

Diversity in Research Universities

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In my experience, universities, or at least most of them, operate from a sound moral compass. Each campus has its own culture and a list of priorities or a document envisioned as the roadmap for future success.

These documents are important strategic planning and budgeting tools. And

my guess is those plans have diversity somewhere on the “to do” or “priority” list. It’s probably in the top 10. It needs to be. Morally, culturally, and strategically, increasing diversity in higher education is essential to our society’s future success.

At Carolina, we’ve operated for the past five years under an Academic Plan intended to be a blueprint to guide our strategy and budget decisions. One of our priorities is to increase diversity among our faculty, students, and staff—by continuing to recruit the best people; by integrating into the curriculum more of the culture, history, and concerns of African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans; and by engaging in more partnerships with the state’s historically minority universities.



Bernadette Gray-Little

Photo: Dan Sears, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Because I oversee our campus budgeting process, I have some opportunities to put my own stamp on things. In my office, we’ve funded numerous specific efforts in recent years; this year, several new initiatives were aimed at diversifying the mix of students studying in the health sciences, including dentistry, medicine, and public health. The newly invested dollars—nearly \$300,000—do not seem large based on a \$2 billion-plus annual budget, but I believe they were sound expenditures for our university. We also have funded

initiatives to diversify faculty and to create programs that seek to welcome and validate the culture of the diverse groups of students who are part of our campus community.

As provost, I have opportunities to charge search committees, monitor faculty hiring and retention trends and progress, and work closely with senior colleagues responsible for admissions and financial aid offices. I also have the opportunity to foster conversations about why diversity is important and to mentor others. But the entire administration and our Board of Trustees have adopted diversity as a priority, and that is a source of personal satisfaction for me.

First, some background about Carolina, the flagship of the 17-campus University of North Carolina system. Carolina didn't become more diverse in its student and faculty makeup overnight. Chapel Hill was completely segregated by race until 50 years ago. Even 40 years ago there were few students of color. The presence of women, at least among undergraduates, was severely restricted until 35 years ago. I am frequently asked if I'm an alum of Chapel Hill because I am a native of North Carolina. I say "no" and continue the conversation. I can tell you, however, that when I was a child growing up in eastern North Carolina in the 1950s and '60s, UNC-Chapel Hill did not exist for me as a possibility. Women were not admitted as first-year students, but I did not know that. The one thing that I did know was that it was a "white" school and that I should look elsewhere. Eight years after I graduated from high school—when I was completing my PhD—my advisor suggested that I consider the psychology department at Chapel Hill. I surprised myself and horrified some of my friends by doing so, but I have been there since.

But here's one simple sentence from our 1986 mission statement:
"The mission of the University is to serve all the people of the State...."

Now North Carolina is a changing state, but often considered conservative in its politics. We have a large African American population that has received national media attention in recent months because of the presidential election and its strong support for Barack Obama. Our Latino population grew almost 400 percent from 1990 to 2000, and continues to grow. We have a significant number of Native Americans, and an increasing number of residents who are citizens of other nations because we are a hub of research and high-tech business. We have people of all major faith traditions in our state.

Today, the university's undergraduate enrollment increasingly resembles the state of North Carolina, and each new class of undergraduates enters with

credentials stronger than the one before it. That is, the student body has become more diverse and also more highly qualified by grades, test scores, and rank in class at the same time. We attribute those gains in part to an admissions policy that evaluates each candidate individually and comprehensively.

Carolina has had the highest percentage of African American students in the entering class six times in the past nine years among the top 50 national universities, according to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. Asian and Asian American enrollment was up 11 percent in the past few years. Hispanic, Latino, and Latina enrollment now accounts for more than 5.5 percent of our total entering class—up about 2 percentage points since 2003. Overall, enrollment of underrepresented incoming students was flat this year, but it is still strong historically—currently ranking 10th among top-30 universities.

Among our faculty, we saw slight single-digit increases in the percentages of Asian, African American, and Hispanic scholars in our last statistical snapshot taken last fall. And in recent years we have done much better among

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female African Americans and male and female Asians and Hispanics. Our track record for black male scholars has not been good (nor for black male students). To those of us in senior administration, and to me personally, this result continues to be a source of frustration. We know we

need to do better. The current results are not due just to a lack of effort by the university. We have confidence in our deans and their senior colleagues in charge of searches. We believe that they get it. Although I do not discount the lingering effect that underlying bias may have, often the major issue is simply the pool of available minority candidates. I believe we can do better in the recruitment of faculty of color than we have done, but to do so means recruiting those faculty members from your universities. Real progress will come from increasing the pool.

On that front, I am proud to say that Carolina has been proactive. The Carolina Postdoctoral Program for Faculty Diversity, a state-supported initiative begun on our campus in 1983, develops scholars from underrepresented groups for possible tenure-track appointments at Carolina and other research universities. The first postdoctoral fellow is now a vice chancellor for student life. She is one of this program's many success stories.

Each program class has 10 scholars—recruited from a national pool—who serve two-year appointments. The program has graduated 132 scholars. Of those, 24 now work for Carolina; 17 hold appointments at other North Carolina universities.

These graduates include:

Barbara Williams, the first African American astrophysicist and an Associate Professor at the University of Delaware;

Juliette Bell, Provost and Vice Chancellor at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina; and

Robin D.G. Kelley, Professor of History and American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, and regarded as one of the nation's preeminent scholars in African American history.

The program was championed by the late Phil Manire, Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Graduate School, who came up with the idea in response to a shortage of minority faculty in the 1980s. The concept was so good that it was endorsed in the university's budget process and received funding from the North Carolina General Assembly. It was an innovative approach for one institution to take in addressing this continuing national problem.

That takes me back to the university's mission statement, which also says we will serve the nation, and we will "address, as appropriate, regional, national and international needs."

In North Carolina globalization is not an abstraction. Globalization has benefited the state in some ways, but has also caused very painful job losses, especially in furniture and textile manufacturing. IBM is a large local employer in the Research Triangle, with thousands of employees. Some are Carolina graduates; some are the parents of Carolina students. Not that many years ago, when IBM announced it was sending a number of local jobs to India, people in the Triangle area of North Carolina took notice. It was another signal that global competition is not just about furniture, textiles, and the old underpinnings of our state's economy. It's also about services and high-tech work—the knowledge economy. How will our students compete in this economy?

We think the richest marketplace of ideas results when we have a faculty and student body—and a library staff—characterized by great intellectual curiosity and aptitude—and also by diverse life experiences and backgrounds.

Those are among the reasons that diversity matters at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We recognize that our success depends on our

ability to attract the brightest minds from all backgrounds and experiences to join our community of faculty, staff, and students.

Our commitment to diversity ensures that Carolina continues to be a place where students will leave excited by the possibilities of a diverse and global society, and where faculty and staff will be eager to share their talents.

I was very fortunate to be part of a chancellor-led university delegation that participated in a summit at the University of Texas at Austin in 2004. These events were designed to explore how students, faculty, and staff could systematically develop skills and knowledge relevant to effective work across cultural boundaries. The conference was informative, and I believe we made a positive contribution to it. But more important was the opportunity for our

It is the cumulative effect of many initiatives that makes the difference we seek.

delegation to reflect on the current state of diversity on our own campus during our travels and time together. Those were galvanizing conversations, and they

motivated then-Chancellor James Moeser to convene a broad-based campus-wide task force on diversity.

In accepting the task force report's recommendations (2005), the chancellor announced specific initiatives to help the university communicate its commitment to diversity and annually monitor progress. Also tied to the task force report was the appointment of an associate provost for diversity and multicultural affairs. The intent was to signal an expanded effort to improve upon what we were already doing well so that the campus community could become even more diverse and inclusive. This report was generally well received. It didn't make our campus perfect overnight, and I will be the first to say we still have a lot of work to do. But taking the time and effort to convene campus leaders and to have serious conversations about doing better says a lot, I think, about our campus culture.

Since that report was released, the university has made a major effort to focus on **access and affordability** for low-income students from North Carolina and around the country.

Through the **Carolina Covenant**, we have promised to provide admitted students from low-income families the full cost of their education so they can graduate debt-free. They must satisfy all of the normal admissions requirements. These students are admitted on a need-, gender-, and race-blind basis. Then they are considered for the Carolina Covenant program. As part of their admission,

they agree to work 10 to 12 hours weekly in work-study. We meet the rest of their needs through a combination of federal, state, university, and other privately funded grants and scholarships.

We had sound educational reasons for creating this program. And it fit our core values as a university—primarily that access to higher education is the key to opportunity. **We were concerned that North Carolina’s brightest high school students from low-income families believed they couldn’t afford to come to Carolina.** We wanted to send the message that college is possible for high-ability, low-income students from any community or any background, who have the grades and motivation.

Part of our interest in advancing this program was the dramatic demographic shift in North Carolina. The state was experiencing rapid population growth—and increasing diversity. The Hispanic population was skyrocketing. At the time, our median family income was dropping, and the poverty rate ranked 14th in the country.

The response to this program, conceived by our Director of Scholarships and Student Aid Shirley Ort, championed by then-Chancellor Moeser, has been very strong. More than 80 other campuses, public and private—likely on some of the same campuses represented in this room—have adopted their own versions of the covenant as part of the massive overall shift we’ve seen in financial aid practices.

Last May, the first class of Carolina Covenant Scholars graduated. Currently, about 1,500 of these covenant students are studying at the university; since the program’s inception nearly 1,800 undergraduates have benefited. Students of color have represented about 60 percent of all Carolina Covenant Scholars; and 60 percent were first-generation college students.

We are still carefully studying and analyzing the experiences our Covenant Scholars are having in Chapel Hill. Preliminary data show a very high retention rate—in the 90 percent range—and we are encouraged by that finding. The program is not solely academic. An added strength of the program is a mentoring component. Faculty and staff have been enthusiastic in volunteering to participate—another indication of the campus-wide support and enthusiasm for this program. It has also been the focus of some fund-raising efforts, and it has been highlighted by our basketball coach, Roy Williams, in a TV public service announcement airing during national and regional broadcasts of football and basketball games. That TV spot has helped

get the attention of prospective students and raise the profile of the effort with key audiences, including high school guidance counselors.

One other recent initiative of note was the launch of our American Indian Center to help strengthen, nurture, and coordinate research and scholarship related to this population. Our state has one of the largest Native American populations in the Eastern United States, so we felt creating the center was an appropriate way for the university to serve as a resource for American Indian communities. This followed the construction of a significant academic building to house the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History in 2004. Completion of that building was made possible by a commitment from the administration and our Board of Trustees to use a significant portion of a major multimillion-dollar bequest for construction.

There's one other campus example that I'd like to highlight today from our University Libraries. As Sarah Michalak says, research libraries cannot wait for schools to make changes in their programs to attract a more diverse student population. Libraries must act. I've been pleased to learn that our own libraries have had an active Diversity Committee that has taken on ambitious efforts to survey our staff and think about future needs.

Our libraries also recently made an important hire, funded by a private gift to the university from former Duke University President, Nan Keohane, to honor her mother, who attended Carolina and dearly loved it all her life. As a result of that gift, Holly Brown has joined our Southern Historical Collection as the Grace McSpadden Overholser Archival Fellow for African American Studies. This postgraduate, two-year position works with the African American archives in our Southern collection. Among the duties are to reach out to the historically black colleges and universities across North Carolina to strengthen documentation of the African American experience in our state. Our goal is to provide direct assistance in preserving, cataloging, and digitizing especially valuable materials being held in other locations.

This is another example of a modest initiative that can help lay the groundwork for continued progress in the libraries. I hope that some of these examples from UNC will prompt you to think of initiatives and ideas from your own campuses that might help other colleagues attending this meeting. **It is the cumulative effect of many initiatives that makes the difference we seek.**

My hope is that each of you will go back home looking for opportunities to

make even a small contribution to advancing diversity at your university. Informal conversations can lead to big ideas.

- Your decisions about a budget request can provide synergy to similar activities in other schools and units.
- Your opportunities to speak at administrative meetings are precious. Plan for them and how you can plant the seed of an idea.
- You can help persuade others with additional resources in their own units to collaborate.
- You can talk to your own provost about the need for campus-wide solutions.
- You can ask your staffs and patrons for help in thinking about how to better serve their needs in the future.

All of this will take time, effort, and, oftentimes, money. But it's worth the investment in the people who will benefit. It will make your campus a better place.

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