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President's Message to the Campus Community, August 2010

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President's Message to the Campus Community, August 2010

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Abstract
Over the past year I have been giving a good deal of thought to diversity at Gettysburg College. I have talked with a number of you regarding the Diversity Commission's work and current structure, our institutional goals with regard to diversity, and potential strategies to meet those goals. With this letter I'd like to share a few thoughts with you, none of which are brand new, but which I hope give you a sense of how important I think this topic is for Gettysburg College. [excerpt]

Comments
The text of the President's message is also available from the President's Office pages of the Gettysburg College website: http://www.gettysburg.edu/about/offices/president/priorities-initiatives/diversity/presidents-message-to-the-campus-community%2C-august-2010.dot?host_id=1

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Dear Colleagues,

Over the past year I have been giving a good deal of thought to diversity at Gettysburg College. I have talked with a number of you regarding the Diversity Commission's work and current structure, our institutional goals with regard to diversity, and potential strategies to meet those goals. With this letter I'd like to share a few thoughts with you, none of which are brand new, but which I hope give you a sense of how important I think this topic is for Gettysburg College.

I proceed from the assumption that we agree that it is our responsibility to prepare our students to be engaged citizens and effective professionals in a multicultural world, that in their personal and professional lives our graduates will need to be able to interact well with a wide variety of people who come from a wide array of backgrounds, people of varying socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious beliefs, etc. Of course, a number of college programs are designed towards that end; for example, study abroad, service-learning, eRace, and our curricular goal of informed citizenship all provide opportunities for our students to gain an appreciation and understanding of different cultural perspectives. However, there can be no substitute for the learning that occurs when during the course of their college careers, all students have the opportunity for everyday interaction with others who bring a diversity of perspectives. That kind of everyday learning requires Gettysburg College to become a more diverse community.

In addition to providing a stronger educational experience for our students, a more diverse community is essential for us to maintain a healthy student
enrollment; we simply must be attractive to a racially and ethnically diverse student body given our changing national demographics.

I would also suggest that a more diverse community will enrich the liveliness of our debates and conversations in our classrooms, our residence halls, our dining hall, etc. Though diversity doesn't ensure intellectual vibrancy, it certainly has the potential to challenge us in both intellectual and personal ways, to push us out of our comfort zones, to think about the world in different ways. This is the type of community--these are the kinds of conversations--that I believe many of us seek.

It is clear that we have had some success recently with regard to enhancing the diversity of our community. Perhaps our most notable success has been with regard to student recruitment. Since 2005 the number of domestic students of color has increased from 7% to 9% of the student body. About 12% of our student body currently consists of domestic students of color and international students.

Our success in recruiting a more diverse faculty and staff has lagged behind that of the student body. Despite a very challenging budget climate, last year my concern about faculty diversity led me to set aside funds designated specifically for the recruitment of a more diverse faculty. At the last faculty meeting of the year, Interim Provost Jay White reported that of eight new tenure-track faculty for the coming year, five bring racial and/or ethnic diversity. In addition three faculty of color will join us for the year as Gondwe Scholars.

While we should be proud of the progress we've made, we all know that a few good recruitment years are not sufficient for building and maintaining a more diverse community. Our effort with regard to the recruitment of a more diverse student body, faculty, and staff must be sustained; and we must also focus on retention. Perhaps most important of all, we must not only provide an environment that welcomes individuals who come from a diversity of backgrounds and bring a diversity of perspectives, but we must also provide
the support that they need to be successful and to want to remain in our community.

As I look ahead to a new academic year, I plan to constitute a newly structured Diversity Commission that will have a smaller membership and a sharper focus than the current Diversity Commission. Specifically, I will ask the Diversity Commission to make recommendations and advance initiatives focused specifically on 1) the recruitment and retention of a more diverse faculty and staff; and 2) the further development of a climate that welcomes, supports, and truly delights in diversity, and that also confronts on a regular basis the related social justice issues.

I'd like to alert you now to a program that will be presented this fall by the Cornell Interactive Theater Ensemble, a group that fosters dialogue about diversity and inclusion in the workplace. They will be on campus on September 23 and 24, and Human Resources will send out detailed information about the program in the near future. I encourage you to review this material carefully and consider how you might participate.

Let me conclude by stating that I am committed to increasing the diversity of our campus community. However, to be successful this must be a community effort. Many of us have a direct role in the recruitment of faculty, staff, and students; clearly, we can make a difference there. But every one of us has a role to play in creating a welcoming and supportive environment. I ask you all to join me in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Janet