THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION
ITEM FOR INFORMATION

Subject: Senate Assembly Statement on Diversity and Inclusivity

Resolution approved April 10, 2013 by the Committee on University Values
Resolution approved April 8, 2013 by SACUA
Resolution approved April 15, 2013 by Senate Assembly

Resolution

The University of Michigan is a great public institution. It is imperative that the University continue to work strenuously to create a learning community that reflects its aspirations to be a leader for public education in our increasingly diverse twenty-first century society. Therefore, it is resolved that we request the administration to:

1) seek to determine the cause(s) of the now decades-long lack of progress in improving campus diversity;

2) redirect University resources and strengthen leadership where necessary to achieve this goal of a more diverse and inclusive campus, supplementing any existing institutionalized programs with new creative approaches;

3) broaden the scope of efforts to include modern definitions of diversity (not only race, color, and national origin, but also age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, religion, veteran status, and economic class);

and

4) support initiatives such as the UM Alumni Association Leadership, Excellence, Achievement, Diversity (LEAD) scholarship program for out-of-state under-represented minority students, including, to the extent possible, making such programs a high priority in the next University capital campaign, within the limits defined by the state and federal Constitutions.

Background

In light of some recent reporting on the ethnic/racial makeup of America's premier universities, we have noted some troubling statistics about the University of Michigan Ann Arbor campus. According to University data, since 1995 the overall percentage of undergraduate minorities (African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic or Latino/as) has seen little or no statistically significant increase, and in the case of African Americans in particular, there has been a precipitous drop (see accompanying chart). (At UM-Dearborn, by contrast, there has been a small but steady increase in racial/ethnic diversity since 2004; UM-Flint has been essentially constant since 2008.) We applaud the strong stand that the University has taken in fighting the legal battle for affirmative action, the efforts by admissions, and the continuing programmatic approaches undertaken to enhance campus inclusivity and diversity, including the many individual initiatives not formally related to U of M (such as the Alumni Association's LEAD scholarships program). Nonetheless, these efforts have proven insufficient to address the stubbornly unchanging demographics, nor to change the perception of at least some members of the university community that the climate for minority students can be difficult. We worry that these conditions not only may place extra burdens on some segments of our university community, but may also impede our efforts to attract persons of diverse backgrounds at all levels, from undergraduates to graduate students to researchers to faculty.

The situation dictates, we believe, the need for a wholesale reassessment of the strategies the University has adopted to build a more diverse and inclusive community, one where diversity is woven into the fabric of the University and where the value of differences in culture, forms of knowledge acquisition and dissemination, and personal experiences and outlooks is recognized and celebrated. We do not deny—indeed we applaud—the expenditures of energy, effort, and resources the University has devoted to this issue. However, despite these efforts, since the 1990s there has been little improvement in overall racial/ethnic diversity (and perhaps other forms of inclusivity) at the Ann Arbor campus. This has had, we believe, detrimental effects on the University's educational experience, community climate, and mission.

We thus urge the University administration to assess carefully its current efforts and to prioritize those that are contributing most directly to maintaining and enhancing diversity in all areas of university life. We ask the University to consider active, intentional, creative, and ongoing efforts to improve the community's diversity as critical to the University's basic educational mission, a priority of the highest order. We are convinced that the situation is urgent. We strongly believe that the University must publicly assert the goal of improving the diversity of all three of its campuses, as well as ensure that achieving greater diversity and inclusivity are prioritized in University practices and procedures.

Appendix

Admissions and hiring constitute one important arena for enhancing diversity. But for those initiatives to be successful, we must continue to promote and expand knowledge development activities, curricular and co-curricular activities, and service within the University and broader community in ways that reflect the University's commitment to sustaining individuals of varied interests, backgrounds, skills, and outlooks.

We know of no magic bullets that will immediately improve diversity at the Ann Arbor campus. And we acknowledge from the start that the demographics of the state of Michigan, while changing, present real challenges that might render certain options that have been successful elsewhere as less applicable here. Nonetheless we list a few measures, some of which may already be in operation at UM or within some of its units, that suggest some of the range of possibilities that we, as a university, might explore. Among the measures that might be taken are (a) expand or strengthen outreach programs to all Michigan high schools where there are significant percentages of racial, ethnic, or other minorities; (b) extend and, most importantly, much more aggressively publicize aid packages for in-state families with low incomes that guarantee free tuition and room and board to their children if admitted (adapting the model that many peer private universities have adopted); (c) develop and strengthen extensive regional/national outreach programs to out-of-state high schools where there are significant percentages of under-represented minorities, particularly in the Midwest region (focusing on places such as Chicago, Toledo, and Cleveland); and (d) expand and strengthen summer academic academies, research opportunities, and other initiatives to improve the skills of under-represented minority students, first-generation college students, or veterans identified as having the potential to succeed at the University but who may benefit from intensive college preparatory training.

We list these as possible initiatives only, and realize that there may be others better suited to the various schools and colleges within the University. We also realize that some may require major fund raising before they can be fully carried out, and so urge the administration to target the enhancing of diversity as a priority in the upcoming capital campaign.

Submitted: June 2013

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Karen Staller, Chair
Senate, Senate Assembly, and SACUA