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Yale lags in diversity goals

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STAFF REPORTER

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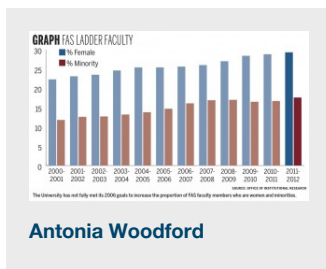
Despite administrators' efforts, the University is still trailing the goals for faculty diversity it outlined six years ago.

Yale launched a faculty diversity initiative in 2006 that set targets for hiring more women and minorities to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences by June 2013. The initiative called for the University to hire at least 30 new professors from minority backgrounds and at least 30 female professors specifically in the sciences and economics — fields in which women have historically been under-represented. But though Yale hired an additional 56 minority faculty and 30 women between the start of the initiative and November 2011, the University has retained only 22 and 18 of those new professors because of faculty departures and remains about one-third behind its numerical targets, said Frances Rosenbluth, deputy provost for social sciences and faculty development.

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With the current diversity initiative set to end in a little over a year, administrators turned their attention in September to the future of their diversity efforts, and both female scientists and minority faculty members interviewed said they feel Yale has room for improvement.

“When I came here [40 years ago] there were very, very few women on the faculty,” said Joan Steitz, Sterling Professor of molecular biophysics and biochemistry. “We have made some progress, but we haven’t made nearly enough progress. Yale does not go out of its way to take steps to diversify the faculty.”



GAUGING PROGRESS

While Yale has not matched its target diversity figures, the University has made progress over the past six years. When the current faculty diversity initiative began in the 2005-'06 academic year, 25.4 percent of FAS ladder faculty members were female and 14.7 percent were minorities, according to data from the Office of Institutional Research. Those figures have since risen to 29.3 percent for female faculty members and 17.6 percent for minorities.

But disparities also exist across academic disciplines and levels of ladder faculty appointments. The humanities contain the highest concentration of tenured female professors, at 30.2 percent, as compared to 24.8 percent in the social sciences, 18.8 percent in the biological sciences and 11.1 percent in the physical sciences, according to OIR data. In all areas except the physical sciences, there are lower percentages of minority faculty than women. There is also less diversity among tenured faculty than among term faculty like assistant professors.

While all eight female and minority faculty members interviewed said Yale's efforts to diversify the faculty are important, they had mixed views of how successful the University's actions have been.

Lynne Regan, a professor of molecular biophysics and biochemistry, said she believes the initiative has allowed the University to make more female senior faculty hires but has not affected the hiring of assistant professors. She added that the percentage of female senior faculty members in the sciences is still “clearly nowhere near” that of female undergraduate majors and doctoral students in those fields.

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Meg Urry, chair of the Physics Department, said the initiative has helped facilitate the hiring of women in her department and in other sciences.

“[Women] hired [through this initiative] turn out to be superstars much of the time,” Urry said. “To think that they wouldn’t have been part of our faculty, had we not had this little nudge to give them a chance, is appalling.”

FUTURE STEPS

Since September, a group of faculty members has met on a provost’s advisory committee to review Yale’s ongoing efforts toward faculty diversity and to develop a plan for increasing diversity moving forward, Rosenbluth said.

The council has not yet decided what form the new diversity initiative will take, Rosenbluth said, and whether the efforts would address faculty across the University or just the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. She said Yale might continue to set numerical diversity targets or designate a budget for diversity initiatives.

Provost Peter Salovey said administrators and council members are also considering whether to possibly appoint a deputy or associate provost to handle diversity issues. He and faculty members interviewed said Yale must focus on both hiring a diverse faculty and retaining those professors.

“We have to recognize that recruiting is just one strategy,” Salovey said. “We also need to mentor and develop talented female and minority faculty from within so that they are promoted to tenure positions.”

Members of the advisory council declined to comment for this article.

Yale is also part of a group of nine universities that meets annually to discuss issues related to diversity. Known as “MIT 9,” the organization was started by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology after a 1999 study on women in the sciences at MIT exposed disparities in salaries and other inequities between male and female faculty, said Hazel Sive, associate dean of MIT’s School of Science.

Members of MIT 9 have taken different approaches to diversity issues like those Yale is currently weighing. The University of Pennsylvania, for example, plans to allocate \$100 million to faculty diversification efforts over the next five years, said Lynn Lees, the university’s vice provost for faculty. Neither MIT nor Penn set numerical targets, administrators at the schools said.

LINGERING CHALLENGES

As Yale looks to the future composition of its faculty, the University must address “unconscious biases” in hiring practices and better meet the needs of female and minority faculty, professors interviewed said.

Several female faculty said they feel faculty hiring committees tend to rank male candidates above female ones, even when they have equally desirable qualifications — a phenomenon they say has been demonstrated in research.

Regan said she thinks this problem partly results from the limited number of women and minority candidates that apply for faculty positions. She said that if a faculty hiring committee is only considering one female or one minority candidate, the committee is more likely to view that person in terms of his or her gender or ethnicity rather than intellectual accomplishments.

Female faculty also said the limited availability of childcare at Yale can discourage women from pursuing long-term careers in academia, noting that it can take a year or more of waiting to receive a spot in University’s childcare centers.

Women beginning postdoctoral programs or entering their first faculty positions at an age when they may consider having children may feel a scientific career is incompatible with having a family because of Yale’s limited childcare offerings, said Megan King, an assistant professor of cell biology at the School of Medicine. Valerie Horsley, an assistant professor of molecular, cellular and developmental biology, said improving access to childcare would be the “biggest single action” Yale could take to increase the percentage of women in its faculty.

Minority faculty have also expressed concern that the University undervalues their work when it is not in the University’s more heavily researched areas, said Kamari Clarke, a professor of anthropology and African American studies who is black.

“Sometimes there is a lack of appreciation for the work that they do,” Clarke said. “Their work is classified in a particular way, but not within the mainstream.”

There are currently 672 ladder faculty members in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, according to data from OIR.

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yalengineer · 2 years ago

The problem isn't with hiring, it's retention. As mentioned, it's very difficult to have kids and to get tenure. In addition, there isn't a sufficient density of senior female mentors. Joan Steitz can't help every women professor's career.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›



lakia · 2 years ago

This is NOT 1955. It's really time to get on with it. Besides, as I recall, the Supreme Court has already ruled on this. Affirmative Action is O V E R.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›



Stephanie_Nichole · 2 years ago

The continued focus on race and gender through "affirmative action" programs promotes racism/sexism. Although they have good intentions, quotas for women or minorities keeps alive the idea that there are fundamental differences that need to be accounted for. As alum2001 noted, Yale should simply focus on hiring the best people for each position.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›



alum2001 · 2 years ago

This kind of politically correct nonsense makes me embarassed to be a Yale alumnus. Hire the best person, period. If there are not enough good minority/female candidates, then that says more about the minorities' and females' lack of interest/progress in a given field, than it does about Yale.

And Salovey's suggestion would be a total waste of money. As if there isn't enough affirmative action on campus already. Just more concessions to the diversity industry. Nothing is ever enough for the diversity industry.

"Provost Peter Salovey said administrators and council members are also considering whether to possibly appoint a deputy or associate provost to handle diversity issues."

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›



ronghai → alum2001 · 2 years ago

You guys should really read some Galtung (<http://www.okan.edu.tr/UserFil...>

"If there are not enough good minority/female candidates, then that says more about the minorities' and females' lack of interest/progress in a given field, than it does about Yale."

Or maybe it says something about the structures of violence we perpetuate, which continue to prevent the progress of "females/minorities." But we probably wouldn't realize that, because... 'It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. The latter, as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves' - Freire.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›



River_Tam · 2 years ago

Better fire a few white men to make quota.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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