President's Message on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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Abstract
Last spring I announced that we would take time this year to focus some of our thinking and conversation on the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion. There are many reasons for us to direct our efforts to this topic: the changing demographics in our society and the need to provide a welcoming environment to a diverse student body, faculty and staff; our responsibility to prepare students for living in diverse communities and working in diverse workplaces; and our desire to prepare citizens who will be sensitive to social injustices and motivated to right them. In addition, we cannot dismiss recent student survey results that indicate a general disappointment in the opportunities on campus to interact with diverse peers. [excerpt]

Keywords
Gettysburg College, diversity, Diversity Commission, race, minorities, handicap, disability, college, accessibility, equity, inclusion

Disciplines
Disability and Equity in Education | Education | Educational Sociology | Higher Education | Liberal Studies

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/dec2012.dot

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President's Message on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Janet Morgan Riggs

December 6, 2012

Dear members of the campus community,

Last spring I announced that we would take time this year to focus some of our thinking and conversation on the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion. There are many reasons for us to direct our efforts to this topic: the changing demographics in our society and the need to provide a welcoming environment to a diverse student body, faculty and staff; our responsibility to prepare students for living in diverse communities and working in diverse workplaces; and our desire to prepare citizens who will be sensitive to social injustices and motivated to right them. In addition, we cannot dismiss recent student survey results that indicate a general disappointment in the opportunities on campus to interact with diverse peers.

I want to thank those of you who have participated in the discussions over the last few months. President’s Council focused on this topic with an outside facilitator during a summer retreat, as did our Board of Trustees during their September meeting. I distributed a thought paper on diversity, equity, and inclusion to the campus community, which was followed by an October gathering of a group of administrative directors, department chairs, and program coordinators who spent a morning on this topic with a facilitator. Our Middle States Steering Committee, which has chosen diversity, equity, and inclusion as a theme for our institutional self-study, co-facilitated a discussion at a faculty meeting with the Diversity Commission, and asked community
members to answer a series of questions during a town hall meeting in November. And finally, there has been a great deal of conversation within various divisions of the College focused on this topic.

What do we have to show for all of this conversation? Where are we heading, and will all of this discussion make a difference for Gettysburg College?

The short answer is that these conversations are essential for our progress towards a more diverse and inclusive campus environment. They help to point out differences of opinion, areas of stress and strain, and places where improvement is needed. Minutes have been kept, the Middle States Steering Committee will be making recommendations in their self-study report, and I have charged the Diversity Commission to advise me on initiatives of highest priority. I expect that by early next fall we will have a draft set of goals and strategies to share with the campus that will provide guidance for our work in this area over the next few years.

However, we are not waiting complacently until that plan is fully formulated, and I am pleased with a variety of initiatives that have been underway this fall:

- We have become the home of the Consortium for Faculty Diversity.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion have been a focus of First Year Experience programming.
- The Johnson Center for Creative Teaching and Learning is sponsoring a series of programs focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- The Cornell CITE group returned to conduct a workshop on faculty recruitment and hiring.
- nGender and eRace continue to provide safe spaces for students to discuss how the issues of gender and race play out in their daily experiences.
- We have hired new advisers for ALLies and Hillel.
- The Chaplain’s Office is in the process of evolving into an Office of Religious and Spiritual Life.
- A gender neutral housing option for students has been implemented.
We continue to work more deliberately to recruit a more racially and ethnically diverse student body, faculty, and staff. As the semester comes to a close, I want to thank those of you who have participated in this work. And I ask you all for your continued engagement. One of the best ideas I heard at the faculty discussion meeting on diversity was that each academic department and program could engage in conversation about how to integrate a focus on diversity and inclusion in its hiring, curriculum review, and work with students. Activities like this might seem small in isolation, but when multiplied across the campus can help to achieve large-scale changes.

There have been many excellent ideas put forward for our consideration and action, and I expect there will be many more. While we cannot do everything that everyone has suggested to increase campus diversity and inclusion, there is much we can do to provide a more welcoming climate to a wide spectrum of individuals who are currently members of our community or whom we would like to attract to our community. I appreciate your thoughtful contributions and persistence as we work towards a plan that will help shape a more inclusive College community.

Thank you all.

Sincerely,

Janet

http://www.gettysburg.edu/about/offices/president/priorities-initiatives/diversity/dec2012.dot