



A Multitude of VOICES

**The Academic Plan
seeks to enrich the University's
educational environment by
improving faculty diversity**

By Patrick Farrell

In many ways, Syracuse University is a microcosm of today's world, enrolling more than 2,000 international students from 100 countries in addition to representatives of most races and ethnic groups found in this country. The University's Academic Plan embraces this variety, foreseeing an institution "where diverse groups of faculty, students, and staff come together as one community of scholars to learn from each other and to prepare for and contribute to an increasingly global and diverse world."

School of Education professor Ted Grace '02 has experienced Syracuse University as both a student and a faculty member. As an African American, Grace has a strong interest in the state of diversity on the Hill. "In terms of different ideas and socioeconomic makeup, SU is a diverse place," Grace says. "But there could be more ethnic diversity." As Grace sees it, such an environment exposes everyone in the community to a broader range of experiences. "Diversity has the power to help change perspectives," he says. "For example, if there is diversity in the classroom—with professors and students from all kinds of backgrounds sharing ideas and perspectives—the students will realize that others may not see the world the same way they do. This kind of insight helps students in the School of Education become more effective teachers."

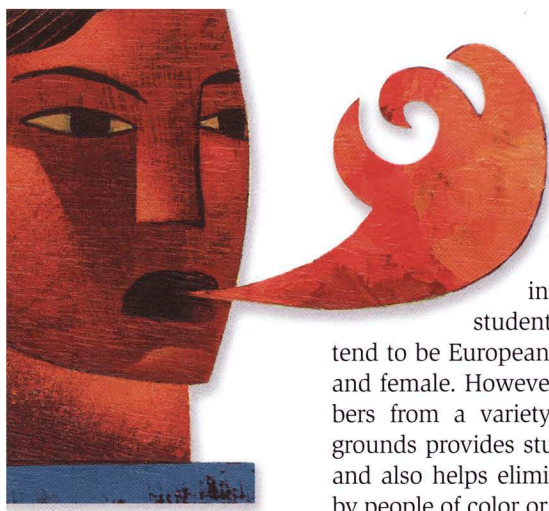
The role of diversity as defined in the Academic Plan goes well beyond simply answering short-term political goals. Instead, cultural, ethnic, intellectual, and racial diversity has been adopted as pedagogical policy because of the richness it brings to the educational environment. It's considered a process that expands and redefines knowledge within the

academy while preparing graduates for success in an increasingly interdependent world. To that end, the Academic Plan calls for the entire community to "work together...and make Syracuse a place where all people are respected for their ability, potential, and contributions."

Recent studies indicate that diversity within a campus community has far-ranging and significant educational benefits for minorities and non-minorities alike. As the world becomes more culturally and ethnically heterogeneous, the lessons of diversity grow increasingly relevant, helping students develop and appreciate a variety of cultural and intellectual perspectives. "Students in diverse learning environments learn more, have higher levels of satisfaction, and have greater degrees of civic engagement," says Vice Chancellor and Provost Deborah A. Freund. "They are better able to appreciate the ideas of others and are better prepared to enter the world they will lead."

While progress has been made in diversifying SU's student profile, the challenge of bringing a comparable degree of diversity to the faculty remains. Efforts are being made to hire new faculty members, with special emphasis on cultural and ethnic groups that are currently underrepresented. In fact, the Academic Plan lists faculty diversity as a top priority, calling for "a dramatic increase in the number of faculty of color by rewarding—through the University-wide reallocation of faculty lines—departments that aggressively seek, find, and retain excellent candidates...."

Without diversity, Grace warns, there's a risk of complacently accepting that everyone shares the



same worldview. “If we don’t interact with different kinds of people, we become comfortable with our own ideas and assume that’s the norm,” he says. Grace, for instance, points out that most students in the School of Education tend to be European American, upper middle class, and female. However, the presence of faculty members from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds provides students with a broad perspective and also helps eliminate stereotypes. “Being taught by people of color or people who speak different languages who also happen to be professors creates a powerful impression,” Grace says. “Just because these people look or sound different doesn’t mean they can’t be experts in their fields. It’s important that students see this.”

This academic year, Syracuse University has 859 full-time faculty members, including 74 Asians/Pacific Islanders, 54 African Americans, 20 Latinos/Hispanics, and 3 American Indians/Alaskan Natives. In total, underrepresented ethnic groups make up about 17.6 percent of the University’s instructional faculty. In comparison, the national average (as of fall 1999) is 14.4 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Education. While these data position SU competitively with peer institutions in terms of diversity, additional work remains.

As Freund sees it, the issue of diversity at Syracuse University is not so much that of fixing an intractable problem as it is an opportunity to build on an existing strength. “From the University’s beginning, diversity has been part of its fabric,” she says. “Syracuse educated the first African American woman to become a physician, never had quotas for Catholics or Jews when that was a common practice, and admitted Japanese American students during World War II. Our commitment to diversity is simply a matter of upholding that tradition.”

Toward a More Diverse Faculty

Efforts to increase faculty diversity have come to fruition. Last fall, for example, 13 of the University’s 55 tenure-track appointments went to minority members. Of seven appointments made at the full professor rank, however, none were members of minority groups. “One of the things that convinced me to work here, after I finished my graduate work, was that the University openly admitted things weren’t perfect in terms of diversity, but that it was actively working to make changes,” Grace recalls. “As one of the core values, and now as part of the Academic Plan, diversity is built into the University’s framework.”

School of Management Dean George Burman acknowledges that desired goals have yet to be achieved. At the School of Management, hiring policy is governed by a desire to recruit the best available teaching talent whenever the opportunity

occurs, with diversity factoring into the equation as an element critical to enhancing the school’s overall quality. “The difficulty is finding talented people to build faculty strength,” Burman says. “Once you’ve found them, you have to compete for them against high-quality schools in a very tight market.” Despite this, the School of Management faculty profile has changed in recent years. Among the school’s 59 full-time faculty members, 39 percent are from underrepresented groups. “We’ve hired a significant number of young faculty in recent years from underrepresented groups,” Burman says. “We’ve tenured some great people, and will continue to do so in coming years. We’re pleased with the makeup of our junior faculty.”

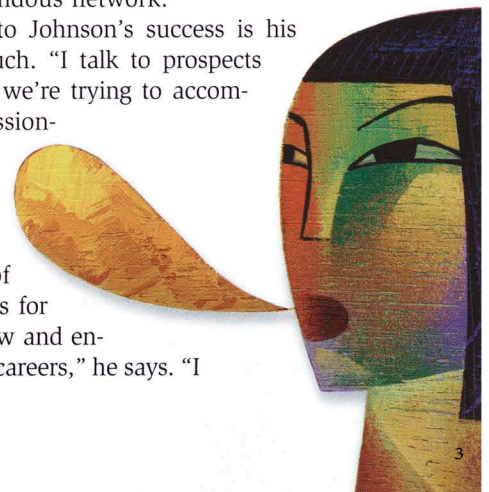
Raymond von Dran, dean of the School of Information Studies, says the drive for diversity in his school is all-encompassing. For instance, among the school’s staff, the assistant dean, the head of student services, and members of the information technology team are African Americans. Von Dran says this helps students see that diversity is a fact of life at the school. “It’s important that students see faculty members of color,” he says. “But it’s just as important that they know diversity exists throughout the school.”

The school also has its own set of core values, and diversity is at the top of that list. “We recognize the need for different voices, and that variety makes us much more powerful,” von Dran says. “You can’t leverage diversity if it’s not there.” Von Dran and his information studies colleagues are working to create an environment in which students benefit from what he calls a “multitude of voices.” Having a diverse faculty and staff, in turn, leads to a more diverse student body. “About 30 percent of our students are either African American, Hispanic, or Asian,” von Dran says. “This is one of the most diverse schools on campus.”

The Challenge of Recruiting

Both Burman and von Dran attribute much of their schools’ progress in attracting minority faculty members to Howard Johnson, executive vice provost for academic affairs. “We face some difficult faculty markets, but—working with Howard—we’ve had some significant successes,” says Burman. “It takes a lot of hard work to identify candidates of the quality we’re looking for. Howard has a tremendous network.”

One key to Johnson’s success is his personal touch. “I talk to prospects about what we’re trying to accomplish professionally here at Syracuse and what that means in terms of opportunities for them to grow and enhance their careers,” he says. “I



try to give them the total picture for both the undergraduate and graduate level.” Johnson says successful recruiting requires a strong commitment, as well as continuing support from deans and senior faculty. It also helps to be aggressive. “The competition is everybody,” he says. “I can’t wait for replies from ads in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*—I have to take an active role in recruiting.”

One advantage Syracuse brings to its faculty search is its reputation. “We’re known throughout the country for looking,” Johnson says. “Word gets around.” Von Dran concurs that word of mouth and networking enhance recruiting efforts. Citing Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Little Brown & Company, 2000)—which investigates why some ideas and trends spread epidemic-like through social networks—von Dran

says his school’s initial progress with diversity has improved his ability to make subsequent hires.

“One idea in *The Tipping Point* is that, after

you’ve experienced a few successes, future successes are that much easier,” he says. “For example, once

we brought in minority faculty members, they became involved in our recruiting process. Because minority faculty members take part in interviews, minority candidates can see they won’t be alone.” Von Dran adds that today among the school’s 43 faculty members, 25 percent are from underrepresented groups. “That’s far above the national average,” he says. “When I came here seven years ago, there were none.”

As another way of finding prospective new minority faculty members, Johnson introduced the “grow your own faculty” approach, which involves identifying likely candidates as they come through the University’s graduate school ranks. Grace is a product of this process. “Howard was the key person in getting me to stay here,” he says. “He has a lot of credibility because he’s been here so long, so he can be frank with candidates. He pushed me to think about my goals and look at the bigger picture of working in the academy. That was very valuable.”

Von Dran can make a persuasive case for any prospective hire to come to SU, even allowing for the weather. “If you have the right people who are productive and exude enthusiasm—and if they’re treated with respect—then this is not a difficult sell,” he says. And once they’re here—retention becomes a priority, particularly with junior faculty. “People move for various reasons,” Burman explains. “We have to try to retain our competitiveness, so that strong, young faculty members will want to stay.”

In his efforts to attract high-quality faculty from underrepresented groups, Johnson is constantly on

the road. For instance, he met potential new faculty at the 2002 National Association of Graduate-Professional Students convention in St. Louis. “All these events are opportunities to recruit underrepresented faculty,” he says. “You look to see where the graduate students are and use that to grow your faculty.”

Johnson believes an effective recruiting program has to be farsighted: It’s important to look at the entire process, which means reaching out to, and encouraging, students coming up through the pipeline—in particular, doctoral candidates on a teaching career path. When attending conferences, Johnson makes a point of meeting the minority caucuses. “All these events have African American or Latino caucuses,” he says. “You have to go and present yourself.” Always looking to expand his network, Johnson finds opportunities to meet prospective faculty candidates in unexpected places. “Even at conferences geared for undergraduates, I have a chance to communicate with faculty members to see if they might consider coming to Syracuse.” At just such a conference in South Africa, Johnson met Cecil Abrahams, rector and vice chancellor of the University of the Western Cape in Bellville, South Africa. Abrahams will join the Syracuse faculty in 2004 as a member of the School of Education and the English department in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Changing the Environment

While acknowledging some gains in faculty diversity in recent years, Johnson also recognizes the need to continue improving. “There is no place at the University, from staff to senior leadership, where improvement cannot be made if we want to make it,” he says. Although he has experienced considerable success with his on-the-road recruiting efforts, Johnson says sometimes difficulties are encountered when introducing some recruits to the campus. “The difficulty is internal,” he explains, adding that attracting new faculty, particularly for advanced positions, can be sensitive. “When you bring in anyone at the senior level with tenure, sometimes it can be difficult to get the support of current senior faculty.”

From Johnson’s vantage point, the drive for diversity as put forth in the Academic Plan is the only reasonable course. “This is not just for minorities,” he says. “It’s essential for any university to have a diverse faculty for all its students. It just has to be there.” In turn, that degree of diversity makes for a more balanced and humane institution. “Not all faculty who come to Syracuse—regardless of gender or ethnicity—will stay forever, but we cannot afford to lose people to lesser institutions,” Johnson says. “We need to make this a place where people can feel safe intellectually and grow.”

