Overall, the efforts of the Geography Department to foster a more socially diverse student and faculty composition have emphasized bringing questions of power, difference, and identity to the core of our courses and our research. We have developed a curriculum, faculty, and a student body largely dedicated to uncovering the ways in which power imbalances are maintained through distinctions among ethnicities, genders, and sexualities – with socially segmented spaces (at the scales of the neighborhood, the workplace, the metropolitan area, the nation, and the globe) serving as important means for effecting those distinctions.

By integrating issues of power, social difference, and space into our curriculum, we have opened up the types of people we look for in our faculty searches and graduate-student recruitment. Undergraduates, as well, have responded to the curriculum, bringing us a welcome diversity in socio-economic backgrounds and nationalities. However, we have not yet attracted numbers of ethnically underrepresented native-born Americans proportionate to their UW numbers.

Student Access and Opportunities

Our undergraduate major is a very open major, with no minimum GPA or prerequisite courses for entry. We have done this to increase access to the program by all UW students. The Department Chair and Student Services Director have met with the University’s central advisors and the advising team at the Office of Minority Affairs to explain our courses, program, and opportunities.

Our major student recruitment efforts focus on our graduate programs. It is for these programs that we actively recruit applicants, carefully screen applicants for admission, and actively recruit admitted students in the context of great competition among the top graduate programs in North America.

Our departmental application asks students to explain how they would contribute to the diversity of our graduate student body. The text reads: “We actively seek diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and cultural experiences in our graduate program. To help us achieve this diversity, it would help us if, on this form as well as in your personal statement, you could identify any factors in your life which you feel will help broaden our graduate program. These may include: economic and educational disadvantages, cultural awareness, overcoming personal adversity, and leadership awards and potential.” Applicants interpret this statement in many ways. In some cases they simply speak to their ethnicity (including minority applicants), but
many of these statements identify other attributes (e.g., single parenting, experience in poverty, first-generation college graduate) that make our admission committee carefully consider the applicant due to the kinds of circumstances described.

However, we face one very large and one minor difficulty in recruiting graduate students from underrepresented minority groups. The first is the **very small number of such students who seek graduate degrees in Geography**. Geography departments are found largely in public universities in the U.S., and the largest programs are in the northeast, Midwest, and Southwest (including California). Only one HBCU, and no Native American institution, has a free-standing Geography department or program. At most colleges and universities, minority undergraduates interested in issues of social justice find their way into Sociology, Political Science, or History. Of course, most academically successful students in those fields then pursue professional degrees in Law or Public Administration/Affairs. It’s difficult for the others to find human geography. Our faculty and advisors work with our own academically minded majors to help them apply competitively for graduate programs, including our own – but these numbers are very small.¹

The second difficulty is the **tremendous competition among graduate programs for academically successful students from underrepresented minority groups.** This is literally secondary to having such students in our applicant pool. In addition, we have grown accustomed to relying on the strength of our faculty and program and the degree of personal attention from faculty in the recruitment process, for successful recruitment. Additional recruitment resources would definitely help us, but we will not scapegoat the opportunities that other institutions can offer.

**Student Development and Retention**

**Undergraduate.** As a medium-small department with just over 200 undergraduate majors, we are able to offer fairly **personalized attention to our students.** We have one full-time Student Services Director (Dr. Rick Roth) and a half-time assistant. We have established a norm of faculty attention to and time with students.²

However, given the context of a very large, non-residential university, students can escape attention, especially if their circumstances or fears keep them from participating. While **many** of our undergraduate students are “non-traditional” in some sense (working full-time, long past high school, or raising children), a **higher proportion of our (very few) American minority students have faced the difficulties of full-time work, full-time athletics, or unusually severe financial straits.** These difficulties reduce their abilities to focus on course work, or to join in informal student communities.

In those years when undergraduate students form a ASUW-affiliated organization, this can be a powerful tool for integrating students into leadership roles. The last two years that we had an

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¹ Professor Vicky Lawson is working with Geography faculty at other universities to develop a proposal for summer workshops for minority college students from across the country, to increase their awareness of graduate-study opportunities in geography.

² For example, the UW’s 2004 Marshall Scholar is a Geography student from an underprivileged background in Yakima. She has a paid assistantship to work with two Geography professors on their joint research; research which feeds her own passion for social justice and the interests of women.
active Undergraduate Geography Association (2000-02), African Americans and Asian Americans had leadership roles. The Department Chair, Undergraduate Program Coordinator, and Student Services Director have hosted meetings (with food!) for majors in 2002 and 2003, among other reasons, to encourage students to form an organization – to no avail, so far.

Graduate. To help with retention and academic progress, we immediately assign to each incoming student a faculty mentor to help her/him connect substantively with the department and the university. We also require two first-quarter courses. (1) In “Tutorial For Graduate Students,” each department faculty member outlines his/her research interests and courses offered, and the students gain experience in articulating their own research interests (orally and in writing). The Department chair leads each of the weekly sessions, thereby learning more about each new student and manifesting the Department-wide interest in their success. (2) In “History of Geographic Thought,” all first-year students get an immersion in the theoretical and methodological debates of the discipline, so that regardless of their preparation and disciplinary backgrounds, they become grounded in graduate-level study in this discipline. These two courses build a sense of cohort among all new graduate students; most shy students and students from backgrounds that do not encourage group work gain an ability to see the other students as colleagues.

During students' first 4-6 months in the program, their faculty mentors help them refine their emerging scholarly interests, choose appropriate courses to take both within and outside the department, and work with them to identify an appropriate supervisor and form either a Master’s or Ph.D. committee. We also have all new students participate in the departmental colloquium, after which there is socializing both within the department and frequently in less formal settings off campus. These various activities work well for all students, including minority and underrepresented students, and help create a spirit of camaraderie among all of our graduate students.

Engagement with the External Community
Department faculty members (Harrington, Mitchell, Sparke) have participated in meet-the-student forums, geared toward minority students, at local middle and high schools: small steps to break down the barriers between minority communities and the UW. Dr. Brown is working collaboratively with the Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Project, bringing geographic perspectives to this grassroots activity. Three of our current graduate students are working with the African American Scholars Program at Garfield High School, encouraging these high-school students to research the historic settlement patterns of African Americans in Seattle, and use Geographic Information Systems software to map these demographic trends.

Staff and Administrative Diversity
Chief among our efforts at creating and maintaining a diverse staff are exhaustive searches. In the past three years, three of our five full-time staff positions have opened and undergone searches. We have one woman and two men in our professional staff.

Faculty Diversity
We currently have 18 full-time members of faculty: 1 Lecturer; 1 Research Assistant Professor; 7 Associate Professors; and 9 Professors. Faculty of Asian and African descent (as well as Native American) are more underrepresented in U.S. geography in most social-science disciplines. Two of our faculty are openly gay, one of whose research includes geographic contributions to queer theory.

In the past seven years, we have requested and received help from the Provost to recruit our African-American Professor, and have taken advantage of special hiring opportunities within the Social Sciences division to recruit three white faculty members who have greatly strengthened the depth of our curriculum’s ability to grapple with issues of difference and power (via courses on the immigrant experience, women in the workforce, feminist theory, politics of sexuality, and social difference in the city).

We currently have no retention efforts focused specifically on maintaining what social diversity we have. Our efforts center on creating an atmosphere of collegiality and support, through formal and informal mentoring, regular meetings with the Department chair, and attempts to recognize and celebrate individual and collective achievements.

Curriculum and Research

Curriculum. We offer a range of complementary courses which examine many aspects of social diversity. We focus on the processes that lead to unequal power and access to resources, always intertwining difference, the power to name difference, the power to exclude, and the roles that space and geographic access play in maintaining social and power differences. Our different courses make use of the concept of access at different geographic scales (global, regional, local, and even interpersonal), and using very different tools (geographic information systems, statistical analysis, social theory, personal narrative, close reading of texts, among others). These key concepts of access and scale are closely linked to other key concepts woven through our curriculum: citizenship, movement, sustainability, globalization, and representation. For current human geographers, awareness of who is representing characteristics and relationships is an important key to understanding how the representation is generated (whether through cartography, place-based statistics, or geographic narrative).

In an attempt to increase the awareness of “course-shoppers” that these relationships can be explored in our courses – and thereby to attract more and more diverse students – we have developed, re-designed, and renamed courses. A sampling of our courses, whose titles provide some representation of these relationships among difference, power, access, and scale:

100-level
- Introduction to Globalization
- Freshman Seminar on Citizenship, Education, and Identity

200-level
- Geography of the World Economy: Regional Fortunes and the Rise of Global Markets
- Geographic Perspectives on Minorities in the United States
- Urbanization and Development: Geographies of Global Inequality

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\(^3\) two of whom are joint positions with other units.
Geographic Perspectives on U.S. Population Diversity
Consumption, Nature, and Globalization

300-level
- Immigrant America: Trends and Policies from a Geographic Perspective
- Geography of Inequality
- Migration in the Global Economy
- World Hunger and Resource Development
- Urban Political Geography
- Policing the City
- Geographical Patterns of Health and Disease

400-level
- Culture, Capital, and the City
- Contemporary Development Issues in Latin America
- Geography and Gender
- Southeast Asia: Conflict and Development
- Industrialization and Urbanization in China
- Cities of East Asia: Geography and Development
- Gender, Race, and the Geography of Employment
- Population Distribution and Migration
- Urban Geographic Information Systems
- Ecoscapes: Nature, Culture, and Place
- Geography and the Law
- Women and the City
- Race, Ethnicity, and the American City

Research. Most faculty and graduate-student research in the Department is motivated by concerns for power, difference, and identity, and is conducted by investigating the ways in which these distinctions interact and are maintained across places, via the control of space, and through interactions of processes (e.g., development, migration, trade, transportation) at multiple scales (local, across regions, among nations. Examples include:

- Social and institutional influences on who dies in hospitals, at home, and under hospice care, and the influences of that on care-giving;
- Roles of household composition (e.g., bi- or multi-ethnic status) on residential location and neighborhood (de)segregation;
- Institutional, geographic, and family-status influences on how women deal with work and home demands;
- Gender and ethnic differences in the training and employment histories of highly skilled technical professionals;
- Institutional influences on the success of different models of policing, as a key form of the control of physical space in the city to welcome certain groups and norms and to exclude others;
- Interaction among local economic and social change and the construction of “whiteness”;
- Geographic interactions among socioeconomic change, climate change, and contagious disease.
• Ways in which public education practice and philosophies attempt to instill national identities in immigrant or trans-migrant children;
• Designing systems for broad public participation in government decisions;
• Ways in which the language of “globalization” is deployed to affect social distribution of power, at local, national, and international scales;
• Influences of gender roles on the negotiation of interregional migration and residential location.

Climate
Our very small numbers of nonwhite students pose a problem for some of those we do have, especially African-American students in our undergraduate and graduate programs. The presence of more visible minorities among the faculty and students would improve the climate, both in terms of “comfort level” and in terms of allowing students and faculty to learn firsthand about difference by noting their reactions to differences in the classroom. Neither our Asian nor African-American tenured faculty members feel any race-based climate problems, though they both agree that the Department and the discipline has come a long way in the past 25 years. One of our openly gay colleagues has experienced homophobic statements and complaints on the anonymous “yellow sheets” from students that are a part of the instructional assessment process, in his very large 100-level class.

Other Issues and Needs
Among the suggestions we have for the University community:
• Allow or encourage faculty to interact with undergraduate admissions officers in the recruitment (and perhaps even in the admissions) of students from diverse backgrounds.
• Encourage faculty to meet and work together to develop strong arguments regarding the value of a social diversity in higher education, though symposia, workshops, and non-academically oriented publications. These arguments should include the relevance of anti-racist efforts and systems in resolving global conflicts; the possibility that close interaction with diverse students and faculty brings for students’ deeper self-understanding and awareness of power differentials; the importance of increasing the breadth of Washington State citizens who recognized their stake in the University. Encouragement could include small grants for preparation of research-based articles for non-academic readers.
• Improve the ability and motivation of departmental leadership to hear and act on the concerns of minority faculty and students. (One simple step would be for support services such as those offered through OMA to become even more visible and well-known by chairs and other faculty). In this realm as in others, department leaders (chairs, faculty program coordinators, senior faculty overall, and professional advisors) are the most potent forces for change or for the status quo.

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4 From our past conversations. I do not think that our Research Assistant Professor has felt such problems, either (though she was unavailable as I was preparing this report).