Report from the Diversity Action Taskforce
Spring 2008

The Diversity Action Taskforce was created to provide recommendations to the incoming dean on the diversification of our faculty and staff population as well as on the fostering of a welcoming, comfortable climate for all populations (see Appendix A, “Description” and Appendix B, “Letter Before Week 1”). Membership on the DAT included six faculty members, each of whom was a current member of an elected SLA committee, two staff members who have also been or currently are Tulane University students, and three ex officio administrators, including Deborah Love, who offered her expertise to the taskforce:

- George Bernstein, History (Dean)
- Linda Cantero, Executive Secretary, recent graduate student
- Shellond Chester, Budget Analyst, Senior Administrator, Tulane M.B.A; adjunct instructor
- Barbara Hayley, Theatre and Dance (Promotion and Tenure Committee)
- Dennis Kehoe, Classical Studies (Executive Committee)
- Deborah Love, VP, OIE and Diversity Initiatives
- Anne McCall, French and Italian (Associate Dean)
- Marilyn Miller, Spanish and Portuguese (Graduate Studies/Council)
- Felipe Smith, English (Undergraduate Academic Requirements)
- Randy Sparks, History (Undergraduate Curriculum)
- Martyn Thompson, Political Science (Grievance)

The taskforce convened in a series of 2-hour meetings over 10 weeks throughout the spring semester. Articles provided by Deborah Love nourished the group’s discussions. Conversations were relatively free-flowing with the first meetings structured loosely around a SWOT analysis and the latter ones focusing on three overlapping areas: faculty hiring and retention, staff hiring and retention, and leadership responsibilities (Appendix C, “Meeting Schedule”). Furthermore, taskforce members engaged in discussions with over 60 colleagues, with whom they requested meetings (See Appendix D,
“Conversations with Colleagues,” for drafts of suggested questions). The taskforce also contacted the rest of SLA faculty and staff to inform them of the process and invite them to get in touch with taskforce members if they wished to be interviewed (Appendix E, “Invitation to Participate”). A half dozen additional individuals took advantage of the offer. The following report, which has been circulated throughout the group for review, comment, and correction, reflects the taskforce’s discussions and areas of agreement.

I. Founding Premises

The taskforce began by discussing the meaning and value of diversity for our academic community, its development at Tulane University, and the ability that our unit has to make improvements on its own and under upper-administrative leadership. It came to a consensus on statements that form the premises from which the taskforce worked. They are as follows:

A. Diversity is a social reality, an intellectual value, and a professional goal.

Diversity entails the inclusion and valuing of people coming from demographically different groups with a variety of experiences, lifestyles, and languages. A commitment to diversity is both socially responsible and educationally vital for Tulane. An inclusive community ensures that everyone’s voice is heard and that no particular group can dominate decision-making. Diversity reflects a commitment to excellence, while a homogeneous university suggests initial, unwarranted exclusions and limits the university’s ambition to embrace the highest standards in the production and transmission of knowledge. Our focus is not simply on new hiring, but also on fostering a greater sense of community within SLA and the university. One of the most important themes is “ownership,” in the sense that anyone who is a faculty member, staff, or student in SLA should feel a sense of being fully enfranchised, involved in decision making when appropriate and a full member of a community. Staff should also have a sense of ownership. Our task force did not include students, but we also recognize the need to foster this type of atmosphere among our students.
B. Tulane University has yet to fulfill its promise in the creation of a diverse and inclusive academic community, but it has significant strengths and an exceptional opportunity to make an impact in post-Katrina New Orleans.

C. The School of Liberal Arts needs the active leadership of the president and provost. Leadership from the upper administration will play a crucial role in promoting diversity and eradicating the conditions that perpetuate several negative images about Tulane University. We cannot claim that we have done everything we can to achieve diversity when we have a full-time student body enrolled in Newcomb-Tulane College that is relatively homogeneous in terms of race and socio-economic background, when women and minority staff tend to be clustered in low-level positions, when he have only one woman dean, and when people of color are largely absent from upper-level administrative positions. These conditions have a powerful impact on individuals who are considering employment at Tulane or who are currently working here. Moreover, by outsourcing basic services to companies that pay well below a living wage and do not provide benefits, Tulane undermines the goals driving its community involvement. Diversification of the faculty should be part of Tulane’s continuing renewal plan, and it will necessitate the investment of funds and creation of programs to improve retention.

D. In spite of the real limits on decentralized improvement, taskforce members agreed that the School of Liberal Arts can and should take responsibility for progress. If we set our own agenda and initiate pilot programs, we will be able to define these efforts and structures according to the values of our unit. Our successes may then inspire other efforts.

E. This is a long-term process requiring improvements across multiple areas.
For this reason, we must nourish a culture of experimentation, evidence, transparency, and accountability. Periodic reviews must take place of all work done; initiatives that are not effective must be modified or dropped.

II. Strengths and Weaknesses at Tulane University for Diversity Enhancement

The taskforce identified strengths and opportunities that favor action as well as recognized weaknesses and obstacles. Initial suggestions for meeting those challenges follow each entry.

A. Strengths and Opportunities

Context
- Southern City with a unique and complex racial, linguistic, and international heritage
- Presidential Commitment
- Opportunity for planning with new dean
- Increased university engagement with city after Katrina
- Faculty Involvement
- Academic Strength
- Staff Loyalty

Indicators of a Commitment to Diversity
- Domestic partner benefits
- International Focus
- Strong Student Diversity Groups
- Religious diversity of students, faculty, staff
- Geographical Diversity of Student body (72% from 500+ miles away)
- Diversity of origins of faculty, especially number of foreign born and/or raised
- Relative success of cluster hires (ADST core group)
Tulane University Curriculum

- Academic Programs Related to Diversity (ASTA [small]; ADST; LAST; WMST)
- Relevant offerings outside of areas of officially designated, racial, ethnic, gender studies
- Public Service requirement and diversity training within it (Teacher Ed program’s model)
- Undergraduate Major in Public Health
- Study Abroad

B. Areas of Ongoing Concern

Lack of visibility of existing strengths

The School of Liberal Arts tends to take its identity for granted. It would be advantageous to articulate and publicize our commitment to diversity on our web site, in brochures, and in discussions with outsiders.

Some inhospitable departmental cultures

On occasion, some departments give strong, although often unintended, negative signals to members of under-represented groups. Examples include giving the worst office to new person, inviting new people out to lunch and leaving them with the bill, etc.

Discomfort of many chairs with direct conversations on expectations and concerns

The chairs and/or executive committees of academic departments should meet regularly with untenured faculty to discuss progress toward tenure and to communicate with them about expectations. Such meetings do not always take place. This is problematic in general; it has a particularly unsettling, deleterious effect on faculty members whose gender or racial/ethnic identity leads them to wonder if they are being marginalized as well as on all faculty whose experiences put them in less of a position to know some of the unspoken norms.
Negative perceptions concerning ‘targets of opportunity’

A program for such hires existed in the mid-1990s that led to some bad feelings and misunderstandings regarding Tulane’s commitment to fairness. “Target” is a lightning rod, unlike expressions such as, “academic excellence program.”

II. Building a More Diverse and Inclusive Faculty

A. Hiring

1. Build Diversity into the Planning Process

The administration has the responsibility to articulate the principle that diversifying the faculty is an important institutional goal and to take concrete steps toward realizing this goal. Academic departments share this responsibility. The best place for departments to begin is in their strategic plans. These should include (a) an assessment of the department’s record on diversity and (b) a plan to address diversity issues. Departments should also explore ways to enhance recruitment and retention by assessing research agendas, curriculum development, and graduate programs that address diversity.

2. Allocate Resources and Recognize Success

We recognize that recruiting minority faculty can be difficult. We can address this difficulty to some extent by recruiting promising faculty at an early stage in their career. One possibility is to offer minority postdoctoral fellowships that can lead to tenure-track appointments. Another way to attract minority faculty is to emphasize that faculty who promote diversity in their research, teaching, and service should also be recognized and rewarded for those efforts. Recognition might include a university diversity award.
3. Focus on Recruitment

We must insure that appropriate procedures are in place to foster diversity on campus. First and foremost, the university has the responsibility to allocate resources to this effort and convince faculty, departments, and other units of its importance. The financial commitment on the part of the university will support hiring incentives and pipeline programs like postdoctoral fellowships. It is important to increase the base of support within departments and programs for minority faculty and to reduce the appearance of tokenism. These goals can best be achieved when departments and programs are able to make multiple hires of minority candidates.

4. Increase Accountability

Academic administrators at every level should be held accountable for efforts to promote diversity. Such efforts should be a part of the annual evaluation process.

5. Work through Existing Structures

Tulane has a number of programs, such as Women’s Studies, Latin American Studies, African and African Diaspora Studies, and Asian Studies that are ideally suited to take the lead in increasing diversity on campus. It is, therefore, crucial that such programs be well funded. Support for these programs sends a vital message to prospective faculty and plays a major role in retention. Allocating positions to these programs with the understanding that they find departmental partners is a strategy that has worked in the past to increase cooperation.

6. Improve the Search Process

a. In advertising positions, departments should make every effort to attract as broad a pool of applicants as possible. This effort may involve advertising in places other than the field-specific placement services. Job advertisements can be used to highlight the importance of diversity issues, describe the positive atmosphere on campus, the support available to minority candidates, and the desire to hire more faculty who represent and
teach diversity. It can be helpful to have job advertisements make a stronger statement about Tulane’s commitment to diversity implied in our current statements. A more aggressive ad might include statements like the following:

Tulane University seeks to make meaningful and lasting progress in responding to the needs of women and minorities.

Tulane University places a high priority on creating an environment supportive of the needs of women, minorities, and people with disabilities.

Tulane University seeks to create a curriculum and work force that reflects the community in which it is located.

Job ads might also emphasize the department’s need for a faculty member to promote diversity in course offerings or program development:

The successful candidate will help create a program in African American Religious Studies.

The successful candidate will create courses focused on issues of diversity.

The successful candidate will be able to work effectively with a diverse student body.

Preference will be given to candidates whose research and teaching focuses on issues relevant to women and/or minorities.

Job ads should reflect the fact that initial minority hires are the first step in a larger process, and that the department or program expects to make future hires around the goal of increasing diversity.

During the search process, members of search committees and departments must respect the boundaries of what is appropriate in interviews. Sometimes these boundaries are not observed. For example, on occasions, interviewees have reported remarks about gay
colleagues. Remarks of this type are completely inappropriate, and the dean’s office should show should remind departments that such behavior hurts the institution. Tulane and SLA are committed to valuing all faculty.

b. The Office of Institutional Equity has sites and resources to support departmental efforts to circulate job ads in such a way as to target women and minority candidates. Some of the resources that will help in recruitment include CMENT and CSWEP for Economics and SWIP for Philosophy. Departments and search committees are encouraged to work closely with OIE to broaden applicant pools. It is important that committees view the OIE as a partner in the process. Efforts were made in this regard in 2007-2008, when the VP for OIE partnered with the dean’s office to help all department chairs and search committee chairs to improve the search process, and these efforts should be continued. These sessions, which remind chairs of paperwork obligations and proper procedures, additionally alert faculty to cognitive biases that they or their colleagues may have and that can lead to the unwarranted exclusion of candidates based on differences in career paths and publication choices. The dean’s office should assist OIE in requiring that departments make special efforts to constitute a diverse pool of candidates. One approach it to have departments provide as part of the process of having advertisements approved steps they will take to broaden the applicant pool. These steps might include advertising more widely than the normal job placement services, and, when appropriate, sending recruitment letters to universities.

c. Search committees should aware of the need to make special efforts to recruit minority candidates. Tulane’s reputation is such that some of our minority faculty members were warned by peers at other institutions not to apply and not to accept a position here. Recruitment of minorities will only be successful when committee members demonstrate a genuine interest in such candidates, including in their research and teaching interests, and in their concerns about Tulane or New Orleans. It will be helpful for the dean’s office to have ready materials highlighting our efforts to improve minority representation and focusing on the positive aspects of our efforts to promote diversity. Search committees can send these materials to prospective candidates. The dean’s office can aid in this
process by exercising vigilance over department’s lists of finalist candidates. The university should provide materials to all candidates on domestic partner benefits, childbirth leave, day care, schools, tuition waivers, and faculty/staff associations on campus. Campus visits should include meetings with other minority faculty members and students.

d. At the end of searches, the dean should verify forms before signing and sending them on to OIE. To benefit from continual feedback, the university (and if not, the dean’s office) should conduct exit interviews (as is done at the University of Michigan) from candidates who got offers but did not accept them.

7. Be Prepared to Compete

The University must be willing to offer competitive salaries and packages that might include release time, research funds, or other incentives.

B. Retention

1. Improve welcoming of new employees

a. Encourage HR and the provost’s office to work more in concert.

b. Continue existing meetings, parties, and activities for new faculty in first semester and extend them into the 2nd semester.

c. Create a ‘Welcome to New Orleans’ program, modeled after the one created at the University of South Florida.

d. Support incoming faculty more actively in regard to housing, IT, and other practical welcome issues.

e. Start a “Faculty Diversity Coalition” with branches, including an Asian F/S Association.

f. Offer new women and minority faculty the opportunity to be placed in contact with faculty of similar backgrounds and interests.
2. *Create a Faculty Development/Mentoring Program*

Mentoring of new faculty can play an important role in their success and in their satisfaction with Tulane. We should work to create a supple, informal mentoring system to facilitate interactions that will lead to good matches. Many models exist; our faculty seem most comfortable with ones that are optional or that at least give new faculty time to choose their own mentors if they wish to do so during the fall semester. We heard many suggestions about the ways in which new faculty could be helped by senior colleagues. Some faculty would like to see more colleagues sitting in on each others’ courses. Many untenured faculty would like more opportunities for course observations and assessment. Several faculty mentioned the value of using a similar model for associate professors and, in both cases, for using peer mentoring.

3. *Enhance Our Academic Community*

   a. The most obvious step to enhance an academic community is for a department to sponsor events that bring faculty together around topics of interest. The dean’s office can help facilitate this and, when appropriate, provide funds to help departments with no money for speakers, etc.

   b. The dean’s office can help facilitate the creation of mid-level, mid-size social opportunities, either by division, interest, or rank. Suggestions for this type of activities include faculty reading groups and workshops, perhaps built around school-wide speakers.

   c. Facilitate the development of a staff network within liberal arts; create an informal network of ‘consultants’ if not mentors who could be called upon to work with individuals who do not seem to be receiving (or responding adequately to) guidance from more seasoned employees.
4. *Increase Administrative Attention to Faculty Development and Climate*

a. The job of being department chair is very difficult, requiring a great commitment of time and energy. The dean’s office can help chairs by disseminating the best ideas and practices that departments have developed over the years. This can be particularly helpful with chairs’ developing ways to work with junior faculty, especially when diversity issues arise. Meetings with chairs, especially new chairs, can be devoted to discussing best departmental practices. The dean can facilitate the work of chairs with junior faculty by having periodic meetings with them. Most chairs are very conscientious regarding junior faculty, but miscommunications about expectations, etc., can cause serious problems, in particular for untenured faculty.

b. Either the dean or associate dean should have an individual meeting at least once each semester with first-year faculty – and perhaps once a year with all junior faculty – to facilitate their transition into the Tulane University community, check-in on their understanding of P&T requirements, see if the faculty have developed relationships with senior faculty in their departments, and trouble-shoot when necessary. The senior departmental administrator for the dean’s office should fulfill this role for new staff members. Members of the dean’s office should take care to check in on a regular basis with minority faculty to see if they are facing issues that need attention.

c. The dean’s office can develop mediation for conflicts that have not yet resulted in grievances. There is a consensus that the university waits too long to intervene, and at that point, options for action are limited, and individuals in conflict have already caused much harm to each other and to others.

**III. Building a more diverse, inclusive, and better respected staff.**

Staff are essential to the School of Liberal Arts’ ability to accomplish its mission. In our unit, there are relatively few staff, 47 as compared with 282 faculty, but they fulfill significant responsibilities ranging from administrative support and marching band oversight to art gallery management and fiscal expertise. Staff have an important impact
on our image, as most have daily contact with students and visitors. The SLA staff recognizes itself as considerably more diverse than the School’s faculty, but its diversity remains low relative to numbers in the New Orleans area. Females represent over 72% of the employees. African Americans represent 12.8% of the employees, Asians 2.1% and Hispanics 6.4%. This limited but apparent diversity masks an internal division between whites and minority employees, the latter of whom tend to hold lower-level positions and generally report to white, male supervisors. The alienation is exacerbated by the fact that, in the post-Katrina era, there are fewer staff employees; those remaining are often isolated from other staff members and have had to take on additional duties and responsibilities, in general, without additional compensation. Many report suffering from a lack of clarity regarding paths toward greater responsibility and compensation. This uncertainty, coupled with the effective segregation between lower and higher levels of staff and the lack of communication between upper administration and the academic units, gives the impression that Tulane University may not care about its female and minority employees.

A. Hiring

1. Efforts need to be made to diversify further our staff

We can tap into a broader applicant pool by using new advertising tools (monster.com and the Louisiana Weekly for example. WFMO should add stronger language to advertisements.

2. A major need seems to be hiring sufficient, qualified, trained personnel to maintain the university’s technological infrastructure.

3. More flexibility in job requirements with experience given more weight in comparison with formal degree qualifications than seems currently to be the case.

4. Pay attention to the effect that turnover has on others who stay and act to mitigate it.
5. Provide more formal training to promising employees

All employees, including those in low-level positions, should be seen as capable of advancing in rank and responsibility. All employees should receive career counseling and extra training opportunities. Tulane University would be well served to be seen as an institution always on the look-out for talent and eager to develop its current workforce.

B. Job Satisfaction and Retention

1. Improve Communication and Responsibility across Units
   
a. The university should make clear who is responsible for what, when and where. A lack of clarity and stability in divisions of administrative responsibility and chains of administrative command suggests a lack of concern or even disdain and disrespect for those ‘below’ who have trouble knowing how to get things done.

b. Within SLA, adopt fair and consistent polices and procedures, expanding upon the administrative training sessions instituted by Shellond Chester (Chief Administrator and Budget Analyst, Dean’s Office) last year.

c. Give a member of the dean’s office staff responsibility for assisting administrative staff in improving job performance, trouble-shooting, etc.

d. The staff of the dean’s office performs many vital functions, the details of which few faculty understand fully. It will be helpful both for new chairs and for staff to have orientation meetings at which the functions of the dean’s office are explained and chairs are introduced to the dean’s staff. Personal interactions between faculty, students and staff matter considerably. It may be desirable on occasion to provide basic personnel management training to new chairs. It is absolutely inappropriate for faculty to treat staff with disrespect. Staff should be able to approach the department chair, and, if necessary, the dean, to seek redress for inappropriate treatment.

e. Tulane should create an ombudsman with overall responsibility for assisting staff in navigating our system, seeking redress in disputes, etc., with confidentiality and an open-
door policy. Employees are part of a system in which the administration can gang up on them but no one is here to help them.

2. *Demonstrate Respect through Fair Compensation and Financial Incentives*

a. In addition to resolving the endemic problem of excessively low caps on positions, the university should fund real merit increases in the staff ranks. Tulane should enact a policy by which all employees would benefit from special increases to their salary upon completion of university degrees.

b. Recognize the real contribution of staff members, whose responsibilities and activities often exceed their official descriptions. Staff perform these functions without real rewards or incentives.

c. Provide the necessary funds for real merit increases.

d. SLA should consider reviving the annual staff award and/or other vehicles for recognizing outstanding staff performance.

3. *Demonstrate Respect through a Commitment to Staff Recognition and Development*

a. Reinvigorate the Staff Advisory Committee and renew its structure to include open forum meetings where problems can be aired and solutions discussed.

b. Create a staff-mentoring network within SLA and lobby for its expansion to include all staff.

c. Foster positive working conditions and show gratitude for jobs well done, in word, written feedback, awards, and appreciation events.

d. Recognize the reality of academic work cycles for our non-exempt employees by allowing for flexibility of hours for all staff, not just those who are “exempt.”

e. Encourage staff to take advantage of the tuition waiver benefit and to attend academic events, free of charge. Tulane University is a community of learners in a city that
desperately needs more educated citizens. We should make providing educational opportunities to our staff an essential part of our mission. We need to remove any impediments, such as intimidation or harassment, that prevent staff from participating fully in the educational mission.

f. Reinstate ESL training at times at which staff can participate.