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CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

SPECIAL ASSISTANT
FOR MINORITY AFFAIRS

MEMORANDUM

To: President Jerome Wiesner
Chancellor Paul Gray

From: Clarence G. Williams

Date: May 9, 1975

Re: An Excellent Affirmative Action Plan
Versus Failure to Meet Goals Relative to
Black Faculty and Staff

Part of the Problem

As one can readily observe from present employment data, the Institute, more specifically its departments, has not met projected goals regarding black minorities and women. It is particularly acute in the categories of black faculty (1.6%), sponsored research staff (1.4%), academic staff (2.0%) and administrative staff (4.5%). The figures for the exempt and bi-weekly categories are below par as well, particularly the exempt category. One has to be puzzled about the unsuccessful results especially when we at MIT are considered by external forces as possibly having developed the best affirmative action plan in the nation. Many of us can attest to this based on inquiries about our plan. What then is the problem?

It may be well to separate the women and black perplexing situations because they are different historically. Therefore, attention here is directed toward the black employees of this institution. Furthermore, past discrimination has taken completely different forms of attitudinal and behavioral patterns toward blacks and it continues to plague our society, including MIT. The MIT problem of not meeting its goals relate very much to past subtle attitudinal patterns of non-blacks

Page Two
President Wiesner
Chancellor Gray
May 9, 1975

who have been unable to accept full partnerships between blacks and non-blacks in a workable situation. The repressive patterns are extremely important because it bears on the inability to strive for true black participation in the mainstream of the workings at the Institute. This is a major part of the problem -- no real example of black internal participation in decision making on any level of operation. Historically, this has been our dilemma and it continues to provide generation after generation of non-believers (non-blacks and blacks) in the capabilities of blacks to excel within the Institute. Patterns of planning for the future have often created the present lack of black participation to excel. A few examples might be appropriate. First, within a few years MIT will create a division of education based on the framework of a chosen few. One might conceive that within ten years this division might become one of the most unique of its kind in the country. At that time one might suspect after great pressure that the nuclear group of this unit might invite a black scholar to join the staff of this division. What is really important is that no one thought initially that a black scholar in this country was worthy of that kind of intellectual pursuit.

A second example also gives some credence to this pattern. In a general conversation with an outstanding scientist (who happens to be head of a department in the School of Science) I was told that he knew all of the less than 10 black scientists in this field. They were not interested in MIT because of the prosperous positions they held. This was his justification for not having one of those few black scholars in his department. Although one should question this rationale, since we are noted for attracting the best scientists, including a few nobel peace prize winners, the department head did not give thought to the fact that black students on both the undergraduate and graduate level are virtually non-existent in the department. It behooves many of us to accept this scholarly work by such non-blacks who fail miserably in translating this talent to social problems. Again, this reaction to the problem is the problem.

One final example is appropos. A department had no black graduate students a few years ago. It is interesting how the department finally decided to deal with the problem. A black applicant was presented to a black administrator for approval.

Page Three
President Wiesner
Chancellor Gray
May 9, 1975

to admit (who in return had two black faculty members to review the application). Both agreed that the student should not be admitted because the student was unprepared academically. The department received the recommendations of the black faculty members through the black administrator. The department still admitted that black student who remained at the Institute one summer and one semester before withdrawing for academic reasons.

Although one must be careful not to project absolutes, it is suggested here that part of the problem is the failure or resistance to utilize some of the means which have made this institution what it is today.

Possible Solutions

Remedies to black concerns are minimal when there is organizational resistance, particularly if it is based on forms of negative attitudinal and behavioral patterns. Therefore, solutions are really based on will power to change and explore diverse measures to resolve an immediate concern -- the lack of sufficient growth of black presence in the MIT work force. Thinking positively that the above pattern can be overcome in the future, it may be helpful to briefly discuss a few possible productive activities which could be pursued in the categories of black faculty, administrative staff and the sponsored research staff. It is crucial for each academic department to have at least one black scholarly faculty member. Of the 24 academic departments (including the interdisciplinary science program), 16 have no black faculty staff. These are the departments of Nuclear Engineering, Civil Engineering, Ocean Engineering, Metallurgy and Materials Science, Architecture, Economics, Foreign Literature and Linguistics, Philosophy, Psychology, Biology, Chemistry, Earth and Planetary Sciences, Mathematics, Meteorology, Nutrition and Food Science and the Interdisciplinary Science Program. It is proposed that each of the above departments be asked to establish a special fund for a black faculty appointment (assistant professorship or an above rank) for the purpose of eliminating this discrepancy. This process could be established for a set period of time by each department. The funding could be subsidized by a general fund of the Institute, if necessary, as an incentive. Perhaps, some segment of the leadership campaign could be related to this issue. This financial arrangement with departments would be similar to our present first-year

Page Four
President Wiesner
Chancellor Gray
May 9, 1975

minority graduate tuition scholarship. The approach may vary among departments but an established game plan would be necessary. One department might reach its stated target by working to identify undergraduate or graduate students within and outside of MIT; another one may utilize visiting black professors or post doctoral programs in the field or closely related ones in assisting the department in developing a system which will increase black faculty presence within a reasonably established period. For example, it is my understanding that the Physics Department presently maintains a roster of all American black PhD's in the country and identifies the outstanding ones through the "buddy system" or the network. Professor James Young and others in the department interact with these future black scholars before they complete their degree requirements. This department has also identified 10 universities where they maintain contact with professors who keep them abreast of the outstanding black students. Of course, MIT's Physics Department will contribute significantly to this national pool since approximately one-third of the black students in PhD programs throughout the country are here. Therefore, other physics departments find it quite beneficial to maintain such a network with MIT department. The above approach is only one, but certainly we are capable of developing others. The fact is, department heads, with encouragement from Academic Council members, should develop an activity to address this issue. The benefits of black presence in academic departments are obvious. Where black faculty exist it is more likely that black students will enroll. Our present black faculty representation bears this point out. Beyond the above point, I contend that financial support for black faculty is necessary particularly, the junior members.

The administrative black staff suffer primarily from the lack of individual career development and sheer numbers, particularly in the "mainstream" of organizational units at the Institute. It seems necessary that the President and Chancellor encourage the senior level administrators (primarily the Academic Council members) to solicit support from their line officers to assume responsibility for developing the black men and women presently on their staffs. This approach is not unique because it has been used in the past. Each black administrator's development plan should be based on his or her needs and the career path may mean internal or external mobility or development. The key to this process is appraisal on a continuous basis. This also

Page Five
President Wiesner
Chancellor Gray
May 9, 1975

requires testing promising black administrators, as is done with non-blacks, in new job assignments, particularly after having served in one capacity for a reasonable period of time to determine individual capabilities. There simply does not appear to be enough job transitions soon enough to test career promise to black administrators. They usually remain in one unit with no promotion until boredom takes its proper course. Finally, we must bite the "bullit" by identifying and placing a black in a line executive position in this Institute. It seems necessary that we identify internally or externally a "blue chip" individual to play this role.

The Sponsored Research Staff is the foremost serious category, with 14% black representation. The problem stems primarily from key personnel in this area (those who receive contracts and grants for research projects) utilizing the theme of the "most qualified person for available positions" to maintain the status quo in their hiring process. Unless some policy alternatives are developed to utilize qualified black candidates and potential black pool, this staff will continue to be a closed non-black working group for quite a while. Something will have to give in this system before a unified strategy can be achieved out of this divergence. There are at least two approaches which could be effective because the key personnel staff in this category already uses both in their selection process. One step is that undergraduate and graduate students be encouraged through incentives to get involved with research projects while matriculating at MIT. If we look at our present research staff we will find that a sizable group were attracted to such specialist positions by this same process. The methodology used to implement such an undertaking would vary, but some sense of obligation or commitment on the part of key personnel is imperative. Perhaps, some type of monetary incentive for researchers would be worthwhile as well.

The second approach deals primarily with establishing "grooming positions" for blacks in the sponsored research division. These positions would be set aside for those who have great potential but do not quite conform to the exact specifications as indicated in job descriptions. Admittedly, this process would have to be carefully scrutinized. Yet, there are too many potentially good minorities who have good credentials in a research discipline but need a brief period of time to transfer these skills to various specific areas of research at MIT. An example of this existing problem is in order. About a year ago a black graduate student was beginning his first year here in the School of Science. He came to me as a graduate school dean to

Page Six
President Wiesner
Chancellor Gray
May 9, 1975

discuss the financial problem he would encounter in supporting his wife and their three young children if he could not find a job for his wife while he attended school. He indicated that they had moved from Atlanta, Georgia with the hope that she would find a position at MIT since she was well qualified (see her attached curriculum vitae). Various supervisors talked to her including personnel in the Center for Cancer Research. Many of us felt that this black woman was quite qualified to do research in this particular center. However, she was unable to be placed despite the fact that discussions took place throughout appropriate units at the Institute. The woman finally gave up the search for a position at the Institute with much misgivings about our sincerity. Her husband still remains in our graduate program but she and the children returned to Atlanta due to considerable financial burdens as a result of residing in the Boston area without a job.

There are at least two points related to this case. First, the black woman was well qualified in Biology. Secondly, even if her research areas were not completely related to microbiology or research projects in the Center for Cancer Research or the Biology Department, she was quite capable of the transition if she had the opportunity. It so happened in this case that she wanted the opportunity. Such "grooming positions" in the future would definitely counteract the above case.

Finally, it is, I believe, a step forward by the fact that we are to have an all day meeting to discuss this issue. I expect that the problem will become crystal clear to all of us. Leaders of the Institute will respond to the problem in one or several ways. (1) denial, (2) shifting the responsibility to others, (3) monetary issues (a reality), (4) the limited national black pool, (5) uniqueness of their operations, (6) lowering the standards, and (7) numerous other scapegoat approaches. At any rate, our answer to the problem lies in the style similar to the one which produced our recent Energy Laboratory. It will succeed only because we decided that it was a national problem and needed our immediate attention. When, then, will black presence take such a priority? I suspect it will occur only when key supervisors come to grips with the fact that they have a problem. Secondly, the natural question will follow, "what can I do about the problem"? Maybe, this is all we can realistically expect on
May 10th

CGW bjw

cc: Professor Frank Jones
Mr. John Mack
Ms. Patricia Garrison