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“Diversity and the Ph.D.”

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Some of you may have heard the stories that John Hope Franklin used to tell about his experiences as a young African-American historian in the era when separate but equal was the rule. In 1935, he was denied admission to graduate school at the University of Oklahoma despite the fact that he was a state resident with a spotless academic record at Fisk University, because Oklahoma was a segregated campus at the time. Honoring the principle of separate but equal, the state did provide Franklin's father with a \$100 refund to go toward his son's Ph.D. education at another institution that would accept him, which, it turned out, was Harvard. Franklin needed that \$100, since Harvard, though it had been willing, for the very first time, to admit a student from an historically black institution who had never been civilized by a stint in the Yard, was not bold enough to provide fellowship support, and it was only thanks to a loan from one of his professors at Fisk that Franklin's graduate work could begin. Four years later, while he was doing dissertation research at the North Carolina state archives, he found himself again momentarily stymied by the fact that the library's reading room was also segregated. As he was told by the director, "in planning the building the architects did not anticipate that any Afro-Americans would be doing research there." Under gentle, silent pressure from an astonished Franklin the director found a small room for him to work in and gave him keys to the manuscript collection so that the white assistants would not be required to deliver sources to him. Within two weeks, however, white researchers protested this special privilege as discrimination and demanded keys to the collection as well, but rather than oblige them, the director took Franklin's keys away and ordered the assistants to serve him, too.¹

We would all like to think that our world is different from the one John Hope Franklin had to deal with, but how far have we come? How many painstaking steps forward have not in fact been countered with two slides back? Three recent publications have given me some cause for concern.

¹ Dana Goldstein, "Franklin: Contemporary Discussions of Race Should Be Rooted in History," *The Brown Daily Herald*, 22 September 2004.
<http://www.browndailyherald.com/media/paper472/news/2004/09/22/CampusNews/Franklin.Contemporary.Discussions.Of.Race.Should.Be.Rooted.In.History-726554.shtml?noreferrer&sourcedomain=www.browndailyherald.com>;
Franklin, John Hope. *A Life of Learning*. The 1988 Charles Homer Haskins Lecture. (ACLS Occasional Paper No. 4) New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1988, 13-14.

The first was the article about a month ago in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that follows up on the Supreme Court's 2003 decision supporting the use of race in college admissions. The title and subtitle tell it all: "Michigan: Who Really Won? Colleges' cautious reaction to the Supreme Court's affirmative action decisions may have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory." Although the Court's decision upheld the right of colleges and universities to diversify their student populations through race-conscious admissions policies, the message has in many cases either been imperfectly heard or purposely muted because of continuing intimidation by those who would rather not see it communicated. "Higher education," as Syracuse University President Nancy Cantor put it, "has not taken up the victory that . . . we won in the Supreme Court."² The second was an article last week in the *Los Angeles Times* reporting on the annual survey conducted by the University of California, Los Angeles' Higher Education Research Institute, which found—again I cite the subhead—that "a record high percentage of college freshmen believe discrimination is no longer a major problem in the U.S." Shouldn't it be considered good news if "undergraduates feel less apprehensive than their parents did about dealing with people of other races and ethnicities"? Well, not exactly, since the survey also found that the number of students who thought it likely that they would socialize with someone of a different background was the lowest ever since the question was asked, and that the percentage of white students who thought promoting racial understanding was important was only half that of the blacks and Latinos queried.³

And the third document is The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation's report on *Diversity and the Ph.D.: A Review of Efforts To Broaden Race and Ethnicity in U.S. Doctoral Education*, of which you've seen a digest. This is a terrific and much-needed report, one that presents an extremely valuable overview of the variety of programs that have been mounted by government agencies, foundations, and other organizations to enhance diversity in the graduate student population. Even more valuable is the report's analysis of the relative effectiveness of the programs, and absolutely indispensable is its list of recommendations for future action. What is sobering, of course, is the report's conclusion that efforts heretofore, some of which have already been abandoned, have been insufficient: doctoral education's diversity record is poor, and if anything, it is getting worse.

The report's recommendations are spot-on and unarguable. We need more data about what has worked, and we need to share that information with each other. We need to develop more compelling arguments to draw students into graduate study that may involve focusing on its social relevance, and more effective means of enticing them at earlier stages of their educational careers. We need to provide adequate financial incentives, mentoring support, and socializing and professionalizing experiences. And we need both greater collaboration across programs and institutions and unequivocal and credible leadership of these efforts at every level.

One obvious challenge of past or existing efforts is that too little money has been spread too thinly, or applied in the wrong places. National programs are often diluted by their reach, and by their distance from local campuses that without a watchful gaze may not honor or implement the national goals appropriately. Fellowship support given directly to the usual suspects of top tier

² Jeffrey Selingo, "Michigan: Who Really Won?", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 14 January 2005. <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i19/19a02101.htm>.

³ Stuart Silverstein, "Racial Issues Lose Urgency, Study Finds," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 January 2005, home ed.: B3.

colleges and universities will often be channeled into fiercely competitive efforts to recruit the same limited group of cream of the crop minority graduates from those same institutions. If our collective goal is to increase dramatically the numbers of underrepresented minorities in graduate programs, and to increase the likelihood that they will complete their degrees, then neither of these approaches will do the job.

We need to have a critical mass of a cohort of color enrolled in top graduate programs at top universities from which they will be best positioned to be hired as junior faculty. A Ph.D. from Florida's Nova Southeastern University, which apparently awards more doctorates to African-Americans than any other institution in the country, will not do that. Where are they getting jobs? It is hard to know. At the risk of sounding parochial, let me suggest that someone should focus seriously on California. Others already have: the National Science Foundation, for example, has noticed that the highest concentration of undergraduate degrees earned by underrepresented minorities in the social, behavioral and economic sciences can be found in southern California. Let's take advantage of these numbers!

Campuses in the University of California system, while more diverse than many of their counterparts because of the high percentage of Asian-Americans, do not have the numbers of underrepresented minorities in their own undergraduate classes that will make the kind of difference we need to effect (though they certainly do have more than the institutions benefited by, say, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship program). But their sibling institutions, the huge California State University system, do, and many of those students are precisely in that huge mid-level group that, as the report on *Diversity and the Ph.D.* tells us, gets excluded now from consideration by programs that focus on the very top institutions or the most economically underprivileged students. Why not develop a program that establishes sustained partnerships between these potential feeder institutions and the research universities right in their neighborhood, a pipeline that could work because it is short? Create summer institutes on topics that will capture the interest of this population of color (that is how to get around Proposition 209). Bring faculty from the Universities of California and the California State Universities together to plan the programs. Make sure that senior faculty—of any and all colors—are prominently engaged, but use the relatively large numbers of graduate students from underrepresented minorities at the Universities of California as primary teachers and mentors (thus providing much-needed support to them, too, and a more attractive alternative than summer school teaching). Use the institutes not only to acquaint undergraduates with the mission and substance of graduate work but also to equip them with the basic skills they will need to succeed, whether it be statistics, foreign language or writing. Promise fellowship funding to those students who do end up applying, with some support tied to their eventual participation—from the other end—in the same summer institutes. And make sure that the universities appoint dedicated staff charged with increasing diversity, to make sure that they put their money where their mouths are and that the program goals are actually implemented. (This is only one of the many ways in which foundation support could leverage state funding.) You will not only establish important institutional partnerships but will also create a viable pipeline that is sustainable because of the geographic proximity, a community and sense of cohort that is essential to long-term diversity efforts, and you are likely to be supporting the work of both minority faculty and graduate students at the research universities to boot.

This is an approach that seems most easily implemented in California—the low-hanging fruit, if you will—but I think it could also be extended to other areas with large minority populations like Texas and New York. Imagine targeted partnerships, for example, between institutions like the University of Texas at El Paso and the University of Texas at Austin and Rice University, or the City University of New York system and Columbia University, New York University, and State University of New York, Stony Brook, with systematic information-sharing among all participants built into the model. Will all of the prospective graduate students necessarily end up at the specific partner institutions? Of course not: for programmatic reasons it may make more sense for them to go to another university, a Cornell University or a University of Michigan, perhaps, where an institute faculty member was trained, and that is okay. We simply have to figure out ways to develop a pool where it is easiest to develop and make sure that the students go to doctoral programs that will make them more competitive on the job market.

We need both to provide direct funding and to develop means of training and socialization. Targeted partnerships between universities and K-12 systems, like the Humanities Out There program at the University of California, Irvine supported by Woodrow Wilson's Responsive Ph.D. program, have proven effective at developing a new paradigm of graduate education that is connected to the community, but it is been focused on deepening the undergraduate cohort. Why not try building on that success by transferring the model to another level, creating articulated and mutually beneficial relationships between masters' and doctoral institutions as well? Think of this as a K-22 continuum, if you will, one that builds pathways from public school to college to graduate school, and that will continually reinforce the connections among the sectors, and between the higher education community and the world in which it lives.