

Yale University's Commitment to Diversity

A Report Prepared for the American Association for the Advancement of the Sciences

Yale University, in order to secure its place as a leading research institution, and situated in an increasingly competitive, globalized, multiethnic and multiracial environment, has adopted an inclusive strategy. This strategy conveys to our potential as well as current faculty, students, and staff, and our institutional and business partners, Yale's readiness to compete successfully in a world demanding intercultural skills. It is imperative for Yale not only to employ measures to attract persons who bring diversity, but also to avoid discouraging and losing underrepresented minorities, women, and others who contribute to diversity at Yale. We are convinced that academic excellence is impaired as much by unintentional hurdles as by intentional neglect of individuals and groups who face structural impediments to academic opportunity. Yale's admissions and personnel search processes attach value to diverse backgrounds and life experiences that broaden the repertoire of ideas and ways of thinking available to the entire University community. This essay provides a brief introduction to the rationale underlying Yale's diversity initiatives.

Underrepresented Minorities. Yale has achieved an extraordinarily diverse student body, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. But student diversity initiatives hold out a hollow hope unless students find themselves in learning environments in which they encounter successful role models of people like themselves. The relative paucity of underrepresented minorities among the faculty of major research universities in the U.S., particularly in the sciences, discourages minority students from pursuing scientific careers.¹ The higher percentage of science majors who graduate from the few predominantly minority colleges such as Howard University provides circumstantial evidence of this phenomenon. The small number of under-represented minorities graduating with bachelor's degrees in the sciences limits the diversity in Ph.D. programs in the sciences, and by extension, narrows the pool from which research universities hire their faculty.

Yale is addressing this pipeline problem with multiple approaches. One is to improve regular search processes to increase the chances of finding minority scholars of distinction by, for example, ensuring that search committees reach far beyond the easiest and most accessible scholarly networks. A second effort, established in 2005, aims to expand the pool of minority scholars at an earlier stage in the scholarly career by attracting promising young post doctoral fellows, primarily in the sciences, who can bring diversity to Yale. Investing in the careers of post doctoral fellows raises the human capital and visibility of these young scholars, improving their chances of getting academic positions at Yale or elsewhere in the academy.

¹ Psychologist and Columbia Provost Claude Steele suggests that minority students can feel "identity threat" when they find themselves in a setting dominated by the majority culture such as they might find in the science disciplines, leading them to avoid those uncomfortable classroom situations. See video prepared by the Stanford University Provost's Office. See also Scott Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Firms, Schools, and Societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Gender Disparities. If the pipeline issue for underrepresented minorities occurs in high school and college on account of inhospitable environments, the problem for females comes later, at the Ph.D. stage and beyond, when they discover the difficulty of balancing family and career in disciplines that demand enormous up-front investments of time, often in their prime reproductive years. Despite advances in the proportion of women in academic science and engineering, a 2008 study by the National Science Foundation confirmed that women continue to make up a much lower percentage of science and engineering full professors than their share of science and engineering doctorates would indicate. A 2009 study by the National Academy of Sciences was more sanguine, finding that “[f]or the most part, men and women faculty in science, engineering, and mathematics have enjoyed comparable opportunities within the university, and gender does not appear to have been a factor in a number of important career transitions and outcomes.”² However equitable the promotions process, there will never be equality at the higher ranks of the professoriate if females are choosing to avoid careers that are known for unforgiving hours and promotion schedules.

Some of Yale’s initiatives to level the playing field for females, who in today’s society still bear a disproportionate burden of family work, include expanding day care facilities with means-tested subsidies, granting parental leave to graduate students and faculty with children, providing junior faculty with travel funds that enable them to take small children along on conference or research trips, and making extra post doctoral fellowships available to scholars who contribute diversity to Yale. But more remains to be done, judging from personnel statistics that we gather and scrutinize year-round.

Yale’s commitment to diversity in its faculty, staff, and student body rests on the conviction that minds are most open, and knowledge flourishes best, where there are no barriers to entry. As an institution that emphasizes excellence and achievement, Yale could easily slip into selection processes for students and faculty that ratify unequal opportunities at earlier stages of educational and career development. But we recognize the danger—not only for those left behind, or for a society that is willing to leave many behind, but for Yale itself—of investing only in the talents of a narrow slice of society. We believe that a critical mass of underrepresented groups is important in both the student body and professoriate, not only because a proportionate presence provides a barometer of how open the system really is, but also because those who contribute to diversity also provide much of the role modeling, mentoring and counseling for successive generations. Ethnic, gender and other kinds of diversity among the faculty increases the diversity in perspectives and approaches shared with students including those in the cultural majority. Yale is committed to providing an environment in which all members of the academic community can grow and flourish as scholars. Failure to do so would place a large tax on the possibilities for excellence at Yale.

² *Gender Differences at Critical Transitions in the Careers of Science, Engineering and Mathematics Faculty*, 2009, National Academy of Sciences Committee on Gender Differences in Careers of Science, Engineering, and Mathematics Faculty; Committee on Women in Science, Engineering and Medicine, Policy and Global Affairs; and Committee on National Statistics, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education.