

Letter to the Editor: Administration takes action on faculty diversity

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Marquis Harrison and Brittany Carter, in the article titled "University is obligated to renew efforts at diversity," are right to ask whose responsibility it is to strengthen the diversity of the faculty and to ask what steps we are taking to achieve that. I am responsible for these efforts in the College, which are coordinated with the University-wide efforts led by Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity Lynne Davidson.

In late fall of 2006, I asked a committee of senior faculty chaired by Professor Elissa Newport to advise on best practices for recruiting and retaining faculty and for making these widely known, to develop guidelines to make faculty searches maximally inclusive and attractive and to advise on support mechanisms to help retain faculty.

In reporting to me in the summer of 2007, the committee made clear that we must undertake multiple initiatives to strengthen our recruitment and retention of faculty from groups not strongly represented in our departments and programs. These include: much stronger training of faculty search committees; increased faculty investments in areas of interest to the Frederick Douglass Institute; investments to strengthen the "pipeline" of potential faculty, especially in the sciences and engineering, where it is harder to identify a diverse pool of potential faculty; developing ways to better support the opportunistic hiring of outstanding faculty.

I have assumed responsibility for ensuring that we make rapid progress going forward, and I have already taken action on several of the committee's recommendations, including strengthening this year's faculty searches and supporting a dissertation scholar from the Northeast Consortium on Faculty Diversity.

-Peter Lennie

Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Sciences and Engineering