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FACULTY

A 'Devastating Account' of Diversity at Yale

By Beth McMurtrie | MAY 25, 2016

Yale University has failed repeatedly to execute ambitious plans to diversify its faculty, praised inclusion while enabling a climate hostile to many female and minority professors and graduate students, and experienced a "lost decade" where budget tightening eroded earlier gains in diversifying the professoriate.

Those are the findings of an unsparring report released on Tuesday by the Senate of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Written by an ad hoc committee formed in January, the "Report on Faculty Diversity and Inclusivity in FAS" notes signs of progress since Yale began its first formal effort to recruit faculty members from diverse backgrounds, in 1972. Women, for example, are better represented across departments than they once were. And the university made significant advances in hiring women and minority professors from 1999 to 2007.

But in reviewing dozens of plans formulated over the decades, and drilling down into hiring and promotion data within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, committee members were struck by the sense of being locked into a perpetual loop: Form a committee in reaction to a crisis, pledge to diversify the faculty, and then fail to follow through with action and resources needed to sustain progress.

"This is a devastating account of where Yale has been and where it is," Kathryn Lofton, a professor of religious studies and deputy dean for diversity and faculty development in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, wrote in an email. "It will determine how we organize to get somewhere better. We have no other option but to improve."

The report points to four broad factors that fueled Yale's mixed record: inconsistent university leadership, a lack of accountability and monitoring of diversity efforts, insufficient financial resources, and a lack of training for

Who Sets a College's Diversity Agenda?



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chairs and search committees.



David Milne

Emily Greenwood, a classics professor and chair of a faculty committee on diversity at Yale: "Until as a community we talk about these things in the open and embrace them, we're going to keep on shelving and locking these reports in drawers."

Emily Greenwood, a professor of classics and chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Diversity and Inclusivity, said the FAS Senate had felt it was important to lay bare what it saw as Yale's unsteady commitment to diversity.

"Until as a community we talk about these things in the open and embrace them, we're going to keep on shelving and locking these reports in drawers, paying lip service but not making any deeper structural changes," she said.

The Senate undertook the review, she said, in response to student antiracism protests that shook the campus this past academic year. Among other things, students pushed unsuccessfully to have the name of a supporter of slavery removed from a residential college.

Last fall the administration unveiled a plan to foster diversity and inclusion across the campus, including a \$50-

million faculty-diversity initiative. Ms. Greenwood said that if Yale truly wanted to become a leader in this area, it must examine its past efforts and current climate as a necessary step toward progress.

The Senate's executive committee will discuss the report on Wednesday in a regularly scheduled meeting with Yale's president and provost, along with the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Already the report has had a powerful effect among professors. "I know some directors of graduate studies who have really experienced crises of conscience," said Ms. Greenwood.

'Scattershot' Policies

The committee sought new information on several fronts: It looked back on more than four decades of diversity initiatives to see how they had fared, examined data on the hiring and promotion of women and minorities, and surveyed faculty members and graduate students in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, which has about 650 full-time faculty members.

In studying hiring and promotion data, the committee found slow progress, although one period stood apart from the others: 1999 to 2007. During that time, the report notes, Richard C. Levin, who was then president, made faculty diversity a priority, laid out concrete goals,

and provided open-ended resources. As a result, hiring of women and minorities rose significantly.

But cutbacks following the recession of 2008 undermined many of those gains. The proportion of new assistant professors coming from underrepresented minority groups, for example, dropped from 14 percent during 2000-04 to 7 percent during 2010-15, although the report notes that changes in self-reporting on race and ethnicity may have undercounted the number of minority faculty members since 2012. Diversity policies in recent years have also been more "scattershot," the report states, with committees forming and disbanding.

Retention has also been hugely problematic. By 2012, for example, only 22 of 56 recently hired minority faculty members remained, as did 18 of 30 women.

"Rather than overt ill will," the report states, "we see an accumulated pattern of thousands of small decisions at all levels — decisions that persistently, if largely unconsciously, have cast the diversity of the faculty as a lower priority in times of strict budget austerity."

In surveys, about one-third of faculty members said that they were dissatisfied with the climate in their departments and that their departments had fared worse in diversity than those at peer institutions. Only 14 percent said their department reflected the diversity of the student body, and only 19 percent said their department had a diversity plan. Lack of mentorship and heavy service burdens on women and minority professors were also cited as problems.

Women and black, Latino, and Asian or Asian-American faculty members expressed the highest levels of dissatisfaction. For example, more than half of women in the sciences and social sciences were unhappy with their departmental climate, compared with 15 and 25 percent of men in each division, respectively. Women reported observing promotion and tenure practices that they thought unfair, as well as an exclusionary work environment. Similarly, more than half of faculty members in underrepresented groups said they often or always felt excluded from informal networks, had to work harder to be seen as legitimate scholars, and had more service responsibilities.

"It is striking that the vast majority of male faculty perceived lack of diversity to be 'not at all' a problem or an occasional problem" in culture, reputation, and capacity, the report notes.

'Daily and Unrelenting Discouragement'

Minority graduate students painted a particularly bleak picture of Yale as a place in which their academic interests are marginalized and where few professors seem to care while many others are indifferent or overtly hostile. They described "clumsy and disingenuous" recruiting efforts; fear of losing caring professors, who tend to be junior faculty members; and devaluation of work on race, ethnicity, and gender.

"Students interviewed from underrepresented groups experience Yale's lack of faculty diversity as a kind of daily and unrelenting discouragement," the reports states. "You can enter the system as a student, but don't expect a future as a professor."

One overriding theme of the report is that departments, rather than the campus at large, are more likely to shape a faculty member's experience, and that some do much better than others in fostering a supportive and open environment. Ms. Greenwood said she hopes that department chairs take that message to heart and begin the hard work of talking about diversity and inclusion with their members.

Daryl G. Smith, a professor emerita of education and psychology at Claremont Graduate University and an expert on diversity issues in higher education, said the report's findings are consistent with what she sees across higher education.

"One of the things that this points out is that many institutions aren't very data-driven on their own data. If you don't track these things, you don't know what you've done, you wait 10 years and go, 'Oh dear,'" she said. Every college, she said, should collect hiring and retention data down to the departmental level, and hold people accountable for a lack of progress. "The reality is it requires great attentiveness, and because hiring is so decentralized, it requires attentiveness at many levels."

The report makes 19 recommendations, including setting numerical goals for hiring; articulating the intellectual value of diversity; approaching the challenge holistically to include improving the campus climate, recruitment, and retention strategies; creating an accountability system to monitor progress; rewarding people for the extra service burdens that are often placed upon women and minorities; improving faculty and graduate-student mentoring; and creating postdoctoral fellowships to increase the number of women and minority scholars in certain fields.

The report also singles out for criticism the execution of an effort begun last fall, when Yale announced a \$25-million, universitywide program to provide matching funds for departments seeking to diversify their faculties. The committee described the process for applying for and allocating money "inscrutable" and called for greater clarity so that departments can begin using the money effectively.

In a written statement, Tamar Gendler, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, said she appreciated the faculty's interest in making Yale a "welcoming and supportive place for faculty and students of all backgrounds." The administration's diversity and inclusion initiative announced last fall "focuses on a multifaceted set of issues, including eliminating hidden bias in hiring and retention; improving mentoring programs; and encouraging undergraduate and graduate students to pursue Ph.D. studies so that the pipeline of faculty across the disciplines will more accurately represent the diversity of our community."

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