

Students of Color United for Change
Colby College
re: Multiculturalism at Colby
April 6, 1994

To the Trustees of Colby College,

We, the Students of Color United for Change, truly believe that there lies within Colby the potential to create and maintain a multicultural and diverse community. It is our hope that such a vision is sincerely desired by the college. The college's statement on diversity and its commitment to a rigorous recruitment plan designed to open the Colby experience to more students of color implies that this vision is shared. While this openness to multiculturalism is both commendable and comforting, this attitude leads many to assume that Colby has done all that is possible to ensure a multicultural environment for those students who are interested in exploring the possibilities of multiculturalism. In a series of recent Campus Community Committee meetings African-American, Latino/a-American and Asian-American students were invited to alert the campus to issues of concern. At one of these meetings students of color brought forth a presentation that outlined the changes necessary at Colby. Out of this five point presentation one constant unequivocal theme was presented, that being a need for Colby to follow through on a commitment of diversity made to each and every matriculated student.

Whereas changes in the academic program and school policy are issues about which the Colby community has reached a consensus, one particular point of contention remains. The issue of creating a Multicultural House/Center has generated apprehension as well as support from different groups on campus. Much of the dialogue against the house/center stems from a misunderstanding of the concept of multiculturalism and the means in which this house/center shall serve the entire community. The most common misunderstanding is that such a house/center would be for the residential and educational enjoyment of those historically defined as minorities. The contemporary etymology of the word multicultural can be broken down to define many cultures, not just Black, Latino, or Asian. Being a minority does not automatically stamp one as multicultural nor does being in the majority exclude one from being multicultural; being multicultural is being aware of and appreciating other cultures, this is something of which all students should be a part. Multiculturalism, therefore excludes no one and includes everyone. The students of color united for change endorse this understanding of multiculturalism.

It is our belief that a Multicultural House/Center on campus would serve a dual yet distinct purpose. Its primary and most important identity would be to serve as a residential oasis for those students who have found that the mainstream dorm life has not provided for their diverse needs. The multicultural house would guarantee a commitment to a diversity of hall events and activities supported by hall staff and based on the understanding that no one culture would dominate dorm life. A multicultural house would provide a space in which the entire community agrees to shoulder the responsibility of educating and learning about diverse cultures. Students of all races, religions, creeds, and sexual preferences would be invited and welcomed into such an environment.

The secondary identity of the multicultural house/center would be to provide an educational service to the Colby community and to initiate multicultural dialogue among other residences. It is our vision to have a large space in this house referred to as a center in which events both social and educational would be held to the benefit of all. Such a center is almost akin to the Marson's multicultural room, except the center would be bigger, more accessible and more visible. The Multicultural House/Center would benefit the entire community in many ways. First it would provide a safe place for students who desire inter-cultural dialogue, mutual understanding and acceptance of differences as part of their college living experience. Second, the reality of a Multicultural House/Center would prepare the students of Colby today for a very real and multicultural world tomorrow. The house should be staffed by an adult member of the Colby community. This position could be filled by the person that President Cotter is asking the trustees to approve to help the new Dean of Intercultural Affairs. We also see the house being governed by a council of students who live in the dorm. This council would oversee the adherence of outlined community norms.

Many people have misinterpreted the idea of a Multicultural House/Center and as a result have likened it to the fraternities of the past or viewed the idea as separatist. However, unlike the fraternities, the Multicultural House/Center will be nonexclusionary, non-discriminatory; It will be committed to generating critical thinkers who are aware of the contributions, differences and values of the various cultures represented here at Colby. Colby, as a community dedicated to diversity and integration, has fallen short. It is our belief that the Multicultural House/Center would serve as a model for an all inclusive community reflexive of the larger world community.

We realize that careful research must go into finding what we believe is the right solution for Colby. While researching multicultural houses/centers at other schools is important, we urge you to look first at the Colby environment and work with the entire student body. In the mean time, we would like to see an existing residence hall space used as a multicultural housing option, as was done with the chem-free housing choice. Given this time of crisis, we fear inactivity on such a critical issue will result in the loss of many valued members of the Colby community as well as possibly hindering future recruitment. A cultural focal point, that allows students to expand their opportunities and experiences through exposure to different cultures, needs to be created here at Colby. By taking the time to find out the needs of the Colby community, we hope that a solution that is not only unique but also characteristic of Colby's commitment to personal growth, will be reached. We would like to thank you for taking the time to listen to our voices.

Yours Sincerely,
Students of Color United for Change

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