

Report of the Task Force on Institutional Racism Colby College 14 April 1999

History of the Task Force

The Task Force on Institutional Racism, hereafter referred to simply as "the task force," was formed by President Cotter in response to a student letter of September 7, 1998. The student's letter detailed her case of bringing charges of racial harassment against another student during the spring of 1998 and the handling of that case by the official College channels. The student's letter concluded that, in addition to the incident of racial harassment, the manner in which the case was handled by the College was, itself, an act of institutional racism. The student's letter outlined fourteen specific measures that she believed would redress existing shortcomings in policy and procedure in official College documents as well as improve future conditions for racial minorities on campus (See pages 3-5 below).

Several members of the Colby community who were "Cc'd" on the student's letter grew concerned when there was no significant response to her letter from senior administrators to whom it was addressed. At the urging of one faculty member in particular, President Cotter agreed to discuss the content of the letter and its implications for the community at the October 1998 Campus Community Committee (CCC) meeting. Two things came out of that CCC meeting. First, although students, staff, and faculty at the meeting desired immediate action by the administration on the fourteen measures suggested in the student's letter, President Cotter instead proposed the formation of the task force, being convened by one administrator, one student, and one faculty member. Second, President Cotter charged the task force with addressing five issues that he felt covered the basic areas of the student's initial fourteen suggestions. The five areas were: (1) rewriting procedural standards, (2) training of staff, faculty and students, (3) curricular issues, (4) affirmative action and retention, and (5) campus support networks. Membership on the task force was opened to all members of the Colby community.

Deliberations of the Task Force

Once the task force convened, its initial conversation focused on the mission of the task force. Many members of the task force wanted to be very clear about the mission and extent of power and influence of the task force before beginning work. The concern was whether the task force's recommendations would carry significant enough weight to bring about effective institutional change. The fact that an ad hoc task force had to be formed for the purpose of addressing institutional racism and, that this task force was given no formal authority, is itself further evidence of institutional structures that act as barriers to progress. The task force remains concerned about this issue since its institutional status and power remain unclear.

In the course of discussing the mission of the task force, the task force's title also became an issue. Since the student's letter specifically addressed institutional racism, many believed that the title and mission of the task force should reflect that. Some did not understand the meaning of the term, "institutional racism" including President Cotter, who, in addition, found the term to be

needlessly inflammatory, and asked for clarification. The task force therefore spent more time discussing these objections and the meaning of the term, and chose to keep the title, Task Force on Institutional Racism, as it is an accurate reflection of the expressed concerns and is, in actuality, a term with great currency among those who study race and racism in the United States.

From there, the primary area of discussion in task force meetings concerned whose labor should be expended in order to bring about the institutional changes suggested by the student. At issue was another instance of what many on the task force perceived as institutional racism: the expectation that racial minorities are primarily responsible for making institutional changes that eradicate discriminatory practices and are further responsible for the education of the community. There was a strong sense among members of the task force that the College's senior administrators should themselves be working on implementing the very changes that the student had so carefully articulated in her letter which were all strongly supported by the task force.

In addition, members of the task force agreed that the five areas identified by the President were in some ways a "step backward" from the student's original list of suggestions. That is, whereas she had formulated fourteen concrete and practical steps that would improve policy and practices and that could be implemented relatively quickly and easily by the College, the five areas of concern identified by the President were abstractions from those concrete issues.

These two concerns—that the labor necessary for making institutional changes should come from senior administrators, and that the student's letter already contained several concrete steps to bring those changes about—led the members of the task force to conclude that we should bring the administration back into the process of making the changes already put before them. The consensus was that our next step would be simply to compose a report and send the issues back to the President for him and his administration to tackle, in consultation with the task force or the standing committee. In short, the task force agreed that the onus must rest with the administration to do the brunt of the work necessary to make change happen.

Recommendations

The Task Force on Institutional Racism therefore recommends that the administration now tackle the fourteen points so carefully outlined in the student's letter:

1. That [the student] receive a formal apology from [the four senior College administrators named], each acknowledging their complicity in the processes of injustice and institutional racism and that [they state] that [the student] did in fact endure racial harassment.
2. That the policies for racial harassment cases be reviewed and revised (by a committee with student, faculty and administrative representatives) so that:
 - a. The chair of the Harassment Advisory Group (HAG) does not have the ability to usurp power and deny students the right to pursue their cases;

- b. Protocol and procedures for filing complaints are CLEARLY outlined in the student handbook, SEPARATELY from the section on sexual harassment (as it reads now it appears as if racial harassment is, at best, an addendum and at worst an afterthought);
 - c. A separate Racial Harassment Advisory Group (RHAG) be formulated;
 - d. The Chair of HAG is NOT the same person as the chair of the RHAG and that this person be an administrator or faculty member of color;
 - e. The proceedings for hearings be clearly outlined in the student handbook and that all participants in any given hearing are given a copy of these guidelines before the proceedings begin;
 - f. The proceedings of hearings are either video or audio-taped so that administrators not present can not claim ignorance as a defense against injustice and institutional racism;
 - g. That in the instance that students do not feel comfortable going to the chair of the HAG, a campus ombudsman be available to hear students' cases and advise them on the various options available to them;
 - h. That appeals for cases arising at the end of the Spring term be allowed to hold over to the next academic term so that the right of the victim to a fair trial is given priority over the perpetrator's right to a speedy trial;
 - i. That the hate speech code be revised and rewritten with stronger language and with clearly outlined penalties for different levels and types of violations.
3. That a full-time Affirmative Action officer (person of color) be appointed.
4. That, in addition to the Dean of Intercultural Affairs, there be at least one more person of color in the Dean's Office Staff.
5. That the College make a greater commitment to the recruitment of minority faculty and that a minority post-doc be offered in every department as a way to bring such candidates to campus. That there be a review of the attrition of minority faculty at Colby in order to reveal a possible pattern of discrimination.
6. That every member of the Dean's Office and Financial Aid Office administrative staff be required to participate in diversity "training" and that this training be ongoing, substantive, and rigorous.
7. That diversity training be offered to other interested members of the staff and faculty at no or low cost and that this training be made available on an ongoing basis.
8. That a position be created that is half-time administrative, half-time faculty to serve the interests of minority students.
9. That a Dean of Minority Recruitment position be reinstated. The fact that this position was quietly removed after Sherman Rosser's resignation is indicative of the College's attitude toward minority student recruitment.
10. (a) That the Pugh Center be formally recognized (through dedication or plaque) as the result of a fight for recognition on Colby's campus by students of color. (b) That the "demands" of these students (available in their original documents) be reviewed by a committee to see what progress has been made and what other challenges remain.
11. That the faculty residence program be constructed so that at least one faculty member of color lives on campus at all times.

12. That the physical environment of students, dorms, and campus buildings be more representative of all students. Currently there is little artwork or posters by artists of color or people of color.
13. (a) That a Minority Affairs Representative be added to student government and (b) a standing all-campus committee on minority affairs be added to work toward the building of a more equitable campus climate.
14. That the diversity requirement be changed to be more substantive. As it currently stands students often complete this requirement without even knowing it.

While we have chosen to modify, specify, or add to some of the original fourteen suggestions for reasons of clarity, the task force supports all of the recommendations initially made in the student's letter; lack of specific comment on any particular item should not be taken as a lack of endorsement of that point. The task force's list contains two designations. The first designation (*) includes items that we believe can be implemented by the College by September of 1999 or January 2000 at the latest. The second designation (!) includes items that we believe are of the highest importance and that will, in the long run, make the largest and most significant difference in the College's cultural milieu regarding issues of race.

1. The task force concurs.*
2. The task force concurs. (a) Furthermore, the task force recommends "racial harassment" be defined in the student handbook. Further, we recommend that the primary responsibility of members of the HAG and the RHAG [see 2 (c) and (d)] should be to aid and enable students to pursue cases if they so choose. This would include distributing written information to inform potential complainants of all of their legal rights and options inside and outside of the College. This information should also be widely distributed and made available in the Dean of Students Office, the Health Center, the Security Office, from hall staff, and other such places. (f) The task force concurs that audio or video recording of hearings would insure fairness to all parties involved in any action and would further protect the College.*!
3. The task force concurs.*!
4. The task force understands this item to mean that the Dean of Intercultural Affairs should not be expected to carry out such important and vital work without additional staffing. The commitment to increasing such staffing indicates the College's commitment to aspects of student life we feel are extremely significant. !
5. The task force applauds the College's Minority Scholar in Residence Program and recommends that it be reinstated as soon as is possible. !
6. The task force concurs.
7. The task force recommends that the College commit to a five-year plan, during which time all faculty, staff, and senior administrators will, at regular intervals, participate in substantive, rigorous, and professional diversity training in anti-racism, especially focusing on institutional racism as opposed to interpersonal relations. As workplaces are liable under harassment and hate crime statutes, the College has a compelling and reasonable interest to require that its employees understand and abide by applicable laws. The task force recommends the following as possible contacts for training various segments of our community:
 - o Dynamic Leadership, Contact: Amnita Njeri

- Empowerment Workshops, Contact: Dr. Patricia Arrendondo
- Equity Institute
- Cross Cultural Consultation; Contact: Patti deRosa
- Dr. Andrea Ayvazian, Mount Holyoke College
- Dr. Barbara Tannenbaum, Brown University

The task force further recommends that students, trustees, and all other non-employee members of the Colby community receive anti-racism training.

The task force recognizes issues pertinent to an elite liberal arts college in Maine and the Waterville area and recommends that these be given attention in arranging such training. Such training should give particular attention to ethnic, race, and class issues in Maine, for example, Franco-American, Native American (Abenaki, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, Micmac), recent immigrant groups, and rural and working class issues.

8. The task force concurs. !
9. The task force recommends that the position of Associate Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid and Director of Multicultural Enrollment be reinstated. *!
10. The task force concurs. Further (a) The task force recommends that a plaque or other appropriate display commemorating the crucial role of Colby's students of color in the realization of the Pugh Center be commissioned or created by the Dean of Students office by September 1999 and that a ceremony accompany the installation of the display. (b) The task force feels that it is important to honor the investment made by past groups of students of color in matters of race on Colby campus. We recommend that the proposals for change on Colby campus made by students of color in 1993-1994 be revisited by the future standing committee on institutional racism [see 13(b)] in conjunction with the Dean of Multicultural Affairs and the Dean of Students and that, should they be recommended based on that review, appropriate actions be undertaken by the College. *!
11. The task force recommends that faculty of color be given first consideration when they apply for the faculty residence program and, provided they meet the criteria set out by the College, that they be given priority assignments to on-campus residences. *!
12. The task force recommends that this question be taken up by the Dean of Housing, that current decor be reviewed, and that funds be made available to purchase works by and/or depicting people of color and their cultures. *!
13. (a) The task force supports a motion soon to be made at Presidents' Council that defines the duties and responsibilities of a Racial Minority Affairs Representative in student government. (b) The task force recommends that its report, along with other future documents, be posted on Colby's public and internal web site. The task force further recommends that it become a standing College committee falling under the aegis of the Academic Affairs Committee with the understanding that some issues would be referred to the College Affairs Committee for action. Committee members shall be trained in or committed to anti-racism and the committee should be in place for effective action during the 1999-2000 academic year. The committee's meetings should be held as open forums.
14. The task force recommends that the faculty, in conjunction with the task force, revisit the College's diversity requirement and give consideration to both its content and structure.

In particular, the task force would like to recommend that the diversity requirement be changed to focus on courses that examine from a critical perspective systems of privilege and oppression with regard to race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation. The faculty should consider increasing the diversity requirement to more than one course. !

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The task force has been keenly aware throughout its deliberations that some, although not all, of the suggestions and recommendations being made in this report will require significant resources. We strongly urge the College to demonstrate its commitment to being an anti-racist institution by making these resources available.