Diversity Groups Advise Regents on Experience Needed by Next President

October 30, 2013

The following groups publish this open letter to the Regents and Presidential Search Advisory Committee in order to voice our concern that the next president must be experienced and successful in increasing diversity among students, faculty and staff. Our new president must also be accomplished in promoting a healthy climate that respects the contributions of every person, regardless of differences of race, gender, sex, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, veteran status, documentation status or other factors.

Association of Black Professional Administrators Faculty and Staff
Council for Disability Concerns
MLK Symposium Committee
President’s Advisory Commission on Women’s Issues
Professional Latinos at UM Alliance
UM LGBT Faculty Alliance
UM Library Diversity Council
University Diversity Council
Senate Assembly Committee for an Inclusive University
Women of Color in the Academy Project
Women of Color Task Force

Key recommendations we propose:

➢ **We believe the next U-M president must have vision and demonstrated success in increasing diversity among the student body, thereby broadening access to a Michigan education.** We are grateful for leaders at the University of Michigan who have fought for affirmative action dating back even before the 2003 Grutter v. Bollinger Supreme Court decision. Despite significant efforts made to increase the racial, ethnic and economic diversity of student enrollment since passage of the state-wide ballot measure prohibiting affirmative action, U-M student composition is now 74% white and a majority upper-income. Between 2005 and 2012, the percentage of under-represented minorities at U-M decreased from 12.1% to 9.7% among U.S. students.\(^1\) All our students are being shortchanged in their education by the limited intellectual and social engagement with people different from themselves. Furthermore, the University is not adequately fulfilling one of the key roles of American public education--increasing social mobility for working class people and people of color.

\(^1\) New and Continuing Undergraduate and Graduate Enrollment by Ethnicity, Gender and School/College—Ann Arbor, Fall 2005 and Fall 2012. University of Michigan Office of the Registrar. Figure of 74% represents U.S. citizens and permanent residents only.
We urge you to select someone with documented success in promoting appreciation and support for all people, regardless of race, gender, sex, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, veteran status, documentation status or other factors. In a 2006 report, Rackham Graduate School and the University’s ADVANCE program assessed the climate for doctoral students. Factors surveyed included students’ morale, overall climate of the department, graduate school experiences, advising and support, and career goals. The survey revealed that “in all areas women students report(ed) somewhat less positive experiences than d(id) men, and in some areas U.S. born students of color and international students of color report(ed) less positive experiences than (did) U.S. born white students.”

One of the report’s key recommendations was that graduate chairs, department chairs and faculty in general be sensitized to the different experiences and needs of female students and students of color. Since passage of the state’s anti-affirmative action measure, some people contend that the academic and social climate for faculty, staff and students of color has become more biased and disrespectful.

Meanwhile, the University struggles to attract and retain significant numbers of faculty of color, particularly women. Of all assistant professors hired by U-M between 1996 and 2006, 485 were white men, 269 were white women, 228 were men of color and 133 were women of color. The rate of tenure achievement for these respective groups was 65%, 62%, 61% and 57%. In exit interviews of faculty who voluntarily left U-M between 2009 and 2012, women faculty were more likely to cite poor climate as the most important factor in their decision to leave. Faculty of color also described improvements in morale and climate as needed more often than did white faculty. Data such as these impress upon us the importance of choosing a president who is experienced in promoting diversity, inclusion and equality in an academic setting.

We need a President who expects the best out of all community members, not just those interested in supporting diversity. Certainly universal training will never be sufficient to prevent all incidents of bias, intolerance and disrespect from occurring, but it will create the necessary foundation to fulfill our mission of “preeminence in creating, communicating, preserving and applying knowledge, art, and academic values, and in developing leaders and citizens who will challenge the present and enrich the future.” In terms of organizational culture, the University offers valuable programming designed to improve communication and understanding across race, gender, disability and other differences. We are grateful for training and dialogue opportunities offered through Intergroup Relations, ADVANCE, the Office of Institutional Equity, CRLT Players, SAPAC, and faculty mentor programs. We urge you to select someone with documented success in promoting appreciation and support for all people, regardless of race, gender, sex, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, age, veteran status, documentation status or other factors.

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2 Assessing the Climate for Doctoral Students at the University of Michigan. Executive Summary. The UM ADVANCE Project, Institute for Research on Women and Gender, March 2006.
3 Faculty Cohort Update, University of Michigan Office of Budget & Planning, July 10, 2013.
4 Exit Interview Study, University of Michigan ADVANCE Program, June 2013.
5 http://www.provost.umich.edu/welcome.html
6 The mission of the ADVANCE program is to help U-M departments make necessary institutional changes to support the needs of a diverse faculty in all fields. It does this through programs and resources designed to improve faculty recruitment, retention, climate and leadership.
7 The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) Players Theatre Program uses a diverse array of performance arts to spark dialogue among faculty, graduate students, and academic administrators on issues of multicultural teaching and learning and institutional climate.
and a number of diversity resource groups across campus. We are champions of these resources, yet we are frustrated that there is no expectation that all staff, faculty and students attend and learn from them.

- **We believe it is critical that all presidential candidates have documented experience in recognizing and addressing the serious problems of sexual assault and domestic violence that occur within a typical campus community like ours.** Fulfilling the University’s Title IX obligation to provide an environment free of sexual harassment and violence is fundamental to maintaining a safe and respectful climate for all.

- **To ensure that the next president shares U-M’s core values of academic excellence, diversity, and access, the process must include candidates who themselves bring a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, academic disciplines, and identities.** The process of choosing the next President is incredibly significant. We commend the Regents for selecting such a highly distinguished and diverse faculty committee to advise on the presidential search. However, we note that the committee has no faculty from the arts and only one exclusively from the humanities, and yet the arts are an explicit and important part of U-M’s mission. Another way to view diversity is through the fields of study on campus. These fields may not bring in funding the way some others do, but contribute to the celebration and promotion of diversity that we espouse and are integral to the holistic development of our students.

Some of our groups have already sent letters to the Presidential Search Advisory Committee and the Regents, arguing that successful promotion of diversity must be a clear strength of the next person chosen to be the University of Michigan’s 14th president. We encourage readers, whether as individuals or in groups, to share their views as well by emailing UMich.President@russellreynolds.com.

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8 Volunteer peer educators from the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) and University Health Service offer “Relationship Remix” workshops on relationships, sex, and decision making every fall semester for first-year students in the residence halls.