



# LAST|WORD

BY EULAS BOYD

## Placing Diversity at the Core Of Institutional Excellence

In its Oct. 23, 2003, publication, *Black Issues In Higher Education* identified the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) as one of a group of universities that have made progress in recruiting and retaining ethnically diverse faculty. As gratifying as that recognition is, it speaks to only part of our intended mission. To be fully successful, the hiring and retention of a diverse faculty must be part of a broader institutional strategy.

RIT's institutional strategy incorporates moving from a good to a greater university. Within this context, one of the pillars of a great university is having a diverse and successful group of students, faculty, staff and trustees. So when asked, "why the push for diversity?" the response is "to embrace institutional excellence."

If we take a closer look, we find that RIT's success in faculty recruitment was preceded by an institutional strategic plan that created enhanced diversity of the board of trustees and student body. Implementing the strategic plan raised the issue of diversity on the board of trustee committee level and strengthened the President's Commission for Promoting Pluralism. The commission promotes appreciation of diverse individuals in spite of differences in race, gender, education, age, national origin, sexual preference, language use, physical ability, health and many other characteristics. It also created the Office of the Assistant Provost for Diversity, the faculty recruitment manager and the North Star Center for Academic Success and Cultural Affairs (NSC). NSC combines the resources of academic and student affairs into a single center to meet the needs of African American, American Indian and Latino American students. Furthermore, RIT moved to build alliances with National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (NACME), Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE),

Urban League, Puerto Rican Youth Development (PRYD), Ibero-American Action League, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and local school districts as part of its drive toward institutional excellence.

There is no progress without struggle. Progress for us is not simply the number of faculty we hire, but the success of our students. In moving toward this end we, like many other institutions, have much work to do. The diversity of the faculty is a key element, but not the only one. At the heart of the mission is the education and graduation of increasing numbers of students of African American, Latino American and American Indian heritage. A diverse faculty has an important role to play in this mission, but they are not solely responsible for the success of these students. Yet, their presence and involvement in the process of higher education is what students and many educators have called for, for decades.

The realities of faculty of color on college campuses have created opportunities for institutional change that have benefited all. Can we leave existing institutional arrangements in place without re-examination? Many of the changes necessary for faculty and students of color to have a reasonable chance of success are often the same changes needed by others who are new to academia. As American higher education adjusts to the 21st century, let us not forget the real lessons of the 20th century. One of those lessons is that the imperative for faculty of color comes from students of color and their success. As we look forward, increasingly students of color will be the pool from which higher education will draw. ■

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