As I mentioned earlier, the *Grutter* decision could be and, I believe, should be “transformative” in its impact on higher education and securing the importance of diversity—in all its forms—on our universities’ campuses. Leadership will be required to prepare for the new recognition of the role of diversity as a “public good” and its impact on faculty hiring, retention, and promotion.

**Our Heterogeneous Society**

Justice O’Connor, in *Grutter*, spoke of “our heterogeneous society.” New demographic trends, and certainly trends here in Minnesota, indicate an ever more diverse and pluralistic group of students coming to the University and preparing to come to the University. The data presented in a National Science Board 2004 report project dramatic increases in the population of college-age persons of color over the next ten years. These data, I believe, alert us to the need to prepare now. The Report states:

> From 2000 to 2015, the Hispanic college-age population is projected to increase by 52 percent, nearly as high as the rise in Asian/Pacific Islanders
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(62 percent); those of blacks and American Indian/Alaskan Natives will rise by 19 and 15 percent, respectively. The white college-age cohort, which declined until 2000, is expected to rise by 7 percent, should expand slowly until about 2010, and should then decline again.\footnote{10}

Each state and each university will face its own particular challenges. Our University has seen a rise in enrollment of students of color from 4,800 in 1993 (or 10.8 percent of total students) to over 7,500 in 2003 (or 14 percent of total students).\footnote{11} The demographic trends in Minnesota indicate that 30 percent of Minnesota’s high school graduates by 2018 will be students of color compared to 13 percent in 2004.\footnote{12} These data inform our understanding also as we receive an increasing number of students of color for whom English is not their first language and who are “first-family” or “first-generation” students.\footnote{13}

A passion that I know President Bruininks and I share is to ensure that our University and our schools fully collaborate in preparing K-12 students for higher education. This is an especially urgent problem for students of color and for students from low-income families.\footnote{14} We simply must commit even more of our expertise and experience, here at the University and beyond, to this vital educational issue. There is an important leadership role at stake here and it is one that we at the University intend to vigorously pursue.

These trends to greater enrollments of students of color will place new demands—and expectations—on our faculty. We will need more faculty able to provide our students with an opportunity to directly participate in a vibrant, pluralistic, multi-cultural learning community. These experiences will be essential for those who serve (and will serve) as leaders in public service and community life.
Here at the University of Minnesota we do see a trend to increasing numbers of faculty of color. In 1996, faculty of color who have tenure or have tenure-track appointments represented 8.2 percent of our total faculty and, today, faculty of color who hold tenure-track or tenured appointments represent 12.6 percent of such faculty.\(^\text{15}\)

**Are We Leading Our Faculty To Be Their Best?**

We have seen an increasing recognition of the value of diversity in higher education and projections of ever higher numbers of incoming students of color. These will result in new challenges for our institutions and our faculty as we face an increasingly multicultural future. Indeed, Nathan Glazer titled his 1997 book: *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*.\(^\text{16}\) I believe his book has some important insights for us today.

Glazer writes:

> The fight [over multiculturalism] is over how much, what kind, for whom, at what ages, under what standards. To say one is “for” or “against” multiculturalism without going through all this effort is not to say much. […] I have discovered how hard such work is, how various are our conceptions of America, how surprisingly we can disagree on what seem to me simple truths. But overall I believe that short of the extremes there is a good deal of commonality.\(^\text{17}\)

In addition, Glazer offers us observations that apply to the contributions of faculty of color to higher education; including the impact of what is taught, the interaction between teacher and student, and the powerful ability to mentor and role model.

Given the new demographic realities and the vital importance of faculty of color to our University, let me ask: Are we doing all we can to lead our faculty of color to be their best?

We have heard that some faculty of color face a sense of isolation or that “barriers” separate them from their colleagues who are not faculty of color. This isolation
or these “barriers” may be due to a lack of thorough information. This might be information, for example, on just what is expected of them to succeed and how—specifically—they will be evaluated for tenure and promotion. The issue of access to complete information is often described in the literature as the need for “career-related” assistance. Studies show, however, that the isolation or barriers may result from more than access to information. There is also a need for faculty to be assisted by such functions as role modeling, encouragement, acceptance, and colleagueship.

We’ve known for some time that “mentoring” results in more successful faculty development, that mentorship usually involves more than one mentor, and that those mentored report higher levels of career satisfaction and success. Indeed, the literature is very clear: Few true leaders emerge without the strong benefit of mentoring and close mentors.

Jean Girves and Yolanda Zepeda of The Ohio State University and Judith Gwathmey of Harvard Medical School have written a paper, now in press at the Journal of Social Issues, that extensively and thoughtfully reviews the benefits of various forms of mentoring, including faculty mentoring. Their findings are very relevant to retaining and advancing faculty of color.

In their paper, they stress the need for both formal and informal mentoring programs. They provide an extensive list of prerequisites to success and they also outline a number of reasons why even well-meaning mentoring programs may fail. Some of these “hindrances to participation” include: lack of a structured well communicated mentoring process; faculty may feel that mentoring is optional and may even be potentially harmful to their advancement; faculty may feel that mentoring is inconsistent
with a merit-based process; and mentors may feel that they do not have appropriate training or that their efforts will go largely unrecognized.

There is no “one size fits all” approach to mentoring yet we should recognize and respond to the basic principles these authors provide to promote effective mentoring. But, also, we should feel free to experiment and to craft our own programs for our particular institutions. With any mentoring program, for efforts to be consistent and successful, it is important that they be supported at the very highest levels of the University. Again, there is a real role for leadership here, especially in the area of recruiting, retaining and advancing faculty of color.

**Moving Forward**

In summary, I’d like to offer four steps for forward progress:

1) We need to measure (both qualitatively and quantitatively) the progress of faculty of color as closely as we can to remain fully accountable, informed, and helpful. We need to ensure that the culture at our universities is hospitable and sensitive to the needs of faculty of color—and we need ways to measure and monitor this. Measuring progress also means attempting to find the best data (again, quantitative and qualitative) on “barriers” to recruiting, retaining, and advancing faculty of color.

2) I would like to make a strong case for investigating more closely, and creatively, the issue of faculty “mentoring.” We can expect some faculty of color to feel isolated, lacking in effective role models, and perhaps less informed about how to best shape and manage their career. The paper I mentioned earlier offers a summary of possible mentoring strategies for faculty including: relying on
multiple mentors, using group meetings, investing in an effective administrative structure, providing appropriate incentives to mentors, and testing various formal and informal mentoring methods.

3) I believe we need to be as forthcoming and as accurate about the tenure and promotion process for faculty as we can. We must stress the meritocratic basis of the process and carefully and transparently outline what criteria are, and are not, crucial in securing tenure. We do try to communicate the tenure process here in as unambiguous terms as we can—but we should be careful that the criteria are up-to-date and communicated as thoroughly and as clearly as possible. All expectations of faculty should include clear and transparent rules and procedures so that all is predictable in terms of what is expected of faculty, particularly in a system that is based upon merit in scholarship and teaching.

4) Finally, I believe it important to continue to articulate from all parts of the University community—but especially from senior administration and top leaders at the University—the importance of faculty diversity as a “public good.”

I am reminded of Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s observation on the death of Justice Thurgood Marshall (the Supreme Court’s first African American justice):

Justice Marshall imparted not only his legal acumen but also his life experiences, constantly pushing and prodding us [on the Court] to respond not only to the persuasiveness of legal argument but also to the power of moral truth."
Diversity as a “public good” is a challenging issue and one that requires much deliberation and imagination to fully realize. It, too, will involve leadership—and changes to our current culture.

But with challenges there are also “opportunities.” And opportunities should be inspiring. I look forward to those challenges and those opportunities, and I look forward to helping to lead us to a more “inclusive” and pluralistic faculty at our universities.

Notes:

1 Robert H. Bruininks, President of the University of Minnesota, 2003 State of the University Address, October 2, 2003.


3 Id. at 630.

4 Ibid.


6 Id. at 493.


8 This section of my remarks (on Grutter and diversity as a public good) closely follows my “Race Consciousness as a Public Good,” Syllabus, September 2003, 2.

9 Id. at 332.

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13 “For those students matriculating on the Twin Cities campus in fall 2001 (the most recent CIRP [Cooperative Institutional Research Program] data available), 12.2 percent indicated that their parents had only a high school diploma. Among these students, there was a dichotomy: 28 percent of students of color identified themselves as first generation, while only 8.9 percent of white students did so.” University of Minnesota, University Plan, Performance and Accountability Report, February 2004, at 51.


16 Nathan Glazer, We Are All Multiculturalists Now (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

17 Id. at 19.
