COMMITTEE FOR A MULTICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

Minutes of the Meeting of March 16, 1999

PRESENT: Professors Killion, McGowan, Megginson, Schmerl, and Wang
GUEST: Professor Rhetaugh Dumas

1. The minutes of the meeting of February 15, 1999, were approved without emendation.

2. Professor Killion introduced Dr. Rhetaugh Dumas, Vice President Emerita, Dean Emerita, and Professor of Nursing. Professor Dumas began by affirming her belief that diversity is enriching for all: the diversity of opinions, perspectives, background, and insights of members of minority groups enriches the experience of members of the majority, indeed of all participants in the social, cultural, and intellectual interaction that characterizes a vibrant university. We should make special efforts to recruit minorities, therefore, not for their sake but for ours. It is true that differences sometimes frighten people; search committees, although they may not want to admit it, are sometimes made uncomfortable by the prospect of having to acknowledge differences of the kind diversity inevitably entails. And it is often difficult to speak candidly. She has found that whites are often worried that minorities will be hostile them, especially if the conversation is candid.

So it is important that chief executives--at the University, deans and department chairs--believe in what diversity can contribute to the total life of their units, and that they help to build an environment in which concerns of this kind can be addressed. What is needed in such instances is leadership. Minority affairs offices cannot be expected to provide this. To stimulate recruitment, sufficient incentives have to be provided, not only to minorities to apply and want to come, but also to the faculty already here, to participate in such recruitment. At the same time, leadership may also include protecting minority faculty from themselves, e.g., from feeling that they ought to, are obligated to, be heavily involved in recruiting and counseling undergraduates. Junior faculty, especially, may need to be reminded of the realities of promotion and tenure decisions.

When Dr. Dumas was Dean of the School of Nursing, she had the opportunity to examine lists of candidates for open positions on the faculty and thus to make sure that minorities were on those lists. If none were, she would send the list back to the search committee. Ultimately, the result was that the percentage of minority faculty at the School of Nursing reached about 16% during her tenure as Dean, exceeding the percentage for the University as a whole.

Dr. Dumas said that, if efforts to recruit minority students are to succeed, it is critical to have minority faculty. Prospective students need to see at least some faculty members
who look like them. But she was aware that minority faculty members are often overburdened with such extra responsibilities, and she was convinced, at any rate, that majority--white--faculty members have to see the recruitment of minorities, whether students or faculty, as their problem to solve. In answer to a question raised by Professor McGowan, who is responsible for recruiting minority students to the Dental Hygiene Program, Dr. Dumas emphasized that recruitment ought to involve minority students as recruiters, either from the Program in question or from a related field. Professor Schmerl asked whether she thought such student recruiters should be paid for their efforts. Dr. Dumas said no, that this was something minority students could be asked to take on as part of their general commitments.

What was known in the nineteen sixties as "institutional racism," Dr. Dumas said, is alive and well today. The call for "equality," in the name of "fairness," she said, doesn't make for fairness as she sees it. What she wants is equity, she said. So what can institutions do? They can begin to understand that there is no substitute for diversity. If you have an outstanding faculty member, someone whom another institution is trying to recruit, why would you let that person go? Meet the competition! Further, Dr. Dumas believes in "growing your own": if you do attract outstanding graduate students and they demonstrate that they are just as good as or even better than you had hoped, why, if you have an opening in your department, would you let another institution be the beneficiary of your hard work? As Dean, she was able to bring some people in with split appointments between instruction and research; again, it may take leadership to bring such arrangements to fruition, but the opportunities exist.

The Committee expressed its appreciation to Professor Dumas for her views and her candor.

3. Reports and Announcements.

Professor Schmerl reported that he had checked with the SACUA office earlier that afternoon, and only three responses to the 32 questionnaires he had sent out had been received so far. He said that he would ask the SACUA office to send reminders to the deans of those units (Architecture and Urban Planning, Art and Design, Education, U-M Flint--College of Arts and Sciences, Law, and Natural Resources and Environment) who had promised to participate in the survey and that he expected to interview. He asked other members of the Committee to do the same. Professor Wang said that he would pursue the matter with his department in the College of Engineering. Professor Megginson said that he had gotten one response from an LS&A Executive Committee member, had already interviewed that person, and had learned a great deal already, which he would eventually incorporate in his written report. Professor Schmerl reminded the Committee that responses should be sent to the SACUA office which would remove any names inadvertently included, in light of the Committee's promises regarding anonymity and confidentiality.

Professor Megginson announced that the annual Native American Pow Wow is scheduled for March 27-28 (Saturday-Sunday) at the Chrysler Arena. It will include dancing, music, displays, and various artefacts for sale. There will be an entrance fee of perhaps $10.00. Professor Megginson invited everyone to attend: the spectacle of over a thousand participants will be memorable.

5. The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m. The next meeting will be held at 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, March 30, 1999, in the Conference Room of the Student Activities Building.