



Affirming our Actions

A historic moment for the College (the launch of a campaign to support our strategic plan) coincides with a more fundamentally historic moment for American higher education. I'm referring to the U.S. Supreme Court's endorsement of race-consciousness in college admissions.

The cases involving admission to the University of Michigan's undergraduate programs and law school affirm in a majority ruling the principles articulated in 1978 by a single justice, Lewis Powell. Powell argued that there were compelling educational reasons for colleges to take race into account in admitting students, but that the process must operate without fixed quotas. The majority opinion in the Michigan law school case, written by Sandra Day O'Connor, reinforces the idea that racial diversity is a compelling educational interest and adds that colleges can work toward building a "critical mass" of minority students on campus as long as the admission process focuses on the individual assessment of applicants.

Supported by the Powell decision, Williams dramatically remade itself for the better. U.S. minorities were 10 percent of the Class of 1977 and are almost 30 percent for the Class of 2007. At the same time, the academic talent of the student body has grown in every measure. We've expanded educational opportunity: Our curriculum is richer and our campus life more lively and varied. The diversity of the campus has enhanced our capacity for empathy and flexibility of mind, broadening what we know and how we know it. The education we offer all our students has been greatly improved.

For all these reasons, Williams, along with other colleges, had filed with the Supreme Court an amicus brief affirming these principles in the University of Michigan cases.

Supported even more strongly by the new rulings, we will continue in our admission process to individually assess applicants to build an entering class of great talent *and* great diversity. We will continue our programs designed to increase the number of students from underrepresented groups who pursue academic careers. We will review those programs to ensure they are in the spirit of the new court rulings, but our commitment to these programs and their goals remains firm.

Also unwavering is our commitment to recruit and retain a diverse faculty and staff, a goal we have met with less success despite considerable long-term effort. Among this year's faculty, 39 percent are women and 17 percent are people of color.

In the current hiring season we must recommit ourselves to hiring talented faculty *and* to increasing the faculty's diversity by working even harder to broaden each applicant pool and to ensure that every promising applicant of color receives the level of review he or she deserves.

We are compelled to pursue racial and other forms of diversity by the best of our history. This includes the call by President Paul Chadbourne in 1872 that the College "will not be rich enough until . . . able to bring the education [it offers] within the reach of the poorest young man in the land;" the admission of the College's first Black student, Gaius Charles Bolin, in 1885; the decisions in the 1960s to recruit more black students and to phase out fraternities; the subsequent move to coeducation; and the broader expansion of racial diversity in the 1980s under the leadership of President Frank Oakley.

We are also compelled by our future. The world that Williams exists to serve will grow even more diverse. For us to continue to prepare our students as leaders, we have to embody that growing diversity on our campus.

We have in this pursuit much encouragement. The best prospective students are attracted to diverse campuses. Our faculty and staff have long embraced this goal and worked hard toward it. Our alumni overwhelmingly support it as a requirement for the College in a world that they know all too well grows more complex by the year.

Our strategic plan, supported by The Williams Campaign, is designed to improve every aspect of the College. To achieve that lofty goal, the continued diversifying of our campus community must be woven into every change we make. True to the College's highest values and buoyed by these historic court rulings, let all of us at Williams recommit ourselves to the hard but vital work necessary to make that happen. Our success as a college truly depends on it.

—Morty Schapiro