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“Diversifying Our Faculties”

“If Diversity Mattered”: Diversity in Journalism/Mass Communication Programs

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“It is both nationally unsound and sociologically untenable to use the tragic affects of (discrimination) as an argument for its continuation.”

---Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ---

In one of the last cycles of the accreditation process, as programs compiled data for documentation of the diversity standard for the Accrediting Council some universities placed international students and faculty members as minorities under standard 3: Diversity. As a result, the Council decided that it would instruct programs to separate international students and faculty members from domestic groups. Internationals must be counted in a separate way, the Council said, in order to not dilute the strength of attempts to right some past legally sanctioned, discriminatory systems that worked to the detriment of domestic minority groups.

I agree with the Council’s decision for many reasons. It is easier to shy away from the real issue --that brought us to this concern about “diversifying” the student body and faculty/staff members in JMC programs. The real issue is about domestic minority groups, who were left out of the power structure of U.S. society. Many want to take the route of focusing on internationals (consciously or sub-consciously) rather than to face the troubling issue of domestic minority

groups, who were systematically and legally disempowered and swept aside in our country. Often, those who shy away do so because this “race problem” has remained what seems to be an intractable issue for so long.

However, I am of the strong belief that we **must** keep the issue of domestic minority groups’ *disempowerment* squarely before us, for this concern is what caused the JMC programs to **arrive** at believing we had to make diversity a major concern in JMC education; this is necessary despite the fact that many were/and are uncomfortable about it.

BACKGROUND:

The descendants of former slaves were deliberately and legally barred from obtaining even modest shares of wealth and power in the United States, during and following the eras of slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow and, the periods of segregation and discrimination and “benign neglect” of the Pre-Civil Rights era that led up to the present day. To correct this imbalance, some descendents of slave owners (who had gained much power and wealth because of this system) had joined forces with descendents of slaves (who had **not** acquired substantial amounts of power and wealth because of this very system) attempting together to bring some forces to bear on helping to minimally, at best, adjust the imbalance.

People are uncomfortable with this issue. Admittedly it is difficult. Much that has been tried, despite all the effort, has failed or yielded meager results. It is a hateful issue, perhaps because it un-masks the continuing inhumanity and weaknesses of humankind. Because so much is at stake, however, it is imperative that we, the leadership in JMC education, not give up.

You might ask what is at stake. Here are just a few examples:

- Many minority communities are regularly devastated by unprepared citizens and by poorly functioning systems. We need only remember Katrina in New Orleans 3 years ago.
- In 2007 ASNE announced in its annual report that for only the second time in the 29 year history of the newsroom census, the number of journalists of color dropped in newsrooms. In the year 2006 the percentage was 13.62 compared with 13.87 percent in 2005. (This while urban areas suffer from internal crimes of monumental proportions that, among other things, need to be covered from all aspects of the story, but particularly through the lens of members of this community.)
- For the most recent year for which data is available, black people with a college bachelor's degree earned \$1,500 less, on average, than whites who had not even gone to college.
- Black people with a master's degree earned an average \$56,477 while whites with a master's degree earned an average \$69,535, and
- Blacks with doctoral degrees were paid nearly \$12,000 a year less than whites with the same education, according to census figures.

Some would give up on righting the imbalances such as those described above because:

1. The problems feel over – whelming; many efforts have failed.
2. It is such an ugly issue and makes even good people feel uncomfortable.
3. It is in their self interest to give up – and excuses (camouflaged or not) allow this.

I am of the opinion, however, that generations of young people who may have the very talents and skills our country and communities could use to resolve some issues such as those described here are getting lost in systems that prevent them from becoming constructive contributors to society. These youngsters are in poor neighborhoods, without ample leadership, with terrible schools, and with few places for recreation to relieve stresses and re-channel negative impulses.

BACKGROUND: No. 2: HBCU's

So often, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) are approached by majority schools and industry managers, who ask for their assistance in finding candidates to help meet their diversity needs. HBCU's want to help and most often they try -- with the often limited resources they have obtained. Yet, year after year, HBCU's watch as foundations and industry leaders continuously give more and more funds and resources to the same (most often majority) schools, as the rich get richer – while the black schools usually get none or a much smaller portion of what “others” are given. Then, the HBCUs are chastised if they are not producing the same results as their white counterparts.

As is well-documented, the largest percentage of African Americans is still found at HBCU's. **If diversity mattered** foundations and industry leaders who say they seek to increase diversity would respond in the affirmative to the proposals from HBCU's that request donations or resource allocations - just as their majority counterparts do. Foundation and industry leaders would choose the strongest HBCU programs and pour resources in (as Scripps Howard is doing at Hampton University) and work with them to help bring about the results they want to see the programs achieve. (My hat is off to the visionary leadership at Scripps Howard for their

commitment to that University.)

Summary:

Despite the Supreme Court ruling that disallows some forms of diversity consideration in higher education good people must continue this fight – for the sake of our country and democracy worldwide. It will take such commitments in our lifetime to begin to chip away at this societal cancer.

In addition to my thoughts about this issue, I have attached articles by others that speak to why we need to concern ourselves with domestic representation and diversity in our programs.

Nicholas Lemann, now Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, in his seminal work—**The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America**—has some words for us that are instructive. He wrote: “whites created a spectacularly poor school system for blacks that was designed to produce graduates who were only marginally literate; then whites would point to blacks’ deficiencies in speaking and writing standard English as proof that blacks were ineducable.” Further, Lemann notes, that often people in our country cried in 1972: “I wouldn’t be surprised if \$100 million had been spent in the last twenty years. Urban renewal, CETA, Model Cities, they’ve tried everything. And the results. No impact whatever.”

Lemann's response to that was the following:

But we hadn't tried everything. We never tried making Head Start a universal program, or expanding it beyond the preschool years. We never tried the kind of major public-works program that the Labor Department pushed for in the 1960s. We never put enough police on foot patrol in the ghettos to make a real dent in the disastrous level of crime there. We never replaced the welfare system with something designed to get poor people into the mainstream of society.” – and Lemann goes on, continuing to make a case for our society to devise honest strategies to right some of the wrongs.

In an article in the Chronicle for Higher Education, in September 2008, Richard A. Tapia, university professor and director of the Center for Excellence and Equity in Education at Rice University wrote:

For more than four decades, universities have used affirmative action policies to increase the participation of US born women and members of minority groups in higher education, where traditionally they have been under-represented. Yet those policies, often applied in decisions about which students to admit and which faculty members to hire, have been controversial, particularly where minority groups are concerned. The policies have faced **repeated legal challenges**, and the **courts have set and then changed the rules for their use**, making the legitimate space carved out for racial affirmative action as small as possible.

Overall, the rulings on affirmative action in higher education have said that diversity is a legitimate goal of universities, based on the reasoning that the institutions' educational missions can best be carried out with diverse student bodies (and faculties).

Whereas affirmative action policies aimed to solve the problems faced by large segments of the US population in gaining access to higher education, the new emphasis on diversity led to a focus on the representation of many types of people, defined by religion, language and other cultural attributes. So - diversity was interpreted very broadly. One result is that universities have **changed their focus from improving domestic-minority representation to attaining broad cultural diversity on their campuses. ...**

Tapia argues, no one could object to promoting an appreciation of other cultures, especially in the academy. But the new emphasis on world cultures obscures the domestic problems that gave rise to affirmative action (in the first place). Representation is both a tougher goal to meet than diversity, and a very different one. It involves getting to the root of problems still deeply embedded in our own culture, and dealing with their consequences in higher education.

The broad **approach to diversity does not focus on domestic minority groups of Americans.** In fact, it has led to confusion about who belongs to a minority group.

It should be understood that most often, **international students and faculty members were among the best students** of their nations and the **products of early tracking.** They have not experienced anything like the hardships that members of domestic minority groups have faced

year after year. They were not viewed as racially or ethnically different in the countries of their birth—and from their formative years on, made to feel that they were second class citizens who did not belong in higher education or in leadership positions.

Diversity initiatives were begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a way to solve broad deep, race-based problems in American society. But with its shift in meaning, diversity today is a sort of red herring. We can deceive ourselves that we are taking the right steps to increase diversity when in fact we are ignoring what is still one of our country's most troubling issues: **educating our domestic, minority youth,"** Tapia said.

I would argue, as well, that we leave our minority youth to fend for themselves at our own peril. Nature abhors a vacuum. Like others they will fill themselves with something—right now, most often that something relates to mindless violence and self destructive and pathological behaviors that weaken society as we lose many of the very talents that might have helped strengthen our country—in the globalization thrusts that have over-taken the commercial world.

In an article by Randy Cohen as the ethicist columnist for the New York Times, he noted that someone wrote to ask him the following question: *"I teach at a state university that offers financial incentives for minority candidates. A department receives \$1000 for completing a tenure track hire, but \$5000 if it hires a minority candidate. I'm concerned that colleagues will make recommendations based on the financial reward rather than pursue the "best" candidate. Should the institution offer these bounties?"* -- Cohen's response: Governments use tax codes to promote desired outcomes. Businesses offer bonuses to encourage certain kinds of job

performance. ... It is admirable of your school to acknowledge that some minorities are underrepresented on campus, that this is unjust in itself and that it subverts the school's mission. Financial incentives are worth a try.... For so long there has been so much social (if not legal) pressure arrayed against hiring such folks—in effect, incentives to hire white men—that it seems hypocritical to object only when incentives benefit minority candidates.

You have handouts, as well, that specify –from the Lee Becker study—how representative/diverse JMC programs are. (Jennifer is making copies.)

You also have a handout from David Honig of the *Minority Media and Telecommunications Council*, where he gives historical details that explain how domestic minorities were prevented from obtaining even modest shares of the country's media systems that led to wealth and power in the 20th and 21st centuries. Honig observed: “Certainly the exclusion of people of color from ownership of the airwaves is profoundly anti-competitive. What could be a more inefficient deployment of resources than having the entrepreneurial, managerial and creative wealth of one third of the country unable to find expression in the nation's most influential industry?” Honig tells the ugly history of six different devices used by the FCC to maintain segregation of the nation's airwaves that therefore served to retain the nation's wealth and power in the hands of – for the most part—white men.

Honig quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who declared that “cowardice asks the question, is it expedient? And then experience comes along and asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? Conscience asks the question, is it right? And, he argues, that is the

point. Diversity in broadcasting is desirable, not because it promotes competition, not because it is popular, or even because it is compelled by the law, but rather because segregation is uncivilized and morally wrong, while diversity is the earmark of democracy.” **That is what we in higher education’s JMC programs must help our students understand—not just by our words, but by our actions.**

In a JMC Educator article “*Assessing Efforts and Policies Related to the recruitment and Retention of Minority Faculty at Accredited and Non-accredited Journalism and Mass Communication Programs*” Federico Subervi and Tania H. Cantrell observe that in the recruitment and retention of minority faculty members, there was a difference between accredited and non-accredited programs. This study was an exploratory post-test of current internal policy implementations and concluded that between 1989 and 2001, most accredited schools outperformed non-accredited schools, with *an increase* in non-white and female faculty members at ACEJMC accredited units. Policy implementation strategies that helped to increase the numbers included such policies as incentives for hiring non-whites and females and uses of minority targeted media to advertise the available faculty positions.

Copies of each of this article are provided here.

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