

[ca. 1974?]

An Open Letter Concerning Affirmative Action

I want to clarify several misapprehensions about the College's Affirmative Action Program.

1. We do not have to have such a program because we have interest subsidy grant for the VAPA; we have to have it, in the first place, because of the government funds we receive and hope to continue to receive in the form of student assistance and work study grants, as well as funds from such agencies as NSF. The interest subsidy grant simply made us noticeable, we were suddenly government contractors on a larger scale, and therefore we had to prepare our Plan now rather than six months or a year from now.
2. At the first faculty meeting I explained that the main item on the agenda for October would be the College's Affirmative Action Plan. Because the procedural part of the Plan is outlined by law, and in truth strikes me as a means by which we could put our own recruitment processes in better order, I suggested in September that I would describe the drafted proposal and hoped that the discussion would focus on the business of goals and timetables.
3. I have never said that the College recently appointed its first black faculty member.
4. I have never said that the trustees preferred a male president in 1972 but may have given that impression on occasion when I tried to illustrate the problem of language (he versus s/he etc.) with reference to trustee discussions.
5. I clearly should have asked Ann Schlabach about the existence of women deans. I imagine that I was originally misinformed because I had not put the historical question properly and was therefore answered in terms of deans as the College has defined them more recently.
6. I have tried to explain the Affirmative Action Program, without suggesting that it will usher in the millenium. Certainly I do not believe this to be the case. Insofar as I understand the law, the College is bound not to discriminate; we cannot discriminate against white males any more than we can discriminate against black women. In the case of faculty hiring, we must be sure that we actively recruit a diverse group of candidates because it is only in this way that we can have any hope of increasing the number of women and minorities on the faculty. I would not recommend to the trustees the hiring of any new faculty member whom I did not believe to be truly first-rate; and I would never truckle to a federal agency in this matter. I would certainly hope that both faculty and students share this conviction and regard it as consonant with all that Bennington has stood for in the past.

At the same time to find it abhorrent to long-range goals for the College community which simply reflect 1970 statistics of professional availability. This, as I tried to suggest at the September faculty meeting and again at the October meeting is a genuinely debatable point. Nevertheless, to set goals is not to set quotas -- at least the two words do not collapse into one in my mind, and to say that this College would do well to try each year to increase the proportion of women and minority faculty members does not strike me as inherently political or vilely tendentious. In truth, these terms seem to me to apply particularly to those affirmative action plans which simply confirm the status quo.

Gail Thain Parker

h

the faculty
the community of professionals and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community

the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community

the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community

the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community

the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community
the faculty of the college community and the college community

h