

Transforming the University

Report of the Systemwide Academic Task Force on Diversity

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I. Executive Summary

The Systemwide Task Force on Diversity was established and given its initial charge on September 15, 2005, by Robert J. Jones, Senior Vice President for System Administration, and E. Thomas Sullivan, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost. The Task Force was given the following mission:

Mission

(1) To formulate recommendations regarding how to reaffirm and deepen the University's¹ commitment and capacity, system-wide and across all campuses, collegiate units, and supporting units, to become a national leader in articulating, respecting, embracing, and supporting diversity among faculty, staff, and students; and (2) to produce a report that will serve as a framework for the subsequent development of the University's system-wide diversity plan for all elements of the University. (For a complete list of deliverables and an outline of our data gathering methodology, see Appendices A and B.) The specific implementation strategies and budgetary recommendations are part of the next phase of the University's work.

Priorities

The principal vision of this report is found in Recommendation #2: In order for the University system to achieve its goal of becoming one of the top three public research universities in the world, the University must re-align institutional priorities and accountability measures with diversity as the priority for the University system, and not just a priority. To achieve this goal, recommendation #3 states: The President's Office and all senior administrators, including deans and department heads, must articulate a systemwide vision of diversity that includes specific goals tailored to each campus or unit, as well as a clear plan for implementation, resources, and accountability. As Recommendation #7 states, this vision should guide "every unit and every person across the system [to] understand that diversity is their responsibility."

For the University to achieve preeminence in the world, diversity must be a driving force. With diversity as the priority, the University will fully leverage its capacity, locally and globally, to expand knowledge through learning and research; improve access and civic engagement with external communities; and create productive and engaging working and learning environments.

Case for Diversity

There is an urgent and growing need for University action to achieve diversity among students, faculty, and staff for at least four principal reasons: (1) the excellence case; (2) the intellectual and educational case; (3) the business/economic case; and (4) the social responsibility case.

(1) To achieve the goal of becoming one of the top three public research universities in the world, the University must be prepared to embrace the challenge of transforming itself by making diversity central to its intellectual and social mission. Diversity and academic excellence are inextricably intertwined. The University will only be successful if it can be a global leader in advancing a comprehensive and complex understanding of diverse people and their myriad ways of being, knowing, and learning. Cross-cultural communication that promotes mutual respect and

equitable opportunities must be an integral component of any definition of excellence. Striving to achieve diversity presents enormous potential for advancing and enriching knowledge, research, learning, and outreach at the University of Minnesota to strengthen local and global communities. For all these reasons it is imperative that the University evaluate and renew its commitment to diversity.

(2) Students learn best in a diverse educational environment. Different perspectives and life experiences enrich classroom discussions and help prepare students to enter and thrive in an increasingly diverse workplace environment. Diversity is a core competency in the intellectual enterprise of the University whose aim is to develop a responsible and ethical citizenry who are prepared to engage in an increasingly competitive globalized marketplace of ideas, people, and practices. Diversity brings with it various perspectives, ways of knowing, and social, linguistic and cultural norms and behaviors.

(3) If current population trends continue and the state does not improve the education of all racial/ethnic/social groups, the skills of the Minnesota workforce and the incomes of its residents are projected to decline over the next 20 years. As a public, land-grant institution and as “the primary producer of research in the state and a key contributor to the state’s economy, the University is uniquely poised to bring its expertise to bear on the state’s response to an increasingly diverse population”² – both for the prosperity of the state and the success of the University. The University of Minnesota will need to recruit students, staff, and faculty from an increasingly diverse population in an increasingly tight job market. The University will not be able to compete for the best students from all backgrounds unless its staff and faculty are diverse and, indeed, its student body is also already quite diverse.

(4) As a public institution, the University of Minnesota has an obligation to play an important role in rectifying historical inequities that have resulted in exclusionary practices that have produced the underrepresentation of certain racial, ethnic, and other socially disadvantaged groups from higher education. Further, certain groups face persistent incidents of bias and the University must take a principled stand against social injustice by providing a supportive environment for all members of the community.

To better understand the context of this initiative at the University, the Task Force gathered evidence detailing past University of Minnesota efforts to advance diversity goals. While it is clear that the University has recognized the need for and value of diversity, it is also clear that sustained and committed leadership, a long-term strategic plan, and the appropriate dedication of resources in this arena have not occurred at a level commensurate with the necessary commitment to diversity. To achieve a climate and environment that supports diversity requires commitment, competence, and support to ensure equitable and accessible learning, working, and social environments for all members of the community (both internal and external), particularly those who have been historically underrepresented or marginalized.

In accordance with the Task Force’s charge, the report below recommends an approach to diversity that is attuned to four arenas that must continually be examined and structured to assure

meaningful access and equity for all participating members, particularly those from marginalized communities, of the University community: (1) Physical; (2) Programmatic/Policy; (3) Informational; and (4) Attitudinal. This approach requires that the administration prioritize action for diversity in five strategic areas: (1) Leadership, (2) Access, (3) Support, (4) Teaching, Learning and Research, and (5) Accountability. The recommendations in this report build upon past efforts and will only be transformative if they are actualized.³

Broader Themes Outside the Scope of Task Force Inquiry and Recommended Future Areas of Effort

The Diversity Task Force was conscious in its work that other task forces had overlapping responsibilities, such as the task forces addressing PreK-12, Internationalization, College of Education and Human Development/General College, and Student Support Services. Alignment of recommendations between these task forces will be crucial in establishing a strategic plan that integrates diversity as a core value of the University. The Diversity Task Force sent notes to 14 of the task forces, identifying overlapping issues of concern (see Appendix C). A review of drafts reports from the International and PreK-12 Task Forces suggest a strong correlation between the reports in the need to foster diversity across the spectrum that connects our local reality to a global context. Such common ground suggests an excellent opportunity to collaborate in reaching the goals outlined by these task forces in the implementation stage.