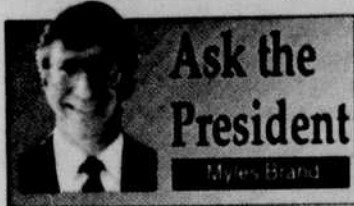


OPINION

University makes progress; has long way to go



Ask the President
Myles Brand

How would you account for the difference of opinions between students and administrators toward the University's efforts to foster a positive educational environment for minority students?

This question assumes there is a fundamental difference of opinion, an assumption I do not wholly accept.

I believe students and administrators share the same basic goals for achieving true racial and ethnic diversity on this campus and reflecting a multicultural perspective in the curriculum.

Also, we agree that while some progress has been made in fostering a positive educational environment for minority students at the University, much — very much — remains to be done. In fact, I believe these feelings prevail across campus, including among faculty and staff, although with somewhat varying degrees of conviction.

In fact, the one major difference I can think of overall is that students tend to view these issues within the context of their own experience on campus over a fixed period. Administrators and faculty, though, tend to have a longer term view, spanning several years.

Clearly, we have moved forward in recent years in hiring new faculty of color, especially Hispanic faculty. In other areas, particularly among African-American and Native-American faculty, we either have lost

ground or barely have managed to stay even. Not surprisingly, because there is a clear relationship between the presence of faculty of color and our ability to attract students of color, there have been corresponding shifts up and down among students in each of these groups.

We cannot be satisfied until there is clear, obvious and sustained progress across the board. This will not be easy, given the harsh fiscal realities in which we operate currently — an environment in which "progress," sadly, often means simply not losing ground. More than one potential new faculty member of color has cited 1990's Measure 5 and the University's continuing budgetary uncertainties, and their effects on recruitment and retention of new faculty and students of color, as reason enough not to join the University.

It is also worth noting that our problems are not unique — although this is no excuse for inaction. We should not overlook that we have made progress: not as much or as fast as we would like, and certainly not across the board. But progress, nonetheless. Within the past year, for example, we have seen significant increases in percentages of students on our campus who identify themselves, ethnically, as Asian/Pacific Islanders (6.1 percent this year versus 5.4 percent in 1991); Hispanics (2.3 percent this year, 2 percent in 1991); and Native Americans (1.1 percent this year, 0.9 percent in 1991). Most unfortunately, we lost ground slightly in the past year in the percentage of African-American students on our campus (1.3 percent, compared to 1.4 percent in 1991) — a setback we are committed to reversing.

Students know there is much

resistance to constructive change at the University. They need to keep pushing for change, because as long as this resistance persists, we will find it difficult to foster a campus climate that truly encourages faculty and students of color to come here, and to remain. It does no good for a department to recruit and hire new faculty members of color, only to have them leave in a year or two because they find the campus lacks diversity.

And we still have far to go in raising awareness among the campus community as a whole that diversity is good, that we all win and grow because of it. It takes many routes to get this across, including repeatedly bringing speakers to campus to tell us about the importance of diversity and what we gain from it. The challenge of delivering this message is heightened by the fact that roughly one-quarter of all students each year are new to campus.

As we consider ways to reduce resistance to change, it would help to keep in mind the late James Baldwin's challenge to U.S. society to live up to its promise of freedom and justice for all — a challenge reflected in his sage observation, in 1961, that "... the question of color, especially in this country, operates to hide the graver questions of self."

What did Baldwin mean by this? And what does his statement say to us, as people of conscience on a campus struggling to reverse a gap that seems determined, here as elsewhere, to widen rather than close? — the gap, that is, between what we intend to achieve and what we have achieved in racial and ethnic diversity and multiculturalism.

In my view, Baldwin's statement, in part, touches on the

fundamental issue of hypocrisy, that old ally of racism. If we are honest about it, any attempt we make as a campus community to address Baldwin's "graver questions of self" will get at whether we are what we think we are — or are we only pretending?

As an institution, of course, the University is formally committed to providing "a student body and a faculty and staff that reflect the cultural, ethnic and racial diversity of modern society."

That is the intent. But what is the reality? As a community, how do we really see ourselves on issues of race and multiculturalism? Is there general acceptance, for example, that diversity makes us better? Or do we only pay lip service to this goal?

Recently, the *Emerald* has run an excellent series on racial issues on our campus. Taken together, the articles suggest — I believe correctly — that we are far short of the mark in closing the gap I mentioned. Indeed, I have the impression — one shared by many students, faculty and staff — that some members of our community think they are far more progressive and activist on racial issues than they really are.

Even so, we are heading in the right direction. The challenge now — to administrators, faculty, staff, and yes, I dare say even some students — is to make our self-perception of progressiveness a definite reality.

Myles Brand is President of the University.

Editor's note: Brand agreed to take part in the "Ask the President" columns, in which the Emerald forwards a question to the President's Office for Brand's response.

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