

VCU SCHOOL OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS DIVERSITY PLAN

PREAMBLE

The School of Mass Communications is committed to diversity as a fundamental principle in fulfilling its mission. The School recognizes the critical importance of educating its students to embrace diversity as an important consideration in their careers in mass communications and as a means of contributing to society.

Diverse individuals and groups bring varied human characteristics to the School. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, national origin, socioeconomic class, marital status, religion and political thought.

A diverse School provides for a diverse classroom setting, which facilitates exchange among individuals with different perspectives. The School will expose students to alternative viewpoints and will encourage critical thinking related to diversity, multicultural and global issues. In addition to ensuring that diversity is an emphasis in classes and curriculum, the School will work to ensure that diversity is reflected in student, faculty and staff recruitment, and in all of its activities, initiatives, programs and outreach.

All faculty, staff and administrators have responsibility for achieving these diversity goals. The School plan is intended to empower all of those individuals, as well as students, to redress non-compliance with the principles of diversity that are detailed in this plan. To that end, this plan places the responsibility for addressing any issues or concerns that may be raised by students, faculty or staff with the Director of the School and/or other appropriate University officials.

Goal – Climate

The School is committed to a climate in which students, faculty, staff and administrators can freely express themselves and interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. The School will take active steps to foster a diversity-friendly environment so that all of these individuals, from various backgrounds and perspectives, will feel included. This plan also is intended to foster mutual respect among those diverse individuals.

In keeping with the diverse culture of the University as a whole, the School will promote openness, acceptance and inclusiveness. The School is firmly committed to fostering free speech as guaranteed by the First Amendment.

Strategies:

- 1) The School will actively communicate its commitment to diversity through its publications, recruitment and other materials.
- 2) The School's administration, faculty and staff will work to ensure that the School's students are provided with an open and inclusive environment, and will seek

diversity in hiring and appointing student workers, peer advisers and members of other groups where opportunities exist to foster a diverse environment.

3) The School's Student Advisory Board (undergraduate program) will consist of a diverse group of students such that students of many backgrounds will be represented in decisions affecting all of the School's students.

4) The School's faculty evaluation form will provide a means for reporting specific contributions faculty have made toward diversity and multiculturalism. Through this system, the School will monitor and also be able to provide documentation in its annual report of its advances in promoting a diverse climate.

5) The School will seek to reward and recognize faculty who have contributed to the advancement of a climate of inclusiveness and acceptance by nominating such faculty for awards at the University, such as the VCU Presidential Awards for Community Multicultural Enrichment, or for similar recognition by professional or academic groups.

6) The School will encourage faculty development in areas that will serve to promote a diverse and accepting culture and climate. As one example, faculty may complete training in the Safe Zone program, which seeks to prepare individuals to understand and accept the unique perspective and experience of gays and lesbians. Where applicable, the School will also utilize tangible evidence of the climate it seeks to create. For instance, following the Safe Zone example, individuals who complete the training are encouraged to display the Safe Zone logo as a symbol of their openness and acceptance of gays and lesbians.

Goal: Student Recruitment and Retention

The goal of the School is to attract, recruit and retain undergraduate and graduate students to achieve a diversity student body. Specifically, the School will increase undergraduate representation to meet or exceed the University's undergraduate minority representation percentage. Graduate student minority representation will meet or exceed the percentage of all graduate students within the University. In recruiting and retaining students, the School also will monitor and attempt to address any gender disparity in the percentage of female and male students in the School.

Strategies

1) The School will conduct recruitment programs in venues outside of VCU to attract prospective students with diverse perspectives and backgrounds. For example, the Adcenter will correspond with professors and advertising club presidents at universities with large minority populations. The Adcenter also will correspond with winners of the "Most Promising Minority Students" program offered by the American Advertising Federation (AAF) to inform them of the Adcenter's offerings.

2) The School will accept invitations and offer to visit high schools with a diverse student population to explain careers in mass communications and to discuss educational opportunities in the School. The School will identify prospective minority students and establish personal contact with them. For example, the Adcenter will continue the High School Heroes program in which Adcenter students speak to local high school students about advertising as a career and about the Adcenter graduate program.

- 3) The School will ensure diversity among faculty and/or students who may assist the VCU admissions office in meeting with guidance counselors or prospective students.
- 4) The School will visit universities in urban areas as well as historically black colleges to achieve diversity goals in graduate student recruitment.
- 5) The School will mail, on a regular basis, materials about the program to high school journalism teachers who participate in School-sponsored workshops. The information will emphasize the School's interest in attracting a diverse student body.
- 6) The School will make scholarship and financial aid information readily available, in addressing recruitment and retention, as a means of achieving diversity goals. In addition, the Adcenter will work to obtain more scholarships for underrepresented populations and communicate these opportunities to those who might otherwise be unable to afford the Adcenter.
- 8) The School will monitor retention statistics on an annual basis and address any retention issue with regard to the diversity of its student body.
- 9) The School will form relationships with professional and academic organizations, programs and/or conferences that promote diversity, as a means of providing additional ways for students to learn about diversity, as well as to network with professionals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
- 10) The School's Diversity Committee will serve as a sounding board for ideas from faculty and students on ways to foster diversity within the School and will provide support for diversity initiatives.
- 11) The Adcenter board will continue its Diversity Committee, which was formed to address issues related to recruitment of students and faculty.
- 12) The Adcenter will join forces with associations such as the AAF and the African American Media Association and top brands such as Coca Cola to become part of their existing efforts to attract minority students to the advertising/media industries.
- 13) Adcenter alumni will visit college classes as well as advertising and marketing clubs in or near the cities in which they live. Special emphasis will be placed on alumni speaking to universities with a high percentage of students of color. These visits will help demystify the industry and make students aware of the VCU Adcenter as an option to consider.

Goal: Faculty Recruitment

The School will consistently endeavor to recruit, retain and promote faculty members to facilitate diversity as defined above. The School will strive for representation at or above that of the overall University, especially female faculty and faculty of color.

Strategies

- 1) All search advertisements will include language encouraging applications from diverse groups, including women and minorities.
- 2) All search committees will include membership with as wide a range of diversity as possible.

- 3) The School will seek to have as broad a search as possible, utilizing many publication outlets, to have a more diverse and qualified pool of candidates from the increased exposure.
- 4) Search committees will identify and annually update venues for reaching female and minority prospects. Members of the search committees will make personal contact with diverse potential applicants, individuals and organizations which represent individuals who would add to faculty diversity.
- 5) The School will participate in conferences and similar meetings to increase its recognition among potential minority faculty candidates.
- 6) As with all new faculty, new minority faculty will be assigned a mentor. Mentors are also encouraged to help the new faculty member assimilate into the School and VCU communities.
- 7) In making committee assignments, the School will work to ensure that female and minority faculty members are not overburdened with service expectations within the School.
- 8) The School will foster collaborative faculty research that includes new female and minority faculty.

Goal -- Curriculum

The School will develop and monitor its curriculum to ensure that it addresses issues of multiculturalism and the contributions of minorities, and will provide support for extracurricular activities that contribute to multiculturalism. As part of the curriculum, issues such as accuracy and ethics will be stressed to students as important in addressing multiculturalism and other issues of diversity. The School's curriculum also will address the related topic of globalization as that relates to the understanding of other cultures both at home and abroad. The School's assessment plan and vehicles will include an evaluation of progress toward achieving this goal.

Strategies

- 1) The School's faculty will be encouraged to develop course content and assignments on an on-going basis that help students to achieve learning objectives in diversity and multiculturalism. Faculty will clearly identify in syllabi the content and activities that address diversity and multicultural issues.
- 2) All undergraduate students are required to take at least one course in global studies and in historical and cultural origins as a part of their General Education requirements.
- 3) The School's Curriculum Committee will carefully review course materials and provide a report to the faculty on the coverage of diversity and multicultural issues as reported by course instructors. This review will be conducted every two years.
- 4) As a part of an ongoing alumni survey, questions on preparation for participating in a diverse society will be addressed.
- 5) The School will strive to maintain and support active chapters of professional groups that advance diversity, such as the Association of Black Communicators (ABC), which is the local student chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists

(NABJ). The School also will participate in programs such as the Black History in the Making event, which recognizes the achievements of students of color.

6) Within all curriculum tracks, as students move into the upper division, projects that require an understanding of diversity issues will be encouraged.

7) The School will continue to produce VCU InSight, a half-hour public affairs program that is written and produced by students. The program, which airs on local Richmond PBS station WCVW, reflects the impressive array of diversity at the University. The show features interviews with people of all ages, ethnic and ideological backgrounds, as well as stories that promote the positive outcomes that a diverse culture creates.

8) The School will encourage the development and offering of classes, such as Project Connect, that address multiculturalism and identity issues.

9) One of the School's contributions to the VCU Honors Program will be to develop special seminars and/or classes that address issues of multiculturalism and diversity.

10) The School will invite professionals to classes to speak on programs relevant to the diversity dialogue in order to expose students to diversity issues and provide mentorship.

11) All students will be encouraged to participate in national, state and local conferences, programs, lectures and other events that promote diversity.

12) Students will be encouraged to participate in Study Abroad programs, particularly those administered via VCU's Office of International Programs.

13) All undergraduate students complete two semesters of foreign language study as part of their degree requirements. Such courses contain a culture component in addition to language skills.

14) Students and faculty will be encouraged to participate in multicultural events on VCU's campus including, for example, an annual international panel on global marketing, the VCU French Film Festival, and an annual fair sponsored by the School of World Studies.

Goal – Research and Scholarship

The School will foster and support research and creative activity that addresses issues of diversity and multiculturalism.

Strategies

1) Faculty will be encouraged to participate in and attend conferences with diversity themes. Faculty may serve as presenters, discussants and panelists in such conferences and conventions.

2) Faculty will be encouraged to include diversity issues in their research.

3) Faculty will be encouraged to work in diverse, collaborative research teams.

4) Faculty will be encouraged to bring attention to and advance the discussion of diversity issues in their work, whether it is of a professional or academic nature.

5) Faculty will also report on the annual faculty evaluation report form any activities which bring attention to and advance the discussion of diversity issues as they relate to mass communications.

Goal – Outreach and Service:

The School will emphasize and promote diversity in its outreach and service to professional organizations, the Richmond community, high school students and teachers, and other groups. In such interactions, faculty members and students will encourage positive attitudes toward multiculturalism and showcase the School's commitment to diversity.

Strategies

1) The School will establish and/or maintain connections with professional organizations, especially those serving people of color (such as the Asian American Journalists Association, the NABJ, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and the Native American Journalists Association) and women (such as Advertising Women of New York, the Journalism & Women Symposium and Virginia Press Women). These connections may include faculty and student membership in the organizations, serving on committees or planning workshops, panels or conventions.

2) The School will encourage and support attendance at the conventions for professional organizations, especially those serving people of color. For example, faculty members and students might apply to participate in the operation that provides daily news coverage of the convention; or the School might buy an advertisement in the convention program or have an information booth at the convention.

3) The School will support a variety of initiatives and groups that promote diversity. Those include having representatives from relevant professional organizations visit the School as guest speakers and in other capacities; involving these groups in the School's internship fairs and related activities; and linking to these groups' Web sites from the School's Web site (and vice versa).

4) The School will continue its sponsorship of the Urban Journalism Workshop, a two-week intensive summer workshop for minority high-school journalists who are interested in journalism.

5) The School will encourage faculty members and students to engage in service and service-learning projects that expose students to diversity issues beyond their previous experience. These projects might involve creating advertising or public relations campaigns for nonprofit groups; helping such groups produce publications; and engaging in such community projects as the Carver-VCU Partnership and mentoring programs for area public schools.