

PROVOST'S INITIATIVE ON MINORITY ISSUES

ANNUAL REPORT

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PIMI Annual Report – AY 2002-03

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I. Introduction and Committee Charge

Provost Richard Saller commissioned the Initiative on Minority Issues in January of 2003 to review all issues related to enhancing diversity at the University. The Committee, co-chaired by Professor Ken Warren and Vice President and Dean of Students in the University Steve Klass, has been given a broad scope of responsibility in this area. The Provost has charged the Committee to directly address issues such as the recruitment and retention of students, faculty and staff of color and to hold departments accountable for their efforts in this regard.

In charging the Committee, the Provost recognized that the University should do a better job of systematically evaluating the progress we are making on issues related to enhancing diversity on campus – because it is morally the right thing to do, and because diversity directly affects teaching and research across all disciplines. Additionally, cultivating a diverse student body makes for substantively expanded life and academic experiences both inside and outside the classroom and prepares students to be successful in an increasingly multicultural workplace. If we seek to further diversify the racial and ethnic makeup of our campus, we must provide a substantially improved quality of experience for our current students, faculty and staff.

For this enterprise to be successful, we must employ a multi-pronged approach to addressing all the issues involved. To ensure that these values are institutionalized, we must be sure that all of our goals are measurable and that they are aligned with the culture of the institution. To that end, the general goals of the Committee established at the first meeting in January 2003 include:

- Establishing a baseline of data detailing the current racial and ethnic demographics of our students, faculty and staff
- Gaining a complete understanding of the offices and programs that currently exist to support the minority members of our community
- Gaining a more complete understanding of the internal and external obstacles to enhancing diversity on campus
- Establishing goals for enhancing diversity on campus, communicating these goals generally to the University community and holding the appropriate offices accountable for showing measurable progress

- Identifying and evaluating practices in the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority students, faculty and senior staff – both internally and externally
- Producing an annual report at the end of each academic year that describes the activities of the Committee and identifies both successes and failures in meeting the Committee’s objectives

Over the course of our discussions we have found that the guiding philosophy for some of the programming and support services directed at students from identified racial groups has been to provide these students “safe haven” from a larger campus environment viewed as being—if not hostile to—at least unaware of or indifferent to, the needs of these students. Implicitly then, the idea of safe haven seems to presume a larger campus environment that will remain, for the time being, a place from which minority group students, will need to seek some measure of refuge. Given that racial inequality remains a broader societal problem and that the University of Chicago is a part of this larger society, it seems realistic that the University continues to explore various means to meet and support those needs of its minority student populations that are not being met by the university as it currently exists. And yet, the idea of safe haven can go only so far in changing the overall campus environment. We do need, then, to think about how far the Committee’s efforts ought to go in recommending changes that would make safe haven unnecessary on the University of Chicago campus—the guiding idea being that the campus as a whole might constitute a place of safe haven. Certainly U.S. Supreme Court rulings on the Michigan cases suggest a need to think carefully about what the University’s goals in this area are and the means we employ to reach those goals. It seems also true that the sense of needing safe haven may not be confined to racial minority groups, suggesting that the University should look more broadly at how it serves all its students. Such a broad approach may not fall strictly within the purview of this Committee, but how the University chooses to address these issues certainly affects the scope and direction of this Committee.

I. A) Request for Clarification of Charge

At the core of our first year of discussions, we found ourselves consistently challenged to streamline our understanding of the constituencies that we should be serving and of how those constituencies might best be served. Consequently, the Committee is seeking additional clarification regarding its charge. In particular, we focused on the following terminology:

Diversity

During our initial discussions, the Committee assumed that, for the purposes of our charge, our operating definition of “diversity” was focused on *racial* diversity. As our discussions matured over the course of the year, however, we continued to hear about the needs of other special populations whose minority status in the University community is based on non-racial attributes, e.g., sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, physical disabilities, etc. The Committee recognizes the reality of these support needs as well as the fact that many of these needs mirror those we have identified for our students, faculty and staff of color. However, we believe it is critically important that we do not allow “mission creep” to stretch our attention so far that we are unable to make meaningful progress on behalf of any minority population.

Consequently, we are seeking clarification of the definition of the term “diversity” as it impacts the mission of this Committee:

- Should we be focused entirely on racial diversity, at least during the first two-three years of PIMI’s existence?
- If we should be thinking more expansively, how do we define the attributes of other special populations that could be included in our mission?

Defining Minority

One of the initially vexing questions addressed by the Committee was how our mission related to the situation of Asian and Asian-American students and faculty. The core mission of CCMI, PIMI’s organizational predecessor, was to address under-representation of African-Americans, Native Americans and Latinos in our student population. Over the course of the past two

academic quarters, however, we have heard a compelling case regarding the needs of our Asian-American populations. Although an aggregate enumeration of Asian American faculty and students may appear to indicate that under-representation is not a concern for this population, closer inspection reveals a more complex picture. Once we unpack the ethnicity of our Asian students and no longer treat Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Indians, Pakistanis and others as one racial group, we discover that the experiences of these students often differ significantly, in part as a consequence of their numbers in the overall student population. In regard to Asian faculty, questions of ethnicity are also complicated by questions of academic disciplines. Relatively high overall numbers of Asian faculty tend to mask a glaring lack of Asian faculty in such divisions as the humanities and the social sciences. Consequently, we have decided that Asian and Asian-American populations should be included somewhere within the PIMI mandate and we seek guidance as to how we should conceptualize the notion of minority going forward.

II. Summary of PIMI Steering Committee Activities and Discussions

January 2002 – June 2003

2002-03 PIMI Steering Committee Membership

Ken Warren, *Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Committees on African and African-American Studies, General Studies in the Humanities and History of Culture, and the College* **co-chair**

Steve Klass, *Vice President and Dean of Students in the University*, **co-chair**

Aneesah Ali, *Assistant Provost and Affirmative Action Officer*

Susan Art, *Dean of Students in the College*

Michael Behnke, *Vice President and Dean, College Enrollment, The College*

Cathy Cohen, *Professor, Department of Political Science and the College and Director, Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture*

Mae Ngai, *Assistant Professor, Department of History and the College*

Donald Reaves, *Vice President for Administration and Chief Financial Officer*

Kathryn Stell, *Deputy Dean of Students in the University and Director, Office of Minority Student Affairs.*

Hank Webber, *Vice President for Community and Government Affairs*

Students

Regine Desruisseaux, *Undergraduate Student Representative*

Carlos Jaramillo, *Graduate Student Representative*

Staffing

Robin Wagner, *Assistant Dean of Students for Operations and Strategic Planning*

The Steering Committee of the Provost's Initiative on Minority Issues convened in January 2003 to discuss goals and objectives. After that initial meeting the group met three more times to review and analyze data, hear presentations from student groups, and establish a working plan for the 2003-04 academic year.

At the initial meeting in January, Provost Richard Saller charged the group with providing direction for the University on minority issues and campus diversity, evaluating the current status, and recommending measurable goals aligned with the institution's culture for further diversifying the racial and ethnic makeup of our campus and providing a substantially improved quality of experience for students, faculty and staff.

Committee co-chairs Ken Warren and Steve Klass began by outlining the goals for PIMI as detailed earlier in this report. This first session of the Steering Committee yielded requests for data on minority students, staff and faculty to develop a baseline understanding of the University's current racial and ethnic makeup and its position relative to peer institutions. These data formed the basis of the Committee's March discussions.

Another important topic of discussion for the Steering Committee was the mission and role of the Office of Minority Student Affairs. Specifically, the Committee deliberated extensively on the issue of which minority groups are included in OMSA's mandate and whether the office's mission should be expanded to also include programmatic support for Asian American students. Traditionally the office, formerly known as the Coordinating Council for Minority Issues, served only underrepresented minorities, defined as minority students who appear on campus in percentages far smaller than their percentages in the general United States population. Typically, that includes Hispanic/Latino, African American and Native American students. As Asians typically are found on campus in significant numbers, they have not been included in OMSA's mission. However, some members of the Committee pointed out that while Asians are not underrepresented on this campus, they are a minority and therefore have issues and needs that the University should address. Furthermore, there is a disjuncture that occurs between academic initiatives on race and University support for students of color, since the Center for Race and Politics does include Asians.

The group further raised the potential meaningfulness of including gender, sexual orientation and disability as other minority group categories. This raised the issue of "layered" identities, when one individual falls into several categories, and it also raised concerns about the language we use in discussing minority affairs. "Minority" vs. "Diversity," vs. "Discrimination" are all valid

terms used to discuss this topic, but each points to a different aspect and includes or leaves out different categories of people. The consensus was to keep open the possibility of the Committee's scope being inclusive of the wider array of diversity matters, though with the underlying definition of "systemic, sustained and historical" experiences of discrimination being at the core of the definition of whom is served. This would exclude socio-economic class by itself as a category for diversity.

The Committee left the following points for further discussion on the mission and scope of OMSA:

1. We should look to what needs exist on campus and develop the resources to serve them.
2. The needs of diversity subgroups for women, racial and ethnic minorities, GLBTs (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender students) and the disabled would have some areas of overlap, especially on resource needs, and a successful model might require the University to develop an umbrella office with staff specializing in serving unique subgroups.

April's meeting featured presentations by three student groups representing African American, Asian American and Latino Students.

Jasmine Harris spoke on behalf of African-American students and made several key points:

- Faculty recruitment is essential for minority students. There are not enough course offerings on race issues and African-American culture.
- Some concentrations cultivate a culture of severe competition that is viewed as hostile by many minority students.
- The classroom climate can be isolating and uncomfortable for students of color, who can be singled out for their opinions in ways that focus unwanted attention on their race, or presented with the dilemma of trying to confront racist opinions expressed by faculty members.
- Minority students have a lot on their plates, as there are fewer of them to serve as student leaders. Thus they have schedules filled by meetings with administrators, event planning, and organizational activities.

Nanett Konig-Toro and Laurencio Sanguino of the Umbrella Organization for all of the Latino Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) provided a summary of their relatively new organization's accomplishments and outlined points of concern for Latino students:

- Accomplishments included working proactively with the College Programming Office, Admissions, and the College Advising office to support new students and provide cultural and academic support programs for fellow students.
- Latino students participate heavily in campus activities and over half of the minority RSO's on campus are Latino-related.
- Latino representation is missing at several key student affairs offices, and the students feel strongly that these offices therefore do not fully support Latino students' needs.
- More events that tie the campus to the larger Chicago-area Latino community are desired.
- Alumni relations is an area of frustration – students find it difficult to build connections with Alumni and would like more guidance and support in this.
- Faculty representation is extremely limited, and only a few of the small number of Latino faculty members provide courses on Latino topics.

Angela Lam, Esther Chae and Janice Lee presented a white paper to the Committee entitled: "Concerning the Status of Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Students at the University of Chicago." In their presentation they provided a summary of the background and characteristics of Asian students, discussed their concerns with the current criteria used for support minority students on campus – that excludes Asians – and outlined the needs of Asian students:

- Many important socio-economic and ethnic distinctions are lost by grouping all Asians together in one category.
- Asian/Pacific Islanders experience racial discrimination and dislocation, yet on campus have few support networks open to them.
- The campus API population is overwhelmingly East Asian and South Asian – the more affluent groups within the API population. There is little representation from Thai and Vietnamese and other Indochinese Asians.

- The lack of API staff and faculty is a challenge for them. While it would appear that there are many APIs among the faculty, most are international and in the BSD or hospital, not in the humanities and social sciences.
- There is not a significant Asian/Pacific Islander American studies curriculum.

As a follow-up to this meeting, Steve Klass invited the students to talk to his student affairs senior staff and also had select students share their concerns and experiences with the Trustee Committee on Student and Campus Life.

Following the students' presentations, the Steering Committee addressed the topic of expanding PIMI's mandate to specifically include Asian Americans. The Committee was generally in favor of expanding the mission in this way, but was not of one mind on how to move forward with such a change. Any formal announcement would need to include clarifications, for instance, on what Asian American students should or should not expect in programmatic support from OMSA. Furthermore, Latinos, like Asians, feel that their categorization as a minority overlaps race and ethnicity in ways that are not always in the best interests of the ethnic subgroups. Admissions recruitment and programmatic support could become unwieldy if there were too strong an emphasis placed on the ethnic distinctions within these racial groups.

Finally, the Steering Committee developed a subcommittee structure to work through the following academic year on specific areas of the University. Ken Warren and Steve Klass will have prepared charges for each subcommittee so that these groups can begin their work early in the autumn quarter. The subcommittees for 2003-04 are:

- **Faculty Recruitment and Retention**, Co-Chairs: Ken Warren and Cathy Cohen
- **Student Recruitment and Retention**, Chair: Michael Behnke
- **Staff Recruitment and Retention**, Chair: Aneesah Ali
- **Student Programming and Support**, Chair: Steve Klass
- **Community Relations**, Chair: Hank Webber

Chairs' Postscript

We are extremely grateful for the substantial amount of work accomplished by the Steering Committee in just two academic quarters, for the support and guidance provided by the Provost, and for the candid and open nature of the various discussions held by Committee members throughout the year. We believe that we have made significant strides both in gaining a more detailed sense of the current state of affairs relative to diversity at the University of Chicago as well as in making marginal improvements in the quality of life for many of our under-represented minority students. We remain excited about the work of the subcommittees that are about to be launched in AY 2003-04 and expect to make even greater progress in the coming year relative to increasing the profile of these issues institution-wide and in making continued improvements in the quality of University life for our students, faculty, and staff of color.