



Recommendations
Regarding the University's
Commitment to Diversity

For inclusion in the
Strategic Plan 2008-2013

Submitted to Donald J. Harrington, C.M.

By the President's Multicultural Advisory Committee

September 2008

INTRODUCTION

The President's Multicultural Advisory Committee

The Multicultural Advisory Committee is an advisory group to the President of the University that addresses both the broad issues of multiculturalism in higher education and the specific multicultural needs of our St. John's University community. One of its functions is to provide recommendations that will help the University better serve its increasingly diverse population.

Although the Committee was created in the early 1990's, responsibility for addressing the campus's multicultural issues was assumed by various administrative departments toward the latter part of the decade. At the request of the President, the group was reconstituted in spring 2004 and has continued to meet regularly since that time. Chaired by Dr. Tony H. Bonaparte, with Dr. André McKenzie as Vice Chair, the committee is comprised of thirty-nine representative students, faculty, administrators, and staff from the Queens, Staten Island and Manhattan campuses.

The Committee provided a set of recommendations to the President to be considered for inclusion into the University's 2004-2008 Strategic Plan. A number of those recommendations were incorporated into the final Plan. As the University embarks upon a new five-year Strategic Plan for the years 2008-2013, and in light of the functions expressed above, the Committee, once again, offers a set of recommendations to be considered by the President. While these recommendations primarily address the Plan's emerging theme of Global Education, they also have implications for the other identified areas of focus: Mission and Engagement. We begin with a rationale for our recommendations, highlighting the importance and benefits of diversity in higher education today.

Rationale: The Importance of Diversity

As a Catholic, Vincentian and metropolitan institution of higher education, we recognize the importance of a diverse population, not only with respect to

students, but also with respect to the faculty, administrators and staff who serve these students. In the spirit of the University's Mission Statement, our identity as a Catholic university calls us to embrace diversity as we strive for an openness which is "wholly directed to all that is true, all that deserves respect, all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous, or worth of praise" (Philippians 4:8.) As a Vincentian university, our commitment to diversity is guided by St. Vincent's spirit of service toward all people. As a university located in one of the most diverse cities in the world, we are poised to harness the richness of that diversity in fulfillment of our metropolitan mission.

We have paid careful attention to the literature that underscores the value of diversity in higher education. For example, the American Association for Higher Education, the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and The College Board are among over 40 educationally oriented organizations that endorsed *On the Importance of Diversity in Higher Education* (2002), a statement outlining the critical link between diversity and higher education. The statement includes the following:

- Diversity enriches the educational experience. We learn from those whose experiences, beliefs, and perspectives are different from our own, and these lessons can be taught best in a richly diverse intellectual and social environment.
- It promotes personal growth and a healthy society. Diversity challenges stereotyped preconceptions; it encourages critical thinking; and it helps students learn to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds.
- It strengthens communities and the workplace. Education within a diverse setting prepares students to become good citizens in an increasingly complex, pluralistic society; it fosters mutual respect and teamwork; and it helps build communities whose members are judged by the quality of their character and their contributions.

Findings from *Making Diversity Work on Campus: A Research Based Perspective* (2005) reveal that:

- A diverse population of faculty, staff, and students yields tremendous educational benefits, including opportunities for cognitive and personal growth; chances for improving leadership abilities; and the creation of a rich social environment for promoting all students' learning and development.

In *Diversifying the Faculty* (2002), Viernes-Turner asserts that the educational missions of most colleges and universities recognize the value of diversity – in their student body, faculty, and staff – as being vitally important to preparing students to live and work in a world marked by sweeping demographic changes and global interconnectedness. The author recommends that a good way for institutions to strengthen their commitment to diversity is to “explicitly incorporate faculty diversity as a goal within an overall strategic plan for preparing graduates to be culturally competent global citizens” (p.5).

A report issued by the American Council on Education's Office of Minorities in Higher Education (2002) echoes this recommendation by urging institutions to “significantly increase the number of faculty of color on our campuses ... to this end, we need to develop more effective and efficient recruiting procedures” (p. 8).

And finally, Chun and Evans (2008) write that “the challenge to higher education is, first and foremost, to make a solid and unwavering commitment to upholding affirmative action efforts in diversifying faculty and staff and to address lingering issues related to structural representation” (p. 32).

As outlined above, the importance of diversity in enhancing the educational experiences of our students is critical to their intellectual, social and personal growth. The diversity that characterizes St. John's is the perfect environment to

provide such opportunities. It is in this spirit that the Committee proposes the following recommendations for inclusion in the University's 2008-2013 Strategic Plan:

I. Diversity Training & Development

In August 2005 the Committee submitted recommendations that focused on the areas of diversity training and development. The Committee recognizes the significant progress made by the University in its diversity training efforts. Through the Office of Human Resources, three different initiatives have been provided: Diversity Awareness, The Leadership Diversity Experience, and Managing a Diverse Workforce. Based on participant feedback from program evaluations, an average of 89% of respondents rated the training as excellent or very good. The Committee applauds the training efforts achieved thus far by the University and recommends the following in going forward:

- 1) In conjunction with the Office of the Provost and the Center for Teaching and Learning, create a professional development workshop module for faculty that focuses on teaching a culturally diverse student population. Strategies include utilizing the University's Diversity Training facilitator (Mary Childers) to convene a planning group responsible for developing the module's learning objectives and content. It is further recommended that faculty be included as members of this planning group;
- 2) Assess the impact of training upon workshop attendees in relationship to identified learning goals, and develop and implement follow up actions as appropriate;
- 3) Continue to actively promote diversity training opportunities for STJ personnel through the involvement of senior leaders and managers; and
- 4) Continue the utilization of Cornell Interactive Training Theatre Ensemble (CITE) in future diversity training sessions.

II. Multicultural Curriculum

As our nation continues to diversify with respect to race and ethnicity, and global boundaries continue to evaporate, our curriculum should reflect these changes to ensure delivery of a college education that prepares students to function as contributing members of a diverse and global society and workplace. The Committee recommends that:

1) Assistance be provided to faculty in reviewing existing courses and incorporating multicultural/global perspectives where appropriate. This could be achieved through faculty development workshops (Center for Teaching & Learning), e.g., development of a syllabus template that specifically identifies diversity and global perspectives as course components that link to learning goals using the Weavonline assessment tool, and other opportunities (Chairperson's Retreat, Faculty Retreat, etc.);

2) To align with the global component of the University's strategic priorities, the *Course Offerings in Multicultural/Ethnic Studies* booklet, previously developed by the President's Multicultural Advisory Committee, be revised to include courses of a global nature that are offered in each of the colleges/special programs. Upon completion, the booklet should be posted online, and limited copies produced and distributed to key offices across the University. The Committee further recommends that:

a) An aggressive marketing and promotional campaign be undertaken to generate greater awareness and utilization of the booklet; and

b) The booklet subsequently be produced within the existing process/structure used for the University's graduate and undergraduate bulletins;

3) Identify ways to expand multicultural course offerings to Staten Island students to address their concerns about the limited availability of such offerings, including:

a) Examine the idea of "rotating" faculty to the Staten Island campus; and

b) Explore the use of existing and emerging technologies (i.e., on-line courses, video conferencing, pod casting, etc.) as a way to expand multicultural course offerings across campuses, particularly for Staten Island students.

III. Student Development/Student-Faculty Engagement Activities

In 2005, the Committee recommended an enhancement of student programming to foster a more culturally pluralistic environment and greater understanding of cultural difference. Since that time, the Division of Student Affairs has developed a variety of initiatives to foster such an environment through an array of programs, events and services. These initiatives have been focused on enhancing student-to-student interaction and student-faculty engagement. As part of diversity programming, students increased their awareness of various cultures, voiced concerns, and interacted with faculty, administrators and staff members through the implementation of programs such as, heritage/awareness celebrations, forums, panels, diversity workshops and training sessions.

The global education and social justice initiatives have included co curricular and cultural events focused on human values, human rights and community development (i.e., Tolerance and Civility Series, UN Millennium Development Goals Awareness Campaign, St. John's Save Darfur Initiative, etc.). The Committee acknowledges the tremendous achievements since 2005, and encourages continued growth and development. Several areas of potential growth are cultural competence, global education, campus environment, academic lectures, and language competence. To that end, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. Increase Cultural Competence in the University community by:
 - a. Expanding Diversity Training Initiatives through cultural enrichment activities (i.e. cultural etiquette workshops, cultural sensitivity and/or diversity awareness workshops for all student staff, enhancement of the diversity-related Don't Cancel That Class workshops) to

expose students to norms and customs in various countries around the world; help students understand the commonalities and complex connections between world cultures; and foster cultural and religious pluralism to minimize marginalization of any community member or cultural group.

2. Increase Global Education in the University community by:
 - a. Developing more University-wide awareness programs that specifically address the UN Millennium Goals and major UN observances.
 - b. Increasing faculty involvement in the Global Awareness Project to foster more faculty-student interaction regarding global education.
3. Improve Campus Climate in the University community by:
 - a. Leveraging results of the EBI Campus Climate Survey to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses of climate; identify factors which impact the University community perceptions of the campus climate; and identify methods to track progress over time to provide evidence of improvement and/or need for action and accountability.
4. Improve the Academic Lecture Series in the University community by:
 - a. Leveraging the work of the Academic Lecture Series Committee to ensure selection of topics and themes to strengthen global education and cultural diversity
 - b. Increasing faculty participation in the coordination of a more robust Academic Lecture Series specifically focused on topics of global, racial, and ethnic issues.
 - c. Dedicating funding to support the Academic Lecture Series to allow for the procurement of renowned authors and scholars from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and disciplines.
5. Develop a Language Bank in the University community by:
 - a. Creating a database to collect information on students, staff, administrators, and faculty who are willing to voluntarily provide

interpretation and translation services for the St. John's community, which will enhance the service of various departments: Admissions, Human Resources, Marketing, Global Studies, and Provost's Office; and better accommodate non-English speaking parents and University guests.

The need for a language databank has been identified by student members of the Multicultural Advisory Committee, particularly Student Ambassadors who recognized this need when relating to parents who were not fluent in English, who accompanied their children to admissions' events.

One of St. John's University's greatest strengths is the diversity of its population. We are proud that our student body represents more than one hundred and twenty countries; and that many of our faculty and employees are also multi-lingual. As the University responds to the global component of the strategic plan, the need to provide these services becomes imperative.

IV. Retention and Graduation Rates of Minority Students

Data from the Office of Institutional Research reveal a marked disparity in student retention and graduation rates by ethnicity. In examining retention data over a five year period (2002-06), the average retention rate of Black and Hispanic students was approximately 7 points lower than that of White and Asian students. In examining composite graduation rates for full-time, baccalaureate degree-seeking first-time freshmen (1998-2003), the average graduation rate of Black and Hispanic students was, again, 7 points lower than that of White and Asian students. The Committee realizes that these issues are not unique to St. John's; the retention and graduation gaps that we are experiencing are ones that also exist nationally. Our Black and Hispanic students are aware of these disparities as well. This past fall a group of them approached members of the

administration seeking ways to address this problem. In light of this continuing trend, the Committee acknowledges that while increasing retention and graduation rates for all St. John's students should continue to be an institutional priority, we recommend that specific strategies be implemented to increase the retention and graduation rates of the University's Black and Hispanic student population:

- 1) Provide targeted outreach efforts to Black and Hispanic first-year students to identify potential attrition issues, paying particular attention to academic and financial matters.
- 2) Each of the undergraduate units will incorporate into their Enrollment Task Force Plans, strategies designed to increase the retention and graduation rates of its Black and Hispanic student population.
- 3) Through the office of Multicultural Affairs, initiate a series of programs and activities utilizing peer-mentoring networks.

V. Recruiting and Retaining Faculty from Underrepresented Groups

Under the leadership of the Provost, with support from the Deans and Chairs, several initiatives have been undertaken over the past few years, in an effort to increase the ethnic/racial representation of full-time faculty. Efforts have included discussions at Chairpersons' Retreats; development and dissemination of a diversity brochure of faculty positions; advertising in diverse publications and web sites; and funding of faculty to recruit at conferences. These and other efforts resulted in an increase in the percentage of faculty of color from 17% in fall 2004 to the target of 20% in fall 2007.

The Committee recommends that the University continue existing efforts and undertake additional efforts toward achievement of a new attainable target of 25% faculty of color by 2013. A few specific suggestions are summarized below:

1. Develop, implement, and address a means by which gender and ethnicity of applicants for faculty positions can be tracked. The information gleaned by this tracking would provide concrete data to support reaching out to a diverse applicant pool. Perhaps the Office of Institutional Research could be involved in this process.
2. The University should consider funding doctoral fellowship positions to include a mentoring and teaching component which would increase the pool of applicant scholars.
3. The University should study and if possible emulate the successful Law School Initiative of creating Research / Visiting Professor positions as a pipeline measure to encourage the hiring and mentoring of members of underrepresented groups.
4. Enhance interest and expertise in recruiting and retaining faculty from underrepresented groups through dialogues on the benefits of a diverse faculty; sharing best practices; conferences; workshops etc.
5. Bring in consultants with expertise in recruiting and retaining diverse faculty to provide workshops for department chairpersons.