

DIVERSITY AND INTEGRATION AT RHODES COLLEGE  
REPORT TO PRESIDENT TROUTT

Submitted by Myrna C. Adams, Consultant

April 15, 2002

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK TO DATE

I visited Rhodes College on March 11 and spent that afternoon, the following full day, and the morning of March 13 in a series of half-hour discussions with students, faculty, and administrators. The visit was designed to be an introduction to the people who ultimately will drive the diversity initiative and the institutional changes that it will require over time. I wanted to learn more about the organization, its culture, and individual perspectives on the issue(s) of diversity and the future of the institution.

In the course of the visit I met with President Troutt and 12 administrators, one of whom was African American; 16 teaching faculty (principally department chairs), including five African Americans and one Latino, and approximately 16 students, including six or seven African American members of the Black Student Alliance (BSA). Of the 29 faculty/administrators, 11 were women. . During my interviews the names of other individuals surfaced, but I could not fit them into my very tight schedule. In addition, I reviewed the demands of the petitioners and the priority statement of the BSA, read current issues of the *Sou'wester* and several important documents available from the College's website.

Ms. Lori Von Bokel-Amin was invaluable as my guide, interpreter, escort, and recorder. By relying on her note taking skills, I was able to focus on listening and learning from the many valuable conversations. Her able assistance was very much appreciated.

My encounters with students, faculty, and administrators helped me to place the institution and its particular set of issues in the broader context of current issues and tensions affecting historically and predominantly white colleges and universities. I approached this work with the following questions in mind:

- How far has the process of racial integration progressed at Rhodes College?
- How is “diversity” interpreted and experienced at Rhodes College?
- What are the goals of Rhodes College relative to diversity and racial integration?
- What strategies and tactics are most likely to enable the institution to achieve its goals?
- What forces are at work that will accelerate or impede the implementation of those strategies?

While the incidents that precipitated the flurry of activity around the concerns of African American students were unfortunate and regrettable, they have given impetus to the diversity work begun several years ago and revitalized by President Troutt. There is reason to work harder and faster to prevent their recurrence and to deal with their consequences. One goal is to develop sound strategies for transformative change in the organization’s approach to diversity and integration. A second goal is to recognize and analyze those forces that impact the ability of the College’s leadership to initiate and anchor those changes that are deemed worthwhile, but can only be accomplished over an extended time period.

I met with a number of people representing important sectors of the Rhodes community. The impressions I gathered from them were fitted into the context of my experiences and studies of organizational change in institutions of higher learning—particularly where the focus is on the inclusion of those historically by-passed. I do not claim to have a deep understanding of the culture, folkways, values or history of Rhodes College. I must say

that I was impressed by the openness, the candor, the sincerity of those with whom I spoke. It was easy to have an open dialogue; people were not defensive and they wanted to be constructive. We generally found the time allotted for each interview too brief. In this report I will make a number of suggestions and recommend that certain steps be taken; however, I do not assume that they are all novel ideas. I presume that some of them have been tried in the past, are currently being explored, or may have been discarded. On the other hand, I hope that some of these recommendations will give support to initiatives currently underway, or will provide a different perspective on the issues for those who are struggling to make Rhodes College a more diverse institution.

It seems to me that the Rhodes College environment is a healthy one. Members of the Rhodes community may be skeptical about the possibilities of addressing the issue of diversity absent an infusion of external resources, but they trust their President and they are energized by the hope of making the College an even better place—for everyone.

#### ISSUES OF RACIAL INTEGRATION AND DIVERSITY

I was told that there had not been a full community discussion about “diversity at Rhodes.” Whether or not that is true, I recommend that an open forum or symposium on the topic be held. Since there are Rhodes faculty who have scholarly interests in the field, and there are current employees, students and “alums” who have valuable insights and experiences to share, this event could provide an opportunity to acknowledge and affirm the expertise in your midst and to share ideas and perspectives as well. It is important to acknowledge that we all are in a learning mode, so those with greater knowledge and understanding should be encouraged to work with their less sophisticated peers in a non-evaluative, supportive way. I have in mind organizing something like the symposium held at a research university several years ago on the topic “What Difference Does Difference Make?” Trustees, senior administrators, faculty, staff and students were involved in the design and implementation of the event; it was videotaped and presented at a national conference.

There was unanimous agreement that the College must become a more cosmopolitan, diverse institution. The reasons clearly articulated by President Troutt are considered valid and important. For some, this is an urgent matter, critical to the future of the institution. Yet, there is some tension around the issue of the extent to which “diversity” at Rhodes is merely an “affirmative action subterfuge” intended to reinforce a black/white paradigm. This frustrates those who want to “move on” past the issues of racial integration at Rhodes to focus on the inclusion of a wider range of people and perspectives. This attitude could be interpreted as an unwillingness to confront the unfinished agenda of racial integration. I noted that African Americans are also calling for a more diverse environment even as they insist that issues of race be honestly and fully addressed.

A close reading of the “priorities of the BSA” reveals that black students are looking beyond their own needs in calling for mandatory diversity training for all, the creation of a Rhodes College Cultural Center (not a Black Cultural Center) “to serve as social space for both minority and majority students”, a redoubling of efforts to recruit “minority” – not only African American—faculty, staff and students, and the demand for a procedure/policy to redress discrimination and harassment grievances. Their call to broaden perspectives by promoting diversity and multicultural education is not self-serving.

Given the report on classroom dynamics and the other recurring incidents, it is surprising that black students have asked for so little for themselves. What has been presented is a modest request for greater access and support: a retention study and program, a Dean of Multicultural Affairs who will attend to their concerns *part of the time*, financial aid counselor/advisors to assist them with their financial affairs, increases in the number of African Americans at all levels to provide them with support and role models. The question that the faculty and administration must put to themselves is this: **“Beyond addressing the priorities expressed by the BSA, have we really achieved the full integration—academic and social—of African Americans at Rhodes College?** I strongly recommend that President Troutt convene a committee or charge the existing

Diversity Task Force to examine this question seriously. I heard the BSA members say clearly that they have gone as far as they can. The burden now shifts to the administration and faculty to apply their knowledge and skill to the tasks. The requests they have made are only part of the work ahead.

Although the President and the Diversity Task Force gave primacy to the unfinished agenda of racial integration, I noted a tendency to treat *diversity* and *inclusion* as one issue - as one overarching goal. I think the discussion and the planning would be more focused and strategic if the two issues, diversity and inclusion, were approached as separate and equally important matters for the College to address. I recommend this approach because it allows for a more complete analysis of what must be done both to attract African Americans and other minorities to Rhodes and to incorporate them successfully into the institutional culture--its values, policies, and practices—to *integrate* them. This approach would be more likely to give focus and attention to details that are often overlooked --the very details that account for the bruises and the burdens visited upon African American members of the Rhodes community after they arrive. I believe the changes required to institutionalize Rhodes College's commitment to the presence and success of African Americans will inevitably work to the benefit of all other previously excluded or overlooked groups.

## ACCESS AND DIVERSITY

The first step toward the achievement of the diversity/inclusion goals, whether they are addressed together or separately, is getting people into the institution. Everyone with whom I spoke agreed that Rhodes College must become a more diverse institution. The challenge of diversity is to bring people (students, faculty and staff) from different places, backgrounds, life styles, social classes, interests, talents AND colors into the Rhodes community at all levels. Repeatedly the word “homogeneous” was used negatively to describe a characteristic of institutional culture.

### Admission and Financial Aid

The relationship between admission and financial aid is well understood, so I expected to see a host of recommendations focused on recruitment and financial aid. And while many excellent recommendations have been made by members of the Rhodes community, I wish to emphasize the following points:

1. Efforts to build bridges with the minority communities in Memphis and its environs will pay huge dividends if they start with the youth (the younger, the better), their parents, religious leaders, community leaders, and school personnel. Black faculty and alums from Memphis can be very helpful in this regard. Professor John Planchon, Chair of Economics, has current data on housing patterns and mobility in the City of Memphis which, could be utilized in this effort. Affluent people of color are moving into suburban communities and should not be overlooked. Selective colleges often draw their best minority students from suburban and private urban schools. Please understand that the mix of city and suburban youth will bring to the surface intragroup differences in social class background with implications for the design of support systems and social/cultural event planning.

An inventory of minority social and civic organizations in Memphis and neighboring cities should be undertaken so that opportunities to increase contact with the College can be developed. The leasing of space on the Rhodes campus for wedding receptions, special events, high school conferences, and other opportunities can be found to bring the name of Rhodes College into conversations as a result of the exposure to the institution—its facilities and its people.

2. While we can separate the steps of recruitment, enrollment and funding for purposes of analysis, they are all components of the total experience for prospective students. How these functions are performed warrants a critical review informed by an appreciation of issues of culture and class. Who manages and implements institutional policy in these areas does make a difference in the outcome. Differences in culture and class can best

be incorporated into daily practice when those who staff these operations are of diverse backgrounds.

3. Although institutional needs—meeting enrollment targets, aiding needy students, guarding the College’s reputation, and just filling all the classes—are paramount, issues of justice and equity must likewise be addressed.

Rhodes College faces serious marketing challenges, but it has a good product and reason to be optimistic about its future. I recommend that the Admission Committee undertake the identification and analysis of the features of college life at Rhodes that are most important to particular segments of the market. A series of focus group conversations with representatives of the various communities of color (from both the campus community and off campus as well) might be organized to identify useful recruitment strategies and to help describe the niche Rhodes College fills for different groups of students segmented by race, gender, ethnicity, lifestyle; by income category; and by geographical area within the broad academic divisions of social science, humanities, business, and natural science.

I have no information about admission criteria and the use of test scores in your admission process. Some faculty expressed a desire to see more students admitted who have special talents, or strong commitments to a particular field of inquiry. Of course, the issue of test scores continues to be debated. How current admission criteria affect the recruitment and retention of African American, Latino and American Indian students should be reviewed by the admission committee and changes proposed, if necessary.

While efforts to increase the numbers of black undergraduates continue, efforts to look at underrepresentation more broadly are essential to achieving diversity. I recommend that the college aggressively work to develop ties to the Asian communities in locales where affluent, high achieving students reside. A review of Rhodes’ programs, activities, and influences might yield a good basis for appealing to this sector of the population over time. (See enclosed article.)

The availability of scholarships to help meet enrollment targets will continue to be limited. However, students of color are not all financially needy. The question is “What makes Rhodes College appealing to high achieving students who have little or no need? Has sufficient attention been given to that population? I recommend that interaction with the “minority” social elites of Memphis and other nearby cities (including Chicago and St. Louis) be expanded. Faculty and students of color can be very helpful. (Note: A Latino faculty member reported that he has never been asked to sit on any diversity committee, nor has he been invited to offer suggestions on the recruitment of Latino students. That is not good.)

Students who are eligible for need-based aid should come from all racial/ethnic groups—White, Black, Asian, American Indian and Latino/Hispanic. Financial aid implications are obvious but may be off-set by the pursuit of federally funded “talent identification” programs of NIH, NSF, etc., and private foundations. I do NOT recommend that you package black students who are eligible for need-based aid any differently that you package other needy students. Instead, I would rather encourage you to seek additional merit-based scholarship funding to attract high achieving African American students. The Memphis Scholars Program is a good example. Perhaps Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation and Mellon Foundation grants can also be pursued

I heard strong objection to the Memphis Scholars Program raised by students from the “Petition Group, such as, “We need more *diversity* and it’s always defined too narrowly in terms of black and white.” and “It lowers our standards as a College since the requirements for THAT scholarship are lower than for the other merit-based scholarships Rhodes offers.” When I responded, “Are the criteria for admission to Rhodes College lowered for the MSP?” Response: “Not really.” Then I asked, “Do you think that this is the beginning, or the end of Rhodes’ diversity effort?” The students seemed to become more accepting of the MSP as a component of a long-term strategy. That point accepted, they then criticized the MSP as being too small an effort. I agreed that it might be a “baby step” but still a step in the right direction. They nodded in general agreement.



One other point was made during that exchange about Rhodes' obligation to Memphis. I observed that both the white male Director of Safety and an African American professor had separately told me of their past history with Rhodes College while growing up in Memphis: neither had felt welcome on the campus; Both are valued members of this community now. I left this meeting feeling that students want to engage these issues, to discuss them forthrightly with their peers, with faculty and administrators. It really is important to challenge the perception that diversity = lower standards; and the sense that serving the community is a "nice thing to do", but is not a duty owed to the community

### The Employment of Non-Academic Personnel

Because of the number of people that I needed to speak with on my visit, I was able to spend less than half an hour learning about the employment and recruitment procedures for staff and administrative employees of the College. I feel that a more complete review of these procedures should be undertaken by the group charged with overseeing the diversity effort for the campus. The following reflects the information I did gather, and my suggestions for follow up.

The College has a workforce of about 500 people including faculty, staff, part-time and temporary employees. The campus dining services and bookstore personnel are employed contractually by outside vendors. While the human resources department collects information on race and gender on a voluntary basis from applicants, this information is not readily available in summary form for review. I strongly suggest that the senior administrators should be provided an annual report on the race and gender of the workforce by job level and contain data on: (1) the number of hires by department, (2) the race and gender of the applicant pool, with a detailed description of the recruitment activity undertaken, and (3) the results of the process.

The question of whether the College wants to develop its own version of an "affirmative action plan" should be revisited. I am not suggesting that goals and timetables are essential, but I do believe that it is critically important that the administration devise a

method of oversight to ensure that adequate attention is being paid to Rhodes' legal obligation to be an equal opportunity employer.

While turnover may be low, there are some opportunities to make new hires or to promote from within. HR policies governing recruitment/searches, hiring, and promotion should be reviewed to determine whether they have the unintended effect of closing off access to mid-level positions and/or certain kinds of jobs. Moreover, unit managers should be held accountable for making good faith efforts to diversify the workforce.

The concentration of Blacks in the positions of housekeeping, and grounds is explicable, but efforts should continue to diversify these work units so long as they are accompanied by efforts to increase diversity at middle and upper levels of the organization.

Even though the College may benefit from current employees recommending Rhodes as an employer to their family members and friends, hiring managers must be vigilant and not allow the hiring of applicant with a "family connection" to dilute the commitment to a more diversified workforce. The most recent open positions in the housekeeping department were filled by children of current housekeepers. While there is nothing wrong with these employment decisions, if the same preference is extended to family members in upper level administrative positions, the effect would obviously raise the question "How open is the hiring process at Rhodes College?" or stated differently, is Rhodes College really an equal opportunity employer?

Competitive pay rates for all employees continue to be important. "Minority" candidates have been difficult to locate in many professional fields technology. Less than competitive salaries will make it more difficult to pursue qualified applicants in Memphis and the surrounding region.

In summary, without a system that demands accountability and data to enable monitoring of employment activity to occur, the administration is dependent upon the individual commitment of persons of good will to forward the diversity objectives of the College's

leadership. The concentration of black employees in service roles is not a problem because their work is not valued. Rather, it is objectionable because it reflects a lack of commitment to the goals of integration and diversity. There is simply no excuse for the failure to locate and hire people of color in accounting, public relations, information technology, development, etc. .

### “Minority” Faculty Recruitment

In addition to an emphasis on increasing the number of black faculty, tenured or in the tenure-track, the diversity goal dictates that the issue of “underrepresentation” be addressed as well. If Rhodes College is to become more multicultural, then the recruitment of women and men of color should be encouraged and recognized. Thus, the hiring of a South Asian, a Latina, or a Chinese scholar to the faculty should be celebrated. Apparently, however, some students and faculty perceive that the hiring of other minorities is not valued at Rhodes. As was stated to me, “You only get credit for hiring an African American.”

Clearly, the recruitment of faculty of color will have a major impact on the recruitment and retention of students of color. This is no easy task. It requires persistence, flexibility, creativity, accountability, and hard work. The higher education community MUST more actively promote the advantages of college teaching as a career to our talented “minority” youth. (Grant possibility???) Volumes have been written, studies undertaken and conferences held on this topic. Included with this report is a recently published article for your review. The recruitment AND retention of black faculty merits special consideration. The black faculty you currently have at Rhodes College are an impressive lot. I would hope that you find ways to retain them as you move forward.

I suggest that Rhodes College make an aggressive effort to seek funding for a teaching post-doc program, an expanded dissertation fellowship program, and a special initiative for faculty from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) –perhaps a two year grant to teach one course a semester while completing a research project or a

publication. The HBCU proposal could be appealing because the faculty participant would agree to return to his/her home institution eligible for promotion, or tenure—not to be lured away by Rhodes College.

Perhaps it will also be useful for Rhodes to formalize a “Target of Opportunity” program to accelerate minority faculty recruitment. As a small liberal arts college, Rhodes should be attractive to junior faculty. By knowing who is in the pipeline, tracking “minority” doctoral students, and communicating an interest in them BEFORE they complete their work, Rhodes College might be successful in recruiting a few of them. Successful recruitment of folk of color is often a function of personal contacts which depend on faculty interest and initiative.

Might Rhodes arrange to cross list courses with a neighboring institution and shuttle students back and forth to take classes? Duke University has a good relationship with its neighboring HBCU, North Carolina Central University. Some Duke faculty, black and white, teach courses at Central and vice versa; some of their students take classes at Duke. This year Duke received a grant to support a “shuttle program” with its archrival, UNC. The “Robertson (grantor) Scholars” program provides scholarships at both institutions and provides transportation between the campuses so students can register for any course of their choosing not available at their own school.

## INTEGRATION AND RETENTION

As discussed earlier, diversity and integration are two separate issues. Diversity focuses on increasing numbers, while integration focuses on incorporation, involvement, on satisfying and rewarding encounters with informal and formal social systems, and equal access to resources for support. Successful integration leads to high retention.

Successful retention is viewed in the literature as “more an issue of institutional reform, a willingness to provide the student services in tune with the student’s needs and develop the institutional environment in which all students, regardless of background, can

flourish.” (NASPA, p. 13) Approaches to retention can vary from a “need-specific intervention” that focuses on one or more student needs such as recruitment, admissions, and orientation, to more comprehensive strategies grounded in research on high-risk students that consider multiple factors such as academic adjustment, financial aid, cultural fit, and alienation. The ultimate stage of institutional commitment to the success of black or other minority students is evidenced by a clearly articulated statement of student recruitment and retention goals and a campus that, as a whole, becomes involved in creating an environment of support and encouragement from pre-admission through post graduation activities. Obviously, in this environment of support all students are benefited and the institution becomes even more appealing to prospective students of color.

Beyond the legal/political issue of racial integration is the generic concept of “ecological integration,” wherein the issues of “climate” – a term used to describe how it feels to live and work in a particular environment – are considered. Every institution I know of is struggling with the question of how to make diversity work to the benefit of everyone involved – how to make the climate supportive of everyone. With so much to learn, without precedents to follow, each institution has to chart its own course. Rhodes College has strong leadership and committed faculty and students to undertake the journey.

I do know that “minority” communities are no longer satisfied with simply getting people of color into “majority” institutions. Sometimes the experience is simply too damaging to those who cannot “fit in.” For those who decide that it is too hard a battle to fight, it is easier to just leave. Hence, the problem of retaining those we work so hard to recruit. The academic success of students is a major concern, and degree completion is certainly the most important measure of that success. But the “minority” community –parents, friends, significant others—also want to see their children *thrive* in the college environment during the best years of their lives.

How successful are African American students at Rhodes College? Do they graduate with honors, participate in scholarly activities, engage in competitive arenas outside of athletics, do they interact freely and frequently with their peers and with faculty in informal, social learning situations? What do we know about those who really are successful as Rhodes students vs. those who just manage to stay in, but hate it on most days vs. those who just leave? What characteristics do they share? What distinguishes them? Could their success or lack thereof have been predicted? And most important, what interventions might be made at Rhodes that can make a difference? If these questions cannot be readily answered, I recommend an initiative to find the answers.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRATION

The study of integration has been pivotal in areas of higher education research on student retention. Academic integration is defined as “strong affiliation with the college academic environment, both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.”

### The Curriculum and African American Studies

I sensed a sincere interest in revising the curriculum. Indeed, there have been earlier efforts made, but they have languished for reasons that are not clear. Faculty seemed energized, excited, but wary about the availability of resources to accomplish a major revision at this time.

Clearly there are good examples of interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching found in the Centers and Programs. Apparently, a major issue is whether the administrative structure and the budgetary system will be modified to provide a more stable infrastructure to support such efforts.

A good deal of conversation was focused on the matter of an endowed Chair of African American Studies and the unsuccessful search. There is a “chicken or egg” dilemma here stated in terms of whether it is preferable to address the issues of interdisciplinary

instruction BEFORE creating another program of this type. Any academic with the background and experience sought for this position will want to have a discussion of resources, future direction and expectations clarified before accepting the position. Without knowing more than I do about the failed search, I sense that the College is not yet in a position to compete for a senior African American scholar in this area.

What can be done in the meantime? I concur with the recommendation of the search committee: attention should be immediately turned to the prospects of bringing more black faculty and faculty of color to the College and holding on to the ones you have. There is a possibility of changing the status of two individuals who have demonstrated their abilities and potential to achieve tenure at Rhodes. Additionally, there is the prospective African American female candidate in Biology who is highly recommended by the search committee. The appointment of any or all of these individuals to the regular faculty would send a powerful message to the community. A decision to hire a senior African American administrator will be reassuring to those who are very concerned about the institution's commitment to black students and to advancing the careers of black faculty as well.

While it is imperative that Rhodes College stabilizes the black faculty base with a reasonable and attainable number, it is important that the diversity imperative be acknowledged and encouraged in all searches. I recommend that the Dean of the College institute a procedure requiring an accounting of all the steps taken in the recruitment process to identify faculty of color and the results of the effort BEFORE a hire is concluded. Only after the Dean is satisfied that a "good faith effort" has been made should the search be brought to closure.

### The Role of Faculty

I enquired about a phenomenon that has received wide public attention in the academy: the minority (read black students) academic performance gap. Do African American students tend to perform lower than would be predicted on the basis of their past

performance, test scores, life experiences, etc.? No one seemed to know and I did not meet Kathleen Laakso, who might have some data to share. Several faculty members discussed the matter of variation in academic preparation that could be the source of frustration and anxiety for some black students. The concern was expressed in different ways: “Perhaps feelings of being under prepared accounts for some of the sensitivity,” someone observed. Another remarked that “schools are not equal; hence, the preparation students receive is not standardized, but we seem to ignore those differences.” The private school vs. public school distinction was noted. In any case, both the identification and amelioration of the problem result from close observation, good communication, and referral for assistance by some member of the faculty.

The few African American faculty at Rhodes complain that the support needed too often falls upon them or on the one overburdened black administrator. Even when more black faculty and staff are hired, it will still be necessary for white faculty and staff to competently handle issues of integration. I would recommend finding out: (1) how easy is it for either black students or white faculty to start a conversation about poor performance? And who would be asked to help facilitate the transaction?. (2) What services are available to students experiencing difficulties? (3) Is the effectiveness of the services provided evaluated periodically?

I recommend that the academic performance of black students be reviewed in relationship to their white peers. The review should consist of collecting and analyzing some quantitative data (GPA, numbers of incomplete grades given, visits to psychological counselors, contact with advisors, variances, etc.) and also collecting qualitative data from personal interviews and focus groups.

Achieving integration requires time—time for the awareness and appreciation of differences to be absorbed. The College may need to do more social engineering, for example, groupwork on class projects can be an excellent device IF the teacher facilitates, mediates disputes, and reinforces the notions of interdependence and mutual gain. Outside of the classroom service projects, intramural sports activities, the planning



and hosting of social/cultural events all contribute to the goal of reducing isolation and marginalization.

Issues of curriculum and pedagogy have surfaced. “The dynamics in the classroom and relationships with the faculty...are the most pressing problem[s],” wrote Dean Ackerman summarizing the outcomes of her focus group meeting with African American students. Claims of racial stereotyping, low expectations, racial insensitivity, prejudices influencing grading, chilly classroom climate, etc. are evidence of the most critical problems confronting Rhodes College.

Research has shown that white faculty are often very anxious about teaching and advising black students. Perhaps this derives from misperceptions, ignorance, and reluctance to interact with individuals whose personal characteristics, values, and interests are different from their own. Whatever the root causes, this inadequacy has to be overcome if the institution is seriously committed to becoming more diverse

Hate crimes while frightening and intimidating are sporadic and infrequent. Greater damage is done by persistent messages and experiences that demean the individual, her cultural heritage, and her potential for high achievement and success. Every faculty member I met decried such behavior, but no one acknowledged overhearing or observing any of the behaviors reported by the black students. I find that hard to accept. Revision of the Rhodes *Standards* may be in order to alert members of the community to their responsibility to be aware of and confront issues of disrespect and discrimination, including harassment and intimidation. And more is required.

I recommend that a Faculty Development Committee be charged with designing a program of education for faculty consisting of a variety of activities intended to address these issues. Having such a program available eliminates the excuse of “not knowing” and renders the faculty member subject to disciplinary action if a charge of discrimination, harassment or intimidation is brought against him/her. Faculty and

students of color should be invited to review, critique, and to participate in elements of the program.

Since mandatory sensitivity training for faculty has been proposed, I recommend that this initiative be institutionalized as “faculty development” activity that is normative and ongoing, as opposed to short term or “one-shot” training session. I think the need is to devote time and attention to the education of the faculty through workshops, with or without outside presenters, issue-oriented discussions during the mandatory faculty meetings, presentations by individual members of Rhodes faculty, presentations by departments of model programs initiated.

With due regard for academic freedom, the Dean’s Council should consider the issue of classroom climate and the faculty member’s responsibility for maintaining a healthy learning environment for all. Processes for seeking redress should be discussed and incorporated into the College’s grievance procedures. Penalties for serious infractions should be established and incorporated into the proposed statement of policy and procedures for handling complaints of discrimination, harassment or intimidation.

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION

### The Role of Student Affairs Staff

As has been noted before, social integration refers to personal/social success, including feeling connected with peers, staff, faculty, and overall campus social life. Although I learned relatively little about this topic during my visit, it was interesting to note that white students are members of BSA and other ethnic/cultural groups. That is not often the case on college campuses. However, the lack of widespread participation in cultural events and socials was also noted. Whether African American students accept invitations to departmental functions, attend faculty dinners, etc. is of interest but I have no data on this. Clearly, black faculty and staff feel responsible for the social and academic well being of African American students. Since black faculty are so few in number, there is a

desire to see administrative support provided to relieve them of the burden. Hence, I support the request of BSA to create a senior level administrative post to oversee and assist in this work. One caution is in order: one person cannot attend to all matters related to successfully integrating African American students, faculty and staff into the culture of Rhodes College. It is quite likely that additional staff will need to be hired or the duties of other personnel redefined as well.

It is worth noting here that differences *within* groups are of increasing importance as socioeconomic class distinctions result in varied customs, traditions, values, language, styles, social interaction patterns, and dietary habits among people of African descent. I learned that a few African American students do not participate in BSA - a reflection of the variation I have noted

Many African American students are the first generation in their family to attend an historically, and predominantly white college or university. If the family lacks familiarity with such institutions, and are ambivalent about sending their children to these places, then the students are at a distinct disadvantage, because they cannot rely on the family for the kind of information and support they need in learning to negotiate the new environment. Therefore, in designing new student orientation programs, I recommend that sessions be developed specifically for minority parents (and other parents of first generation to attend college students). For those parents who may not attend, other means must be found to communicate with them.

Off campus orientation programs for parents may also be viewed as a recruitment activity if significant others can also be invited: siblings, relatives, pastors, and younger children. My experience tells me that Black parents have serious questions and appreciate the opportunity to ask them in the homogeneous group setting. Families play a significant role in determining a student's persistence in college. Student Affairs staff would play very important roles in these programs.

Once a student is admitted, course placement and advisement are critically important functions. How well are they working at Rhodes? For all groups or for SOME? Are “students at risk” identified early on? That category may include first generation to college kids, athletes, and students with highly varied academic backgrounds, students from less competitive high schools, etc. The point is that the identification of those students enables special services to be established to catch them before it’s too late. Even the process of dropping/adding courses provides opportunity for unconscious bias to influence the advice given and the actions allowed. What safeguards are in place in case stereotypes are at work?

Does Rhodes College have an “early warning system” that detects poor performance? What interventions are available to assist faculty and students in dealing with the possibility of failure? Psychological counseling, academic counseling, advising, tutoring, career planning, volunteer activity, paid employment on or off campus, all serve to ensure the success of students once admitted.

It may be useful to study how the experience of the financially needy student differs from the experience of others. The objective of such a study is to determine whether an unintended consequence of being in need of financial assistance reduces or even eliminates the possibility of fully engaging in the life of the College. For example, can such students participate in May-mester (the opportunity to study outside of the US which has an additional \$4500 cost)?

### The Need for a Senior African American Administrator...

The transformative work of diversity and integration engages and impacts every sector of the institution both vertically and horizontally. People need guidance and direction, support and collaboration; policies and processes require coordination and accountability.

That there is only one person of color, an African American woman, in a visible administrative role is a problem –for the overburdened individual, for African American

students who need more than one person can possibly give, and a problem for African American faculty whose career advancement may be jeopardized as they try to fill in the gaps.

I urge the creation of a new position at the senior administrative level to lead, coordinate, assess, and champion diversity. The College should seek a very experienced individual who has or is eligible for faculty rank to work extensively with academic and student affairs to oversee the creation and implementation of the Rhodes College diversity plan. S/he should give particular attention to those recommendations that bear on academic searches, curricular changes, faculty development activity academic support systems, admission and recruitment efforts, and should develop and implement structures and processes to enable, support, and assess the diversity work of faculty and staff.

Among those faculty and staff I met, there is a consensus that Rhodes College needs a senior black administrator and that the position should report directly to the President for now, with a dotted line to the Dean of Faculty. Eventually the role could become that of Associate Dean or perhaps even a deanship will be appropriate. For the time being, it is preferable that the reporting point signal to the community that the incumbent has derivative authority from the President.

#### ...And Additional Personnel Changes

The current Director of Multicultural Affairs position should be upgraded to an Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. The title change is important because it conveys an institutional commitment to diversity as a fact of life at Rhodes College. Multicultural issues must cut across every aspect of student life and cannot be consigned to a corner of student affairs overseen and managed by one person. The incumbent in this position can ensure that every unit in the student affairs division includes diversity work in their day-to-day activity and that they are accountable for doing so. S/he will offer advice and counsel, assist other members of the student affairs staff in implementing co-curricular educational programs for students, training programs for administrative staff, orientation

programs for students and staff. In short, everyone has to develop cross-cultural competency and a program of professional development activity may be needed to accomplish this objective. The cultivation of relations with Black alumnae could be the responsibility of the Assistant Dean. Advising student groups and serving as a point of information and referral for individual students who want to initiate projects but need support and assistance could be incorporated into the role.

I must emphasize the importance of designing “diversity positions” so that they contribute to the long-term career advancement of the incumbents. A “director of multicultural affairs” has less chance of becoming a vice president for student affairs than does the incumbent in the mainstream line relationship who proves to be capable of ascending the ranks.

Finally, I urge you to consider the creation of the position of College Ombudsperson. This could be a part time role for someone who is highly regarded by all sectors of the community for his or her wisdom, judgment, openness, and respect for varying perspectives and points of view. The ombudsperson would need to have the skill and capacity to help parties articulate their concerns, to consider alternative perspectives, to seek rational solutions.

This recommendation is informed by my experience as participant or observer of organizational change efforts that inevitably induce or bring to the surface some degree of conflict. The effective management of conflict is not always appreciated until a crisis emerges. I detected that some faculty and students don’t feel safe enough to verbalize their position on the issues of diversity. The remark “I can’t get penalized for what I don’t say” is one of my concerns. For students, staff and administrators, an ombudsperson is a designated neutral or impartial dispute resolution practitioner whose major function is to provide confidential and informal assistance to all constituents of the college community. Having an ombuds office provides a safe, confidential outlet for complaint handling, for the resolution of interpersonal misunderstandings and disputes as well as for helping those with complaints about academic or administrative issues to

resolve their concerns fairly, and if possible, informally, reducing the need for adjudication of disputes by disciplinary bodies.

The responsibility for drafting a policy and crafting procedures to address and resolve complaints of harassment and discrimination could be developed in this office. The ombudsperson would hear concerns of any member of the community and seek to resolve them through the uses of facilitation, negotiation and /or mediation.

### An Official Rhodes Diversity Policy Statement

Finally, I would recommend using President Troutt's statement(s) on diversity and other relevant documents as a basis for crafting an Official Rhodes Diversity Policy Statement of principles and goals for the institution. The drafting should be done by a "striving for diversity" leadership group consisting of trustees students, faculty, administration and staff-- and put before the community for affirmation. Once this process is concluded, I suggest that some annual event be organized to celebrate and recognize those members of the community who have been outstanding in their efforts to realize the multicultural vision of Rhodes College. And finally, I recommend that work proceed on the development of a plan for operationalizing the policy and its goals. The extra effort could be coordinated by the above-referenced "leadership group" under the direction of the proposed senior African American administrator.