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Diversity report shows Purdue's strengths, room for growth

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. – Purdue initiatives to increase diversity have made progress in areas such as hiring contractors and new faculty, and plans are in place to continue enhancing diversity universitywide, according to a report presented today (Friday, April 8) to the board of trustees.

"Diversity is a university priority, and each year we measure our progress toward these goals," said Purdue President Martin C. Jischke. "We are doing well in some areas, but still have more work to do."

The report contains demographic information as well as specific programs designed to accelerate progress at each Purdue campus. Data presented included figures in some areas as recently as Feb. 28.

Provost Sally Mason presented an update on the legal environment and diversity in curricula, faculty and students. She told trustees that since 2001 more than half of the new faculty hired were women or minorities, with a high of 62 percent in 2003-04.

"So far this academic year, 57 percent of our new faculty hires have been women or minorities," Mason said. "We have now been at or above 50 percent for four straight years.

"A large number of faculty are due to retire in the coming years, and we are in the enviable position of adding 300 new faculty positions through our strategic plan. We can change the face of our university by focusing on diversity in these new hires."

Promotion rates for minorities who were nominated reached 100 percent in 2003-04, up 12 percent from the prior year. Mason cited increased attention to mentorship and guidance for faculty development as forces for this improvement, as well as a new measure approved by the University Senate that gives tenured associate professors a chance to participate in the promotion process.

"This broadens participation in the promotion process," she said. "Having young faculty, many from emerging specialties or doing interdisciplinary work, represented on
our promotion and tenure committees also changes attitudes about the types of work that are considered of value."

Mason said Purdue also has been successful at increasing the number of minority graduate students, which increased 1.8 percent this year over 2003-04. The record enrollment this year of 628 domestic minority graduate students was accomplished by aggressively recruiting qualified minority graduate students, particularly for science and engineering disciplines, Mason said.

Ongoing undergraduate recruitment initiatives include scholarship programs for Indiana students, such as the 21st Century Scholars program and the Purdue Opportunity Awards program. Purdue's Science Bound program mentors and encourages underrepresented students in eighth grade to 12th grade in Indianapolis Public Schools. Participants take classes in preparation for future careers in science, engineering, technology and math-science education and are eligible to receive scholarships to Purdue.

A survey questioning new undergraduate students' attitudes about diversity showed that while 75 percent agree that racial discrimination is a major problem in the United States, only 22.7 percent of the students believed promoting racial understanding is important.

"This is below the national average, and we believe it reflects a lack of diversity in many Indiana communities," Mason said. "It shows the importance of diversity in the Purdue education these students will receive. It's our job to make sure that when they leave here, they have 100 percent exposure."

According to the report, hiring of architectural and engineering firms owned by women and other minorities showed the most improvement, jumping more than 12 points to 28.6 percent in the first six months of this fiscal year. Construction contracts to firms owned by women and other minorities increased to 17.8 percent this year from 2.4 percent in 2003.

Morgan Olsen, executive vice president and treasurer, said this increase is the result of efforts to seek out and encourage underrepresented groups to bid and take part in final-stage interviews.

"Purdue has worked long and hard to identify and qualify construction firms and suppliers owned by these groups that are willing and able to do the work," Olsen said. "It's our hope that as we continue to locate these firms, we can encourage the networking that is so essential to success and discover other opportunities for future relationships."

Efforts to enhance participation from these minority groups have involved participation in the Indiana
Construction Roundtable's Diversity in Construction forum and the Indiana Minority Opportunities Fair.

Beginning in February, Jesse Moore Jr. became the university's first manager of supplier diversity development. Moore leads Purdue's statewide initiative to build and increase working relationships with minority and women-owned businesses.

"We are showing a 7.5 percent share of supplies and services expenditures with firms owned by women and other minorities so far this fiscal year, compared with 4 percent in 2002," Olsen said. "With the addition of a supplier diversity development manager, this program can be a powerful force that will spill over to other areas of procurement in the long run."

A supplier diversity strategic plan will be developed to include enhanced communications and marketing efforts with unsuccessful bidders to help them with future bids.

Another way officials have begun to target diversity on campus involves the staff hiring process.

Alysa Rollock, vice president for human relations, presented data on staff demographics and campus climate. At 8.6 percent, the estimated total minority staff at Purdue was low compared to the 14.2 percent overall total minority population for the state of Indiana, but Rollock said revisions are being made to review hiring processes to improve that figure.

"We constantly develop, disseminate and review recruiting resources that will help us attract underrepresented populations," Rollock said. "We created a staff recruitment and selection procedures manual as well as a training session to show various schools how to use it. Our focus is on bringing the best candidates nationwide to Purdue for all executive, administrative and managerial positions."

An associate director of equal opportunity/diversity at Purdue Calumet and an assistant director for equity in hiring are new positions in place designed to enhance staff diversity, Rollock said.

Another area introduced in the diversity report is Intercollegiate Athletics. The number of women participating in athletics has increased almost 14 percentage points since 1993. There also was a 3 percentage point increase in female coaches over the last three years.

"Athletics at Purdue strives to hire staff that can help students achieve or exceed in all aspects of the college experience," said Morgan Burke, director of Intercollegiate Athletics.

There is minority representation in 14 of 18 sports at
Purdue, and 90 percent of the minorities in the department are involved in eight sports, Burke said.

Athletics' annual three-year plan includes an African-American new-student orientation, efforts to increase minority presence in game management positions and a diversity training session for staff. Athletics will participate with the entire university in the 2005 Indiana Black Expo, which will take place July 7-17 in the Indiana Convention Center and RCA Dome in Indianapolis.

Jischke said, "We are moving forward. We have set a course for success, and the wind is at our back. We continue to look for new initiatives to improve what we are doing."

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