

On November 3, 1998, voters in Washington State passed Initiative 200, which prohibits preferential treatment based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in public employment, education, and contracting. This document outlines a three-pronged approach to help maintain the diversity of the University of Washington's student population.

Maintaining Diversity at the University of Washington After Initiative 200

Since the late 1960s, the University of Washington has been actively committed to educating a diverse student body. At the root of this commitment are two fundamental premises. First, the education of all our students is enhanced in a diverse learning environment. If students come to a campus that includes people who are different from themselves—people from different backgrounds and experiences, with different values and reasons for being here—then all the students benefit. Each of these students brings to the learning environment understandings and perspectives born of who she is and where he comes from. Everyone gets a better education.

The second fundamental reason for our commitment to diversity is that the opportunity for a UW education should be available to all members of our community. Education opens pathways to success, to future possibilities and to fulfilling one's potential. Access to education is the hallmark of American society and the means by which individuals better themselves and improve their quality of life.

The University has taken a three-pronged approach to maintaining the diversity of our student population. Admissions criteria, outreach and recruitment efforts, and student financial aid are the key elements. The following discussion describes what the UW is doing to maximize each of these elements in the service of diversity.

Admissions

For thirty years UW admissions decisions have taken race and ethnicity into account. In the fall 1998 freshman class, about two-thirds of the class—those with the strongest academic records—gained entry on the basis of grades and test scores alone. The remaining third was reviewed and admitted on the basis of several additional factors, of which race or ethnicity was one.

Under Initiative 200, the University can no longer diversify its student body by using race or ethnicity as a “plus-factor” in admissions decisions. Since the initiative passed, University faculty and administrators have developed a new set of admissions criteria aimed at trying to ensure that the University can continue to attract a diverse student population. About two-thirds of the entering freshman class will continue to be admitted using grades and test scores alone. The remaining third will be reviewed in a supplemental process that takes into account both academic considerations and personal factors. These personal factors include economic and educational disadvantage, cultural awareness, overcoming personal adversity, a school adversity factor, and leadership awards and achievement. The success of this process will be carefully monitored and reworked in the years ahead to promote the diversity of the student body.

The early signs, however, are not good. At this writing, the number of undergraduate minority

students who applied to, were admitted to, and intend to enroll in the Fall 1999 freshman class has declined substantially from previous years. Expected enrollment by African American students in the freshman class is down 40 percent (from 124 to 74); American Indian students are down 20 percent (from 56 to 45); and Hispanic/Latino students are down 30 percent (from 205 to 143). Asian American students planning to enroll increased six percent (from 1,108 to 1,176). These reductions dramatically underscore the need for aggressive and intensive activities of outreach and recruitment.

Outreach and Recruitment

Expanding the pool of qualified minority applicants is of the utmost importance if the University is to maintain diversity and access. Sponsors of Initiative 200 assured the public that it was not their intent to prohibit recruitment and outreach activities intended to enlarge that pool. The University already has an extensive program of outreach and recruitment, and we will be increasing those efforts by reaching out to community colleges, high schools, middle schools, and in some cases elementary schools. These programs will involve not only University staff and faculty, but also students, alumni and members of the local communities. The goal will be to help minority young men and women believe they can go to college and encourage them to prepare to do so. This will require a team effort on the part of the University, K-12 teachers, counselors and parents, and interested community members. Only through such a comprehensive outreach effort can we succeed in increasing the number of minority students at the University.

The UW has been seeking creative and intensified approaches to outreach and recruitment. We have identified a variety of new activities that we plan to implement, including more direct-mail recruiting, placing college admissions counselors in targeted high schools, increasing high school visits by current and former UW students, using the World Wide Web for strategic outreach efforts, and developing overnight residential programs for potential UW recruits. Moreover, students at the University have been hard at work devising their own recruitment initiatives in the schools, and the administration is collaborating with the students in support of their outreach efforts.

The UW has also conceived a number of initiatives aimed at broadening the pool of underrepresented minorities who are encouraged to take college preparatory work and assisted in their academic preparation for college. These efforts include expanding the Early Scholars Outreach program, which provides academic support for students at a number of Seattle and Renton middle schools, expanding a high school mentor program, developing summer residential programs on campus, increasing outreach to key middle schools, and applying to participate in a newly established federal government program, GEAR-UP, which would permit more UW outreach efforts to middle schools in the Yakima Valley. All of these initiatives require additional funding, which the University will seek from both public and private sources.

New efforts are also being made to attract and recruit graduate and professional students to the University. Partnerships with "feeder" colleges and universities, intensified recruiting in states from which the UW has attracted significant numbers of minority graduate students, and working with the Office of Minority Affairs to identify promising UW undergraduates are among the strategies

that will be used to maintain diversity at the graduate and professional level.

Scholarships

One major impediment to attending college is the financial burden. There are a variety of sources available for those with financial need, but in many cases the cost of attendance remains an insurmountable obstacle. It is the University's intent to try to remove this as a factor in students' decisions whether to seek college degrees.

In the past, the University has accepted scholarships targeted to minority students according to the donors' wishes. We will continue to administer such funds so that the desires of the donors are honored and the scholarship funds go to qualified minority students. The University will actively seek new contributions from private donors who wish to target their gifts toward enhancing the University's diversity. In a new, innovative scholarship plan, adopted by the Board of Regents at its March 1999 meeting, the UW provides a menu of options for awarding scholarships to minority students. These include matching students who qualify for scholarship support with scholarships specifying racial or ethnic criteria.

All of these efforts are aimed at increasing the number of minority students attending the UW. Once students are here, many of them find they need support and guidance to enhance their ability to excel and graduate. The UW's Educational Opportunity Program, formerly a recruitment, admissions and support program, has been redefined to focus on expansive recruitment and comprehensive academic support for students through such services as help with study skills, tutoring, and personal and academic advising.

Dealing with the immediate effects of Initiative 200 has been a difficult and painful endeavor for the University of Washington community. Making sense of the new law, rethinking our admissions criteria, evaluating current programs in light of the new law and looking ahead creatively and boldly to future challenges have required discipline, critical thinking, and innovative approaches. Our experience so far has convinced us that the struggle to maintain the diversity of the University will require constant vigilance and a strong commitment for years to come.

Committee on Diversity

For that reason, in January 1999 President Richard L. McCormick appointed a broad-based Committee on Diversity, chaired by Vice President for Student Affairs Ernest R. Morris. President McCormick has asked this committee to examine what the University must do in the long term to enhance its 30-year commitment to access and diversity, to get beyond the immediate pressure of responding to Initiative 200, and to think creatively about how this University can ensure that all of its students benefit from a rich, multicultural learning environment in the 21st century. Remaining a diverse institution is essential to the UW's educational excellence and to the health and well-being of our society. We are determined to do so.