LETTERS *from Santa Fe*

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO JULY 1991

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John Agresto

DIVERSITY AND ACCREDITATION

The last issue of our *Letters* talked about the proper and improper place of diversity in liberal education. Parts of the clamor for increased diversity or "multiculturalism" had us concerned. We focused our worries especially on the political use of curricular diversity as a way not of expanding our understanding of the variety of intellectual traditions and insights but as a handy tool for disarming the traditional liberal arts, rejecting the idea of Great Books, and belittling the study of Western civilization. We were concerned about a multiculturalism that reduced all works to, at best, representations of a person's sex, race and class. And we were concerned that, under the banner of diversity, a political agenda was now masquerading as educational reform.

If the last issue of *Letters* could be accused of being overly abstract about this matter, this one cannot. This issue is about one thing and one thing alone: accreditation.

In this issue we leave the world of diversity as a curricular debate and show what has been attempted in its name in the life of higher education.

What makes this seemingly soporific topic interesting is that it is a fairly pointed example of "diversity in action." It takes what was previously rather theoretical and concretizes it. In this issue we leave the world of diversity as a curricular debate and show what has been attempted in its name in the life of higher education.

What is obvious is the degree to which the word "diversity" has, in the last few years, taken on an aura, a sanctity, that makes otherwise thinking educators fear to question it. Of all the "politically correct" formulations rife in higher education today, "diversity" and "multiculturalism" have, simply by the incantation of the words, the power to bulldoze faculties and administrators into immediate and quiet acquiescence.

What is especially striking in the events of the past year is the way in which the notion of diversity can be used as a weapon to refashion the character and makeup of colleges to satisfy a clearly political agenda.

Why there should be magic in the word "diversity" is not immediately obvious. Indeed, curricular "coherence" or "integrity" would seem to have equal claim to our respect. This would seem especially true when we realize that much of what passes for curricular diversity today seems more fashionable and newly orthodox than truly diverse: the loudest proponents of diversity hardly ever seem to make the case for stricter attention to foreign languages or for expanded reading of the best that has been thought and written in other traditions. Nor do they seem to clamor for an expanded place for ideas radically at odds with the reigning orthodoxy of the bulk of the professorate. (Where, for instance, have we seen proponents of diversity saying that colleges should hire more veterans or Republicans, or recruit as students more Mormons, or Fundamentalists or practicing Catholics?)

Rather, diversity—which, on a certain level, is absolutely defensible as a curricular principle—has become code for a kind of thorough-going affirmative action program in higher education, an affirmative action program based not on an expanded attention to intellectual pluralism but an expanded attention to issues of race and sex. And that, in brief, explains why college and university administrators have so hard a time resisting its onslaughts. That is why—because of their supposed sins of sexism and racism—the traditional liberal arts, the Great Books, and Western civilization are all targets for the proponents of

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LETTERS *to Santa Fe*

"RELEVANCE" MUST ENDURE IN MULTICULTURALISM

One central notion that keeps striking me is the use of the word "relevance." It seems to me that relevance, when it comes to the serious business of education in any guise, must have durability. Those who advocate "diversity," "multi-culturalism," "gender studies," and "political correctness" are indeed correct in suggesting a certain degree of relevance—narrow, restricted and stultifying. To tap into the greatest minds and spirits goes beyond narrow concerns and has the greatest relevance in terms of a truly liberal education.

Peter A. Benoliel
Chairman of the Board
Quaker Chemical Corporation

WESTERN CIVILIZATION CURRICULUM PROVIDES DISCOMFORT OF QUESTIONS

Each of us has different memories of Columbia College, but for all of us a dominant recollection of the College is its Western Civilization curriculum—most notably, the two-year sequence of courses in Contemporary Civilization and the Humanities. For all of us, perhaps most of all for those of us who emigrated to these shores or whose families were newcomers or marginalized here, this extraordinary common curriculum represented a great opening to the world. It became the firm base for all our other academic and professional training.

Columbia College can take pride in having demanded the most of all of us, regardless of background. It can be proud of having made all of us quite uncomfortable—uncomfortable as we encountered new and unfamiliar ideas and as we pursued together an understanding of the Western heritage.

Columbia College did not define its academic program on the basis of ethnicity or the race of any of us. It invited us all, regardless of our origins and with full respect for our origins, to join in the common study of our heritage, and to do so with an appreciation that criticism and reform of our institutions is an integral part of the tradition we describe as "Western Civilization."

For Columbia College graduates, the current debate on American campuses on the merits and the place of Western Civilization in the undergraduate curriculum must seem mildly amusing, and even a bit absurd.

No Columbia College alumnus would suggest, on the basis of his own education, that a Western Civilization curriculum is an unchangeable 'canon' or anything of the sort. No Columbia College graduate would suggest that a "core curriculum" excludes the study of other cultures or the contributions of all our people—or, least of all, that it forecloses the study of our sins and imperfections.

The current attacks on the study of Western Civilization in colleges around the country and even in our high schools is especially incomprehensible to those of us from minority groups who were fortunate enough to be educated at Columbia College. We have no difficulty in understanding the observations of the distinguished historian Donald Kagan, the Dean of Yale College, that

> "at the core of Western Civilization is a tolerance and respect for diversity unknown in most cultures. One of its most telling characteristics is its encouragement of criticism of itself and its ways. Only in the West can one imagine a movement to neglect the culture's own heritage in favor of some other. The university itself, a specially sheltered place for such self-examination, is a Western phenomenon, only partially assimilated in other cultures."

In this great tradition, Columbia's curriculum taught us skepticism and the complexity of things, thereby challenging many of our settled assumptions. Columbia College provided us with the discomfort of questions, rather than the comfort of answers. The College helped each of us build, in our own way, from a foundation that rests on a liberal tradition thousands of years old.

José A. Cabranes
U. S. District Judge for the District of Connecticut
Excerpted from remarks at the John Jay Awards Dinner,
Columbia College, New York, March 21, 1991.

Diversity and Accreditation

Continued from page 1.

diversity and multiculturalism.

Now, back to accreditation. Last year, Baruch College of the City University of New York had its accreditation "deferred" by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (a Department of Education recognized regional accrediting agency) for reasons of insufficient diversity. These standards of diversity governing Middle States are reprinted, in part, in the pages that follow. Also reprinted is an article that appeared last May in *Black Issues in Higher Education* that clearly announced how the Middle States would apply the diversity standard, and an article by the executive director of the Western States Association of Schools and Colleges decreeing that all colleges and universities within its jurisdiction must now have affirmative action policies in place and have as a specific educational outcome an "appreciation of cultural diversity." So far, these are the only two regional accreditors that seem to require collegiate adherence to a diversity standard.

Interestingly enough, in April of this year, Lamar Alexander, the new Secretary of Education, deferred recertification of Middle States pending an inquiry into Middle States' use of diversity as a criterion of accreditation. The Secretary's memo and portions of his decision regarding this matter are reprinted within. ■

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MORE INSTITUTIONS MAY BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR DIVERSITY THROUGH NEW ACCREDITING EMPHASIS

This article, excerpted from the May 10, 1990 ***Black Issues in Higher Education,*** *was one of the first to indicate that, at least within the Middle States Association, colleges and universities would be held to a rigorous standard of 'diversity' that would apply to its curriculum, the make-up of its student body and faculty, and the character of its administration and board.* —*J.A.*

In the wake of an informal investigation into New York's Baruch College—which has placed the school's accreditation renewal on hold—scholars are debating the extent to which an institution may be held accountable for its failure to attract and retain minority faculty and students.

One of the buzzwords in higher education circles over the last few years has been "diversity." But when the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools took the unprecedented action of deferring the accreditation of Baruch last month, because of its poor record on minority representation, many university leaders were forced to reevaluate their commitment to a multicultural campus.

Many education officials say it is only natural that institutions be expected to diversify their campuses, especially considering society's increased minority populations and academia's declining minority representation.

Dr. Howard L. Simmons, executive director of the Middle States accrediting group, declined comment on the status of Baruch and said that attention should be focused on the larger issue: the responsibility of all institutions to ensure minority status in higher education.

"When we're talking about equity and diversity, it applies to minority involvement in curriculum, faculty and the board of trustees," Simmons said. "An institution has the responsibility to provide services that cater to the diverse, special needs of its students. And it's not just a matter of bringing them in and making programs available—not just access, but success."

Simmons said it is only sensible that accrediting agencies begin to measure an institution's record in determining its ability to provide quality education. "There is no better agency to deal with this. We deal with everything else," he said. "How can curriculum have integrity if you leave out references of large contributions from different groups?"

He said that many educators hide behind "the spectre of academic freedom" in avoiding the diversity issue. "They may have a right to teach, but they also have a responsibility to teach the truth," he said.

Andrew V. Stevenson, second vice president of the board of the Association of the Collegiate Business Schools and Programs, said that the Middle States' decision exemplifies an "appropriate" use of the accrediting process.

"I think what Middle States did was a step in the right direction," Stevenson said. "It's the beginning of the kind of accountability that is going to be necessary for this nation to come to grips with the realization that unless it is willing to declare a national emergency, we are all going to suffer. The accrediting process can facilitate institutional focus on the issue of recruitment and retention of minorities by assessing the standards by which the institution will be accredited."

Stevenson, however, is not willing to endorse the concept of withholding accreditation, but rather of postponing it until satisfactory recruitment and retention progress has been made. "I'm not sure accreditation can be withheld on these grounds, but it certainly can be provided on a conditional basis until such time that satisfactory evidence can be provided," he said.

Dr. David Reyes-Guerra, executive director of the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology, said, "I would support the notion of having racial recruitment and retention as criteria for accreditation. I would support moving the profession in that direction."

But officials at some accrediting agencies question the fairness of penalizing institutions for low minority representation. They argue that factors outside of an institution's control often make it virtually impossible to hire minorities or to attract students of color.

William Laidlaw, executive vice president for the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) said that because there are so few minority faculty

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"They may have a right to teach but they also have a responsibility to teach the truth."

—Howard L. Simmons
Executive Director,
Middle States
Association

"I would support the notion of having racial recruitment and retention as criteria for accreditation."

—David Reyes-Guerra, Executive Director, Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology

Continued from page 3.

members to go around, enforcing such a mandate would prove difficult. "There are 270 accredited schools of business," he said. "If we made requiring minority faculty members a criterion, too many schools would never be accredited."

Laidlaw said that in 1989, of the 696 doctorates awarded in business only 2.2% were received by blacks; .7 were given to Hispanics; and none was given to Native Americans. Moreover, he said, there were 5,370 U.S. citizens enrolled in business doctoral programs, and only 2.9 of those were black, 1% Hispanic and .1% Native American. "You can see from those numbers that there are not that many," he said.

Much more can be accomplished by encouraging universities to sponsor summer institutes and other initiatives that acquaint minority juniors and seniors with doctoral programs, such as the six-week program established by AACSB, Laidlaw said. "If you try to legislate, you don't always get the best and the brightest. That's the difference between the old affirmative action programs and the more sophisticated approach of valuing diversity," he said.

Mark Dugan, assistant director of the accrediting commission of the Association of Independent Colleges and Schools, also took umbrage with Middle States' tactics.

He said that the focus should be on "whether students are getting what they came to the university for and not on the color of the faculty and administrators. I don't think anyone cares what color they are if they are doing the job. If you have poor instructors, they're not going to help retention. The key is having qualified people."

But Simmons argues that quality comes in all colors, and he also discounted claims that certain regions—particularly rural areas—are not able to attract qualified minorities. "In most cases, that's an avoidance tactic," Simmons said. "It's ridiculous. That's like saying that all Black Americans like to be concentrated in the same place. The bottom line is, they don't want to be in those places."

With Middle States' action stirring debate throughout the higher education community, observers nationwide are speculating about the long-term role that accrediting agencies will play in enhancing diversity. But most agree that whatever the impact, Middle States is to be commended for raising the issue to a new level of discussion. ■

Joel Segall

WHEN ACADEMIC

Joel Segall was president of Baruch College during its review for accreditation. He resigned that position last year, after Middle States Association deferred its accreditation. This piece is excerpted from an October 29, 1990 op-ed, reprinted with permission of the ***Wall Street Journal*** *© 1991 Dow Jones & Company, Inc., All Rights Reserved.*

—J.A.

It is hard to decide whether higher education has entered a new era of McCarthyism or a Kafkaesque trial process: McCarthyism because the label of racism is liberally and generously applied with as little recourse available to the victim institution as in the days when a label of communist was enough to smear the victim for long periods: a Kafkaesque trial process because the institutions are not made aware of explicit charges nor are they presented with evidence.

What is more horrifying is that colleges across the country are quick to accommodate to the demands of those who would call them racist if the demands were not met.

At issue here is the interjection of racial considerations into official assessments of the worth of a college. Traditionally, accrediting agencies were concerned primarily with "academic quality," which involved such matters as library holdings, faculty output, and research and teaching programs. Some accrediting agencies, particularly the tougher ones, have quite explicit requirements—including the percentage of student credit hours taught by full-time faculty, the percentage of faculty holding doctorates, and the substance of course offerings.

But these are changing times. The Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, in pursuit of something its executive director calls "social justice," has introduced into the accreditation process criteria concerning racial balance and harmony. Most other regional accrediting associations are following suit.

On the basis of the new, nonspecific criteria, Middle States this March deferred its decision on reaccreditation of Baruch College of the City University of New York for almost three months. The major shortcomings Middle States found at Baruch were "the paucity of minority representation on the faculty and in the administration" and low student retention rates. But what constitutes "paucity?"

QUALITY IS BESIDE THE POINT

Minority members constitute more than 18% of Baruch's full-time faculty, which is higher than the average for senior colleges in City University, much higher than for all colleges in the U.S., and very much higher than for all colleges in New York state. Is "paucity" gone if we can go to 20%, 30%? Apparently, there exists a minimum quota in the mind of Middle States, and Baruch has not yet reached it. What Middle States wants is more. No matter that barely 3.5% of new doctorates in all disciplines go to blacks, a high proportion of whom will not choose academic life, or that an even smaller percentage go to Hispanics. And no matter that just about every college in the country is searching for minority faculty. Now, we must have more or accreditation is in jeopardy.

Similarly with retention rates. Baruch's retention rates may be, as Middle States says, "particularly among Black and Hispanics students. . . worse than at many comparable institutions," but logic alone requires that if the rates are worse than at "many comparable institutions" they must also be better than at "many comparable institutions." In fact, Baruch's six-year retention rates for regularly admitted black students are at about 40%, which is the same as for City University and exceeds the national average for four-year public colleges. For Hispanic students, retention rates (at about 32%) are considerably lower. What is the right or the adequate retention rate? Middle States does not say and has refused to consider the statistical data.

The new criteria have little to do with academic quality. The report of a follow-up visit by a special team representing Middle States came to the following conclusion:

> From the team's perspective, Baruch College has been, and remains, an excellent academic institution. We believe that the problems surrounding the reaccreditation process can be attributed primarily to two factors:
>
> 1. Baruch College has emphasized traditional academic values without exhibiting equal concern for the values of social justice and equity critical to serving working people in a multicultural urban environment.
>
> 2. Baruch College took the recommendations contained in the evaluation team's report less seriously than it should have, given the serious nature of the criticisms. In fairness, communications from Middle States' representatives during the reaccreditation process contributed to shaping the institution's initial reaction to the evaluation team's report.

So there it is. In pursuit of academic excellence, we do just fine; in pursuit of social justice—whatever is meant by that undefined phrase—we do poorly. As a consequence, our reaccreditation was deferred and not restored until July.

This is not a trivial matter. People do not always distinguish between deferral and denial, and the reputation of the college has been impaired. Because the matter was widely covered in the press, fund-raising efforts have been impeded, the value of the Baruch degree called into question, and residual anxiety exists among students, parents and prospective applicants.

Damage control required that we present a program to Middle States designed to secure reaccreditation. We have presented such a program and the college will carry it out. That program was treated by the press as a cave-in to Middle States, which it was, and a confession that Baruch had some racist tinge, which it does not.

There remains, however, a fundamental problem raised by the change in Middle States' criteria. When colleges are called on to depart from normal academic standards to solve societal problems, they are being asked to do something they are not equipped to do, and are diverted from what I persist in believing is their main job, the pursuit of academic excellence. This tinkering with recognized academic standards to try to solve the problems of society at large can only damage the college and diminish the value of the degree. That, in turn, will harm the career prospects of precisely those people the college should benefit most.

By now it must be clear that I find Middle States' criteria offensive, even disastrous. And yet they carry the banner of "social justice," which I understand to be, roughly, egalitarianism. And what that means, I suppose, is equal outcomes: minority students must be graduated at about the same rates as non-minorities and minority faculty must reflect the demographic profile of the student body or, perhaps, the city or some as-yet-unidentified base. What we are left with is something like a quota system with the quotas not yet specified, but higher than current numbers imply. And that, I submit, is no way to run an accrediting agency. Or a college. ■

So there it is. In pursuit of academic excellence, we at Baruch do just fine; in pursuit of social justice—whatever is meant by that undefined phrase—we do poorly.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE SECRETARY

April 11, 1991

MEMORANDUM

To: The National Advisory Committee On Accreditation And Institutional Eligibility

From: Lamar Alexander

I am enclosing a copy of my decision accepting your recommendation that I not grant Middle States Association's recognition petition until you have had the opportunity to further review how Middle States has applied its "diversity" standards. Until your inquiry is completed and I reach a final decision on Middle States' renewal petition, Middle States will of course continue to be included on the Secretary's published list of recognized accredited agencies.

I can understand your concern that the Middle States Association may have exceeded the appropriate role of a Department-recognized regional accrediting agency by deferring the accreditation of Baruch College of the City University of New York and the Westminster Theological Seminary. Apparently there was no question about the quality of education provided in these institutions. Yet Middle States allegedly deferred accreditation of Baruch and Westminster because those institutions did not conform to the accrediting agency's view of an appropriate racial, ethnic or gender balance on the faculty or governing board.

America's strength lies in its variety, especially in the diversity of its people. We are a huge patchwork quilt of different backgrounds and cultural experiences. Many colleges and universities seek to become communities that reflect this American experience, to attract individuals of many different backgrounds. Other colleges and universities have chosen different missions for themselves. In light of the enormous variety among colleges and universities in this country, should a regional accrediting agency dictate to institutions whether or how they should balance their students, faculty, administration and governing boards by race, ethnicity, gender or age? Middle States' "diversity" initiative may undermine institutional autonomy and academic freedom and could in fact lessen variety among the nation's colleges and universities.

A decision by an accrediting agency to withhold accreditation from an educational institution carries serious consequences. A negative decision by an accrediting agency not only stigmatizes the institution, but may lead to a cutoff of federal student aid and other forms of federal financial assistance. Since about one out of every two postsecondary students now depends on some form of federal aid, this is a powerful sanction to use against an institution. Such an extreme step may be necessary when an educational institution fails to meet its most basic responsibility to provide a sound education to its students. But, because of its serious consequences, a Department- recognized regional accrediting agency should exercise great care before threatening to suspend accreditation on any grounds other than academic quality or institutional integrity.

I look forward to working with you to strengthen and improve higher education. I especially hope that we can focus on encouraging accrediting agencies to develop stronger standards by which to gauge the quality of education provided to postsecondary students.

THE SECRETARY'S

Reprinted below are sections from Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander's decision on April 11, 1991 to review the certification of Middle States. The Secretary has asked that section of the Department that recognizes accrediting agencies to review the certification of Middle States at its Fall 1991 meeting. Towards that end, all who wish to comment to the Department's Advisory Committee on Accreditation and Institutional eligibility must do so by July 31 of this year.

—J.A.

In order for a postsecondary institution and its students to be eligible for many types of Federal financial assistance, it must be accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Secretary of Education (unless one of the statutory alternatives to such accreditation applies).

About one out of every two postsecondary students in this country now receives some form of federal financial assistance. For that reason, accreditation by a recognized agency is for most institutions not simply a matter of choosing to affiliate with like-minded institutions in a voluntary association; it is a matter of necessity.

Middle "diversity may un institu autono academic

I can certainly understand why a college or university might try to attract students, faculty and employees of very different backgrounds. America is a country of people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. That is part of its unique strength. Many colleges and universities seek to become communities reflecting the variety that is America. Other colleges and universities have chosen different missions for themselves. In light of the enormous variety among colleges and universities in this country, should a regional accrediting agency dictate to institutions whether or how they should balance their students, faculty, administration and governing boards by race, ethnicity, gender, or age?

I am concerned that CHE's prescription and application of diversity standards as part of the accreditation process may undermine the reliability of accreditation decisions as basic indicators of an institution's adequacy in providing training and education to the

DECISION

students. I am also concerned that CHE's prescription and application of diversity standards as part of the accreditation process may interfere with a postsecondary institution's traditional academic freedom and may decrease real diversity among postsecondary educational institutions that define their educational missions differently.

While as a voluntary private association CHE may wish to promote various social goals or agendas as it sees fit, the federal recognition role is subject to additional considerations. As mentioned earlier, the accreditation decisions of Department recognized accrediting agencies have serious consequences under federal law for institutions and students. For that reason, the Department must be careful not to sanction coercive restrictions on traditional academic independence through the departmental recognition process.

CHE and other interested parties should have ample opportunity to address my concerns about the application of CHE's diversity standards. Moreover, before I reach any final decision on CHE's petition, I wish to receive the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on matters within that Committee's expertise. That Committee at its Fall 1990 meeting voted to defer making a recommendation on CHE's petition because of many of those same concerns about CHE's diversity standards. Accordingly, I am deferring a decision on CHE's petition for renewal of recognition and remanding this matter to the Advisory Committee.

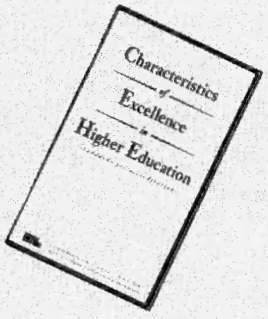
States' ' initiative 'ermine 'ional 'y and freedom.

CHE and other interested parties are invited to submit supplemental material addressing all the above issues.

To allow adequate time for review by the Advisory Committee and by the Department, CHE and any other interested parties should submit any additional written materials on CHE's renewal petition to the Accrediting Agency Evaluation Branch, Office of Postsecondary Education, by July 31, 1991.

What follows is the Middle States Association's own excerpts regarding its diversity requirements from its guidelines document ***Characteristics of Excellence,*** *approved in December 1988. The Association underscores that, in applying these principles, the institutions themselves are expected to "determine the methods most suitable to their unique needs...." Nonetheless, in releasing this summary the Association "reaffirmed the appropriateness of procedure and actions with regard to Baruch College...."*

—J.A.



CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENCE:

In the current version of *Characteristics of Excellence,* approved at the Middle States Association annual meeting in December 1988, the relevant statements on equity and diversity are these:

■ **Eligibility Requirements:**
Among the stated eligibility criteria for membership in the Middle States Association are requirements that an institution "have a governing board which includes a diverse membership broadly representative of the public interest and reflecting the student constituency."

■ **Institutional Integrity:**
Among the standards for accreditation (the common elements for accreditation) is an expectation that institutions will have "humane and equitable policies for dealing with students, staff, and faculty" and "programs and courses which develop abilities to form independent judgment, to weigh values, to understand fundamental theory, and to live in a culturally diverse world . . . ."

■ **Programs and Curricula:**
In reference to programs and curricula, *Characteristics* states: "Where possible a global perspective should be introduced to emphasize the cultural diversity and interrelatedness of the contemporary world." Furthermore, "the kinds of courses that should be included in general education are those which draw students into important new areas of intellectual experience, increase awareness of each individual's own cultural heritage as well as that of others, and prepare them to make sound judgments outside as well as within their specialized field."

■ **Services to Students:**
Student services "...should also address with more than mere expressions of intent the special needs and concerns of minority students." Students should be given "an environment in which personal integrity, social understanding, and human sensitivity flourish."

■ **Admissions**
Regarding admissions, *Characteristics* states: "An important index of an institution's caliber is its admissions policy as evidenced in requirements, standards, and procedures, and in the efforts it makes to achieve diversity in the student population."

■ **Faculty**
As regards faculty, *Characteristics* stresses that the "selection of the faculty must avoid parochialism and excessive inbreeding. Steps must also be taken to achieve appropriate diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, and age in faculty ranks."

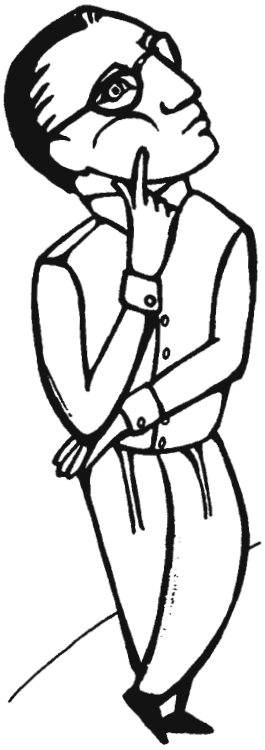
■ **Governing Board**
Finally, members of the governing board "should represent different points of view, interests, and experiences as well as diversity in age, race, ethnicity, and gender."

PRO: The Diversity Criterion

Stephen S. Weiner

Accrediting Bodies Must Require A Commitment To Diversity

Accrediting bodies stand at the boundary between higher education and the public.



American colleges and universities are undergoing massive changes in the racial and ethnic composition of their student bodies. What is the relation between those changes and issues of educational quality? What role should accrediting agencies play in shaping campus actions concerning diversity and quality?

In 1988, after extensive discussion among our 152 accredited and candidate institutions, the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges decided that every accredited institution, as part of its commitment to educational quality, should be expected to make continuing progress toward becoming a multiracial, multicultural institution. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges in our region and the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools have taken similar stands.

Our commission recognizes that today's college students will come to maturity as parents, workers, voters, and professionals in a world that has no majority. Colleges and universities must keep that world very much in mind as they shape the educational experiences they offer. As the Association of American Colleges declared in its 1985 report "Integrity in the College Curriculum":

"All study is intended to break down the narrow certainties and provincial vision with which we are born. In a sense, we are all from the provinces, including New Yorkers and Bostonians, whose view of the world can be as circumscribed as that of native Alaskans who have never left their village. . . . At this point in history colleges are not being asked to produce village squires but citizens of a shrinking world and a changing America."

Diversity is already a fact of life both in our region and on our campuses. The proportion of Caucasians in California's population is predicted to drop below 50% within the next 15 years. In 1988, white, non-Hispanic students accounted for 65% of the state's college enrollment, compared with close to 80% for the nation as a whole. In Hawaii, white, non-Hispanic students make up 30% of campus enrollments. While changes in the composition of the population have affected our region earlier than most others, there is a steady shift to a more diverse population throughout the United States. Thus, the issue now is less whether racial and ethnic diversity is coming than it is how to harness that diversity to the cause of educational improvement.

The commission's expectations regarding diversity affect virtually every aspect of campus life, and, therefore, each of our accrediting standards. For example, the commission's standard on institutional integrity now includes this statement: "The institution demonstrates its commitment to the increasingly significant educational role played by diversity of ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds among its members by making positive efforts to foster such diversity." This standard requires institutions to have equal-opportunity and affirmative action policies.

"Appreciation of cultural diversity" has been added to the commission's expectations concerning the outcomes of undergraduate education, along with competence in written and oral communication, quantitative skills, and the habit of critical analysis of data and argument. With respect to the learning environment, the commission expects that each institution will have "an academic community that significantly involves its various populations."

First, we ask both institutions and our teams not to define the challenge of diversity—or its attainment—solely in terms of numbers of minority group students or faculty, staff, or governing-board members. Contrary to the fear expressed by some, we are not pressing for the adoption of quotas. Having members of minority groups in each constituency of an institution, especially in leadership positions, is essential and a prerequisite for meaningful dialogue about diversity. But our concerns go well beyond such counting exercises to the culture of the campus, the value placed upon diversity, in different aspects of campus life, and the ability of the campus to bridge the contrasting perceptions of reality held by members of different ethnic and racial groups. Interviews, focus-group discussions, and the analysis of institutional data (such as student-retention rates) often reveal a gulf in perception. Whites perceive minority group members as being treated well, while people of color often recount experiences that convince them that they are still "outsiders" and that their status on campus is both marginal and vulnerable. The first step toward addressing the tensions that arise from such diametrically opposed views is to know that they exist.

Second, we look for presidential and faculty leadership in affirming that "diversity"

This essay by Stephen S. Weiner, Executive Director of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, appeared in the October 10, 1990 issue of the ***Chronicle of Higher Education.***

does not mean a narrow effort to benefit only members of minority groups, but a commitment of talent and resources to widen everyone's intellectual grasp and personal understanding. Diversity is not a "problem" to be solved so that colleges and universities can get on with "real business." A permanent part of the "real business" of higher education is examining how diversity and educational quality should be pursued both inside and outside the classroom. Presidents and faculty leaders need to attend to the requisites of affirmative action in employment and admissions policies, support candid assessment of the existing campus climate concerning diversity, and take the lead in articulating a vision of how a diverse and educationally challenging campus community can develop.

Third, campuses should have written plans on how to achieve diversity that have been subjected to broad and searching discussion. The plans should address curricula, recruiting and retention strategies for students and faculty and staff members, student-life programs, and academic support for students. The plans should have goals and some way of assessing whether the goals are being achieved. We have found that writing such plans forces disciplined thought and commitment. The purpose of the plans is not for campus leaders to become caught in the slavish grip of a document, but rather to prompt them to come back to these issues on a continuing basis.

Finally, we expect each of our visiting teams to address diversity issues in their report evaluating the institution. Our teams' reports do not impose solutions on a campus. Rather, in a collegial spirit, they analyze the institution's self-study; ask questions; report perceptions, problems and opportunities that become evident during the visits; and praise worthwhile efforts that are under way.

After conducting 50 comprehensive visits under the new standards, we have learned this most important lesson: that to achieve an academic community that embraces diversity, we first have to learn how to talk about it. Issues involving race and ethnicity have emotional and political overtones, and many people feel uncomfortable discussing their perceptions, feelings, and aspirations.

Two steps seem to help in getting the discussion started. The first is to remind ourselves that "diversity" should not be a code word for granting preferences to one group over another. Rather, we are seeking to build a campus community where all people, regardless of professional role, ethnicity, or gender, will be respected, will have the maximum possible opportunity for professional development, and will be productive. In particular, we are seeking to create campus cultures where individuals and groups are deeply committed to teaching one another and learning from one another. When people begin to understand that diversity is about bringing people together, rather than driving them apart, they become far more willing to contribute their thoughts and their energy.

Second, even after assurances that the goal of diversity is community building, people need to be given "protected space" in which to talk. By that I mean the guarantee that people may speak freely and candidly, in a diverse group, without fear that they will be punished or ostracized for expressing controversial opinions. At times, discussions about diversity are emotional. But the discussion must go beyond emotion. We have to be willing to think hard and anew and to explore uncomfortable questions.

Conflict and disagreement often accompany progress on diversity. The campus where students are demonstrating in the president's office may be just the one that has most seriously and thoughtfully engaged the issues. And, it is also true that there are times when an ugly racial incident galvanizes a campus to take constructive steps that are long overdue.

With only rare exceptions, college leaders in our region agree that diversity and educational quality are intertwined and, therefore, both are the proper concern of the regional accrediting commission. But we also find that institutions fall along a wide spectrum in their initial capaciy to respond to the commission's expectations.

Campuses are changing and so is the nature of accreditation. Accrediting bodies stand at the boundary between higher education and the public. We seek to inform the public about proper standards of higher education and to affirm that certain institutions meet those standards. In turn, we must also serve as a medium to insure that public concerns are reflected in the dialogue about quality in higher education.

Accreditation should be about more than the setting of minimum standards. Our role, which must be carried out with great care and deliberation, is also to challenge even the best colleges and universities to rethink their contribution to society as a whole. As accrediting bodies play that role we do not, and will not, please everyone. But as we ask tougher and better questions about the meaning of quality, we join the campuses in taking risks that are well worth taking. ■

Diversity and educational quality are both the proper concerns of the regional accrediting commission.

CON: The Diversity Criterion

William R. Beer

Accreditation By Quota: The Case Of Baruch College

The attack on Segall and the Baruch faculty represents an ominous direction taken by accreditation.

On April 5 , 1990, the New York Times reported that Dr. Joel Segall, president of Baruch College of the City University of New York, was resigning from his job, following a critical review by the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges. There was no allegation that Baruch was anything less than an excellent college. In fact, it is widely regarded as one of the four top business colleges in the country and trains almost one out of every three of the certified public accountants working in New York. Rather, the complaint was that there were not enough "minorities" in the faculty and administration and that not enough "minorities" graduated. Disturbing though this is, even more unsettling is the fact that the criticism was concocted by the central offices of the accrediting agency, acting independently of its own guidelines and evaluation team.

The attack on Segall and the Baruch faculty represents an ominous direction taken by accreditation. For the first time, an accrediting agency is criticizing the ethnic composition of a college's graduating class, as well as making specific complaints about the racial makeup of its faculty and staff. According to a source on the Department of Education's National Advisory Committee on Accreditation and Institutional Eligibility, such a step is entirely unprecedented. No other accrediting agency has ever undertaken an aggressive role in attempting to impose racial quotas on faculty, administrators, and graduates.

In itself, the attempt to control the ethnicity of university personnel is nothing new. In the last twenty years, the concept of affirmative action has evolved into a quota system in which white males are routinely excluded, as John Bunzel has documented in a recent article in the *American Scholar*. Although deeply threatening to the integrity of the university because they undermine the concept of professional peer review, quotas imposed on personnel committees have been a long time aborning, and it does not appear that they will be easily abolished. Until recently, however, the federal government was the principal agency in this coercion. Now, it appears, the effort has shifted from government to private agencies such as Middle States, accompanied by the notion that henceforth a college may have its accreditation withheld if it does not graduate the right percentage of certain ethnic groups.

A Racial Graduation Quota?

When asked if a college could be found delinquent for failing to graduate sufficient numbers of "minority" students, Dr. Howard L. Simmons, executive director of the Middle States Association, agreed that Middle States does use an "outcomes-based approach" for granting or withholding its approval. He denied that Middle States has any "hard and fast rules" regarding minority retention rates, indicating there is "never a single standard" in assessing a school's performance in this regard.

Simmons has claimed that his approach comes from *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Standards for Accreditation,* the handbook used by Middle States. In fact, there is no statement whatsoever in that manual concerning minority retention rates. When this was pointed out, Simmons changed his mind and said that accreditation is granted or withheld on a case-by-case basis. "I know that sounds hard to understand," he admitted, "but that's how they do it. The team decides differently for each school." There are "so many factors involved" that there can be "no quantitative standards" for evaluating a college. So much for the objective criteria of accreditation.

The use of an unstated but *de facto* racial graduation quota puts university administrators in a vulnerable position, since there is no way to tell whether Middle States will charge them with not having satisfied the goal of graduating sufficient numbers of designated minority groups. The lack of precision permits Middle States to deny that they are seeking any exact outcome, thereby avoiding legal action. At the same time, when it suits them they can use the "outcomes-based approach" as a potential threat to colleges seeking accreditation. Knowing that they will be held to an inexact but real racial graduation quota, residents and deans will be inclined to design programs to increase graduation prospects for protected groups.

Middle States can thus obtain the desired outcome without ever having to invoke the threat explicitly, and all the while remain protected from public scrutiny. Simmons admits having adopted the same tactic with many other institutions, but because of the secrecy involved in the accreditation process,

This essay by William R. Beer, professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College, is excerpted from the Fall 1990 issue of ***Academic Questions,*** *published by the National Association of Scholars.*

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he has not had to be held publicly accountable.

The other criticism leveled against Baruch is that it does not employ enough "minorities." In reality, this argument is absurd since many Baruch professors are Jewish and non-white Asians. But in education-speak, such individuals are not defined as "minorities." Middle States is actually arguing that Baruch's faculty has too many non-Hispanic whites and not enough blacks for a student body that includes many blacks and Hispanics. Thus, the broader question at issue is whether or not white instructors can adequately teach "minority" students. The "diversity" of a student body, according to Middle States, must be matched by a corresponding "diversity" of faculty and administrators. This belief is so widespread amongst academic administrative cognoscenti that few question it. When the logic of such a concept is challeneged, the usual response is that a white professor cannot be as good a "role model" for a black student as a black professor.

While one may suggest that professors can serve as inspirational mentors to college students, no evidence exists that such individuals must be of the same sex, race, or cultural background. The idea of "role model," in short, is fraudulently applied in the field of higher education.

Indeed, if such a concept did make sense, it would have exactly the opposite results of what Middle States ostensibly desires. It would mean not only that black students should be counseled to take courses only from black professors. If black students need black professors as role models to spur them to greater levels of achievement, white students require and deserve the same kind of encouragement. Taken to its logical conclusion, the "role model" argument is actually a strong justification for racial segregation in higher education. If black students respond best to black professors, they ought to maximize their chances by enrolling at all-black colleges. The same would apply, *mutatis mutandis,* to white students.

In the classic accreditation process, institutions are evaluated on the basis of the stringency or laxity of their educational standards. In the past, if a college was found to be too lax, accreditation was withheld, or perhaps conditionally granted pending correction of certain deficiencies. But now, for the first time, a college's accreditation has been "deferred," not because its standards are too low, but because they are too high. An institution of higher learning is being directed to arrange its faculty, administration, and curriculum so that a de facto racial graduation quota can be filled. Aside from some serious issues of law, this initiative represents the latest step in the abolition of institutional autonomy and faculty control over the hiring process.

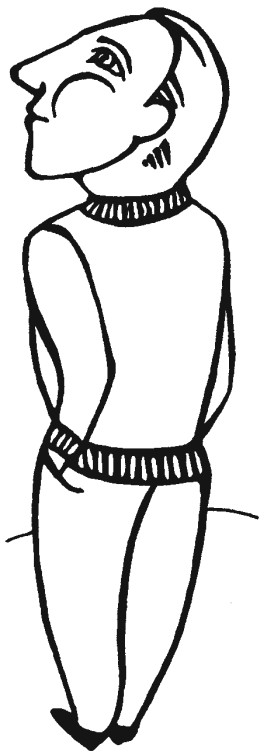
It is no coincidence that this new and arbitrary direction has been taken by a private accrediting agency. In 1989 the Supreme Court issued a series of decisions that seriously undermined the ability of government to require institutions to use racial and sexual quotas in hiring and promotions. Though this was a serious setback for those who would like to see a political system governed by racial and sexual entitlement, they have evidently regrouped.

For example, under the sponsorship of Senators Kennedy and Hawkins, the Civil Rights bill of 1990 currently being argued in Congress would reimpose on employers the burden of proving that they did not discriminate against minorities in hiring. Since it is virtually impossible to prove that something has not occured, the result will be that employers (including colleges and universities) will be obliged to adopt quotas in hiring in order to forestall potential lawsuits. This is particularly likely because the same legislation will require employers to pay the cost of employees' litigation, thus encouraging plaintiffs to make complaints of discrimination free of charge

On the level of academic rhetoric, the tactic has been to substitute "diversity" for the now-tainted "affirmative action," since it is widely recognized that the latter has produced discriminatory preferential hiring. Surveys show that most blacks, as well as most whites, are opposed to preferential treatment for blacks. Using "diversity" sounds better because the term is vague and it is hard to say one is against it. But the Baruch case shows what "diversity" truly means; it is simply old wine in new bottles.

That there is no logical or empirical justification for racial quotas in hiring or graduation should not need saying. But Simmons and his allies are not governed by logic or facts; they are driven by a sense of moral righteousness that is impervious to any argument. Rather than conforming to consistent and objective standards of excellence, Simmons makes up the rules as he goes along. Rather than appealing to the intellect, Simmons tugs at people's basest emotions in order to impose his political agenda on higher education. ■

The Baruch case shows what "diversity" truly means; it is simply old wine in new bottles.



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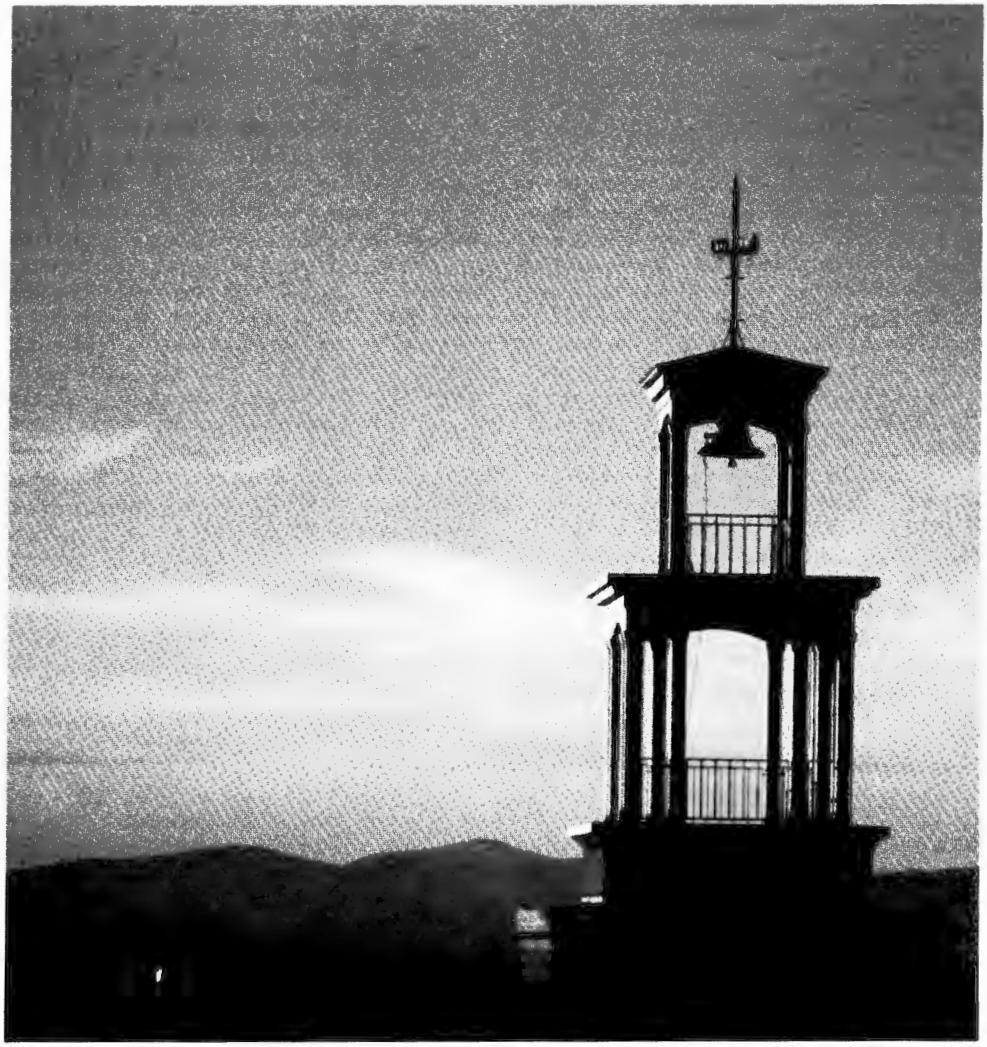
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