

RESPONSE TO RCC DIVERSITY SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

by

THOMAS H. JACKSON AND CHARLES E. PHELPS

November 18, 1999

The RCC's Subcommittee on Diversity completed earlier this year a very thoughtful and helpful report on a wide range of campus diversity issues, including both a history of various diversity-related activities at the University and a discussion of the role of enhanced diversity in meeting our broad educational goals. We fully embrace the fundamental and important idea that the educational objectives of any university such as ours - providing education and training for the next generation of the county's leaders - will unambiguously be better when it is carried out in an appropriately diverse and inclusive organization. Diversity and inclusiveness must be wrapped into the strategic plans of the organization, and become part of the fabric of everyday activities and actions, rather than merely add-on programs or personnel that do not affect the normal activities of the University. 1

Having received the RCC Diversity report, we have spent a considerable time working with other academic leaders and administrators on campus to our response to this very thoughtful document. We summarize our responses to the specific recommendations of this committee below, following (in each case) a capsule summary of the 14 recommendations themselves.

1. Develop a mission statement.

We agree, as we did with MSAB last spring, that having a University "diversity mission statement" is important. Various drafts and formulations have been developed and discussed with a number of constituencies over the past six months. We are committed to completing and announcing a diversity mission statement by the end of this semester.

2. Develop a diversity website.

We agree that this is a desirable addition to the campus web presence, and have begun work with Robert Kraus (Public Relations) to establish such a site. This site will contain, among other things, official statements and documents relating to these issues (such as the mission statement discussed in item 1). It can also provide links to established student groups (e.g., SALSA, BSA) and to formal College structures (such as OMSA). It can also provide a link to the diversity-related course listings (see item 9).

3. Develop specific admissions material for students of color and review all admissions materials to be sure they show our diversity interests.

Members of our admissions staff, including Keeon Gregory (Associate Director in charge of undergraduate student body diversity issues) feel that some minority-specific promotional material is actually ineffective in achieving our goals, and prefer to use other mechanisms to help attract strong minority students to our campus. For example, students of color now get a personal letter from Keeon Gregory each month and other communications to the students and their families, which cover a broad range of issues from the history of Rochester to arts and entertainment. We do a special outreach program for minority students in Monroe County. We do phonathons with current students, and we have also increased our visibility in high schools and selected college fairs that have high under-represented minority student participation. The staff is currently working to complete a new document entitled "The 15 Most Commonly Asked Questions by Minority Students" that will form a further basis for communication. The key issue from our current strategies is frequent personal communication, rather than the older approaches of having special brochures (which often look "staged" to recipients, according to studies).

4. Develop a pre-frosh diversity program.

We begin by noting that the current Summer Orientation Program includes an interactive program to address such issues as diversity and sexual harassment. This past summer, Thalia Productions was hired to design and produce three scenarios where their actor/facilitators presented scenarios designed to stimulate students' thinking in these areas, and then moved from these presentations to small group discussions. We are asking Dean Green and Vice President and Dean of Students Burgett and their staffs (including OMSA from the College), and including representation from the Intercessor's office (for harassment issues) to review the program and recommend, as necessary, additions or changes.

5. Make diversity a specific ResLife programming theme.

This item speaks as if there were no such programming theme now, but this is not wholly accurate. The current program includes fall training (averaging 70 - 80 hours) about half of which relates to diversity and/or related communication issues. There is also a 2 credit course on counseling skills (communication) to serve this goal. In service training deals with diversity issues as the need is perceived by staff and RAs. There are other training items (mid year training, programming requirements for staff). The ResLife staff also participates in many nationally sponsored programs such as "Campus week of dialogue on race" as well as many cultural and gender related "week/month" programs. ResTV offerings include specific choices dealing with diversity issues.

Having said this, we understand that this is an area demanding constant evaluation and improvement, and have asked the director of Residential Life to provide an overall review of these efforts, working closely with the College and other appropriate parts of the University community, to ensure that we continue to improve our work in these areas.

We wish to note here as well that the River Campus Libraries had already formed not only a diversity web site for the library (a central focus of student life) but have also begun to sponsor various focused discussions on diversity related issues.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, some of these goals will be met by the newly formed College Diversity Roundtable (CDR) Committee, appointed by the Dean of the College. This group is charged with establishing an educational forum and exchange by which diversity (in all its manifestations) can be supported and affirmed.

6. Provide special funds for student groups doing mutual understanding events.

We believe that programming funds for "mutual understanding" and related events should come directly from Student Government programming funds, rather than being a "special set-aside" from the Central Administration. The reason for this is quite specific: We believe that the goals of increasing mutual understanding can only be met eventually if these activities become part and parcel of the standard programming choices of the student government, so they are shared by the entire student body. Otherwise, separate funds would create the idea that this is "just" an issue for minority students, and participation by the widest possible cross section of the student body cannot occur in such an environment.

7. Give serious thought to creation of a multi-cultural center.

For reasons similar to those in item (6), we believe that the idea of a multi-cultural center on campus (either in an area using special interest housing or elsewhere on campus) needs to be a shared goal with the widest possible cross section of the student body. In that context, the best way to include a multi-cultural center as a special interest housing unit would be to have the center "compete" with other proposals (in a manner recommended by a separate RCC subcommittee). This approach keeps the issues in center stage of a wider set of groups and people as the discussions about use of these spaces continues, and we believe this will be the most productive approach in the long run.

8. Multicultural awareness for staff.

This training is already underway on the River Campus, beginning initially with Campus Security, but with plans to extend this training to all staff who have a "public interface" role in major ways. This training is being provided by a consultant specializing in such training (Ruth Scott and her associates).

9. Broaden the dissemination of OMSA's course listing.

We agree that this is a laudable goal, and will seek additional ways to broaden the dissemination of this material. The diversity web site (see item 2) provides one obvious vehicle.

10. Revitalize FDI "properly funded."

Dean LeBlanc has been working over the summer with key faculty in the College to facilitate a plan closely following recommendations made by the Hudson Committee this past spring. Dean LeBlanc has achieved good agreement about the general principles of such a plan, and is now working to bring the details to fruition. As these plans develop, the opportunity to add new faculty through the FDI umbrella will expand.

11. Intensify efforts to recruit minority faculty.

Provost Phelps has charged each Dean in the University to develop school- and department-specific plans for recruiting faculty members from under-represented groups. Faculty recruiting at this and all universities works almost wholly through the departments, and the appropriate methods for seeking a diverse faculty vary hugely from setting to setting. Thus, the appropriate strategies and tactics to achieve desired increases in faculty diversity will necessarily be very "local", at the level of the department (and nationally, within the "field"). The Deans have been charged with creating such plans within their schools, and (as appropriate) from each department within their schools. Their production of such plans and strategies will become a systematic part of their annual performance reviews initially, and their adherence to the plans (and success in achieving the goals established in those plans) will be part of their overall performance evaluation in the future.

The Provost's office will continue to provide funds to augment faculty offers throughout the University to increase minority faculty presence. These funds have been important in attracting (or on a few occasions, retaining) minority faculty members, and will continue to do so.

We wish to be clear that our expectations about success in expanding minority faculty hiring differ greatly from field to field. The stark reality is that in some fields, almost no new PhDs are produced with certain minority backgrounds, and the small number of such new graduates are recruited vigorously by many top universities and colleges around the country. Thus, we expect strategies and plans for faculty hiring from under-represented groups that are specific to each discipline, and we must not expect uniform success in actual hiring across fields, departments, or schools.

12. Expand minority staffing.

President Jackson sent a memo out this summer to all Vice Presidents and other administrative leaders in the University setting forth the importance of increasing minority staff presence in the University, particularly at senior and leadership levels (copy attached, which will also be put on the diversity web site). This memo takes the same approach with senior administrative leaders as was discussed in item 11 regarding faculty hiring, and the Vice Presidents throughout the University are now charged with

enhancing minority presence in senior staff positions and will be evaluated accordingly as to their successes.

13. Expand minority graduate student presence.

Provost Phelps has tasked the University Dean of Graduate Studies (Bruce Jacobs) with finding mechanisms to achieve this goal. Dean Jacobs has begun a series of efforts already to accomplish these goals. First, conducted a benchmarking exercise to learn where our stipends stood nationally. We found that our fellowship offers were not fully competitive, and have increased them to include \$12,000 per year for the first two years of study and another \$12,000 in the fifth year. The departments where the students study will be responsible for the intervening two years. This will increase the attraction of our fellowships both because of the increased stipend amount (up from \$7,000 annually) and because the fifth year will be an unusual (if not unique) offer to minority students.

In addition to these changes in stipend support, Dean Jacobs had initiated several mechanisms on a trial basis to enhance our ability to contact minority students throughout the country with strong research interests that might lead them to graduate school. For example, we will now be using the nationwide files showing participation in McNair programs (such as the one we operate on campus ourselves) for undergraduate minority students to help prepare them for graduate school success. In addition, Dean Jacobs will be developing seminars for the faculty in each department responsible for graduate student recruiting to share and develop new strategies for attracting strong minority graduate students to our programs. Dean Jacobs held a half day workshop for the faculty from all departments in the University recruiting graduate students (The Graduate Council) in mid-October to begin this process.

14. Appoint a vice provost for diversity.

We believe that in the highly decentralized structure of the University of Rochester, this would be a position that would not effectively move forward our goals of enhancing diversity on campus, and we do not intend to proceed in this direction. If the diversity efforts do not become part and parcel of the daily lives of the Deans, Vice Presidents, and other leaders of the University, the efforts will not succeed, whether or not we have a specific individual appointed as vice provost for diversity. Thus, we have charged the Vice Presidents and Deans with fulfilling their relevant parts of these goals, and will evaluate their performance specifically on their achievements against those goals. The funds that might otherwise be spent on the salary for a new vice provost will be used (among other things) to augment the graduate student stipends, enhance undergraduate minority student recruiting, enhance provost's funds for attracting minority faculty, and the like. We believe that these concrete activities are far more productive in achieving the goals of diversity than creating a separate vice provost position.

15. Put 1% of endowment into minority student recruitment.

This proposal actually is the most difficult to respond to, since the University now expends far more than 1% of its endowment income on minority student recruitment. (In saying this, we restrict our immediate discussion to the undergraduate students in the College, where we believe the discussion was focused). In this discussion, the relevant endowment is that available to the College (about \$300 million total in round numbers) and 1% of that endowment would account for about \$3 million. Spending the income off such an endowment at desired rates of 5-6% would create funds on the order of \$150,000 to \$175,000 per year. Specific expenditures on recruiting minority students into the undergraduate college student body (salaries, travel, special events, etc) would currently exceed significantly a 1% of endowment target under either a narrow or expansive view of what constitutes the relevant endowment. More broadly, the University now spends many millions of dollars annually on financial aid for minority students. Thus, rather than focusing on a specific spending rate (which is already exceeded by current operations), we believe that the right strategy is to make sure we put forth a strong and continuing effort to recruit minority students and others with diverse backgrounds and interests into the University community.

Concluding Comments

We intend these responses to the RCC Diversity report to signal the beginning, rather than the end of our ongoing efforts to increase diversity and inclusiveness at the University of Rochester. Some of the specific recommendations (as indicated above) have already been accomplished. Others require an ongoing commitment and, indeed, a change in the normal practices of some part of the University community, to ensure that the underlying goals of achieving and maintaining appropriate diversity at the University are met. We pledge our energy, attention, and leadership to bring these goals to fulfillment, not ending with our responses to these specific recommendations, but rather with the hope and promise that our actions in this regard will indeed help to fulfill the University's motto - *Meliora!*.

1. See, for example, "Diversity Plans: What Impact Can They Have?", by Debra Humphreys, Editor, Diversity Digest, in Diversity Digest, Fall 1999, Association of American Colleges and Universities.