



November 3, 2008

Chancellor Wrighton,

On behalf of the boards of the Academic Women's Network (AWN) and Association of Women Faculty (AWF), we are writing to request that an office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Development, Inclusion and Diversity be established in order to create an environment at Washington University that champions the issues of women faculty and under-represented minorities.

For many School of Medicine and Hilltop faculty, 2007-2008 was a bruising year. The "resignation" of Dean Mary Sansalone, and the bestowing of an honorary degree on Phyllis Schlafly created a crisis of confidence in the leadership of this institution. Further corroding the environment for women and minority faculty was the unilateral appointment of a Dean of Graduate Studies without the due process of a formal search and without consideration of women and minority candidates. As a direct result of the crisis of confidence, the leadership of AWN and AWF articulated specific suggestions last spring in an attempt to persuade the university leadership to institute meaningful actions that would change the culture for women faculty.

Our organizational leadership formally requested that your office move forward with a plan to recruit a Vice Provost for the support and advancement of women faculty in a March 26, 2008 letter; however there appears to have been no action on this issue in the past seven months. As previously stated, we believe the person chosen for this leadership position should be selected through a national search, should be a high ranking tenured faculty member, and should have demonstrated success in transforming an institution such as ours. Although we prize the various endeavors undertaken by Leah Merrifield to sensitize faculty and administrators to the issue of diversity at Washington University and to build a more diverse community here, we believe that the office of the Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Diversity Initiatives is not a replacement for an Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity, headed by a senior member of the faculty. We also value the efforts of such committees as the Advisory Committee on Women Faculty to

address impediments to the advancement of women faculty; however, we believe they have neither the authority nor the funding to initiate the kinds of structural changes that Washington University needs.

Beyond improving the climate for women and under-represented minority faculty, it is clear that the establishment of a Vice Provost's Office for Diversity is indispensable for Washington University to be seen as world-class institution. As the experience of other institutions shows, a Vice Provost for Diversity is crucial for the recruitment and retention of the best faculty and graduate and undergraduate students (male as well as female, white as well as ethnic and racial minorities), who ever more frequently appraise an institution on the basis of this commitment. As Stanford's report on "Building Excellence" eloquently states: "A diverse community of scholars [and administrators] asks diverse questions and has diverse insights, and so pushes the forefront of knowledge further faster, providing in turn a richer educational environment for our students." It is, quite simply, not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do.

A recent issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* devoted to *Diversity in Academe* has clarified that the shortage of women and under-represented minority faculty in certain disciplines and university leadership positions, is not, contrary to institutional claims, principally due to pipeline constraints. Indeed, "national data show that the pipeline has, in fact, opened up... during the decade ending in 2006" (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 26, 2008, p. B4). Therefore, expanding diversity at every level and rank, but particularly at the highest administrative levels, is contingent on institutional resolve.

Although it is too late for Washington University to lead on this issue, it is not too late for us to join our peers in their innovative efforts to improve diversity in the academic community: Stanford, Harvard, Cornell, Princeton, Columbia, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Michigan and the University of Texas, to name a select few. These institutions have established well-funded offices for faculty development and diversity that are uniformly headed by a Vice Provost from the academic ranks. Each of these institutions has recognized the necessity of appointing a Vice Provost, as opposed to a staff administrator, to carry out their universities' diversity mission because only a tenured faculty member has both the direct knowledge of academic culture and the job security necessary to effect far-reaching change within that culture.

Looking to specific examples of success among our peers, at the University of Wisconsin, Cornell University, and Stanford University, the Office of the Vice Provost has sought to reshape university culture both from the bottom up and the top down. In each case, a holistic approach has been adopted for the creation of a community where, to quote Provost Biddy Martin at Cornell, "the attitudes and actions of people promote mutual respect and civility,

so that all can fully participate in the education, employment and social opportunities of the university.”

During the upcoming spring semester, Professor Patricia Jones, Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity at Stanford University, will speak on the Danforth Campus about her path-breaking work to advance diversity at her institution. She plans to include in her presentation the results of several studies undertaken by her office to assess the effectiveness of Stanford’s diversity initiatives. It is our sincere hope that you and senior administrators from both campuses will take the opportunity to meet with her and attend her lecture.

In the Washington University *Diversity Progress Report* of June 2008, we noted with some satisfaction that institutional support for the Association of Women Faculty and the Academic Women’s Network is twice cited as proof of the University’s commitment to diversity. However, we were surprised to read on page six of the report that “AWN and AWF will be charged [by the university] with the ongoing development and realization of Washington University’s efforts directed towards improving the academic climate for women and members of minority groups.” Notwithstanding our keen desire to work with the administration to advance the interests of women faculty, we found this statement to misrepresent the relationship between our organizations and the university administration, first, because any mandate for our organizations necessarily comes from our membership and not the university administration, and second, because our organizations have too often met with anemic acknowledgment and involvement in official university endeavors to address the condition of women faculty. As a case in point, the Advisory Committee on Women Faculty recently created in direct response to grievances that our organizations presented to you during the 2007-2008 academic year did not include the involvement of the leadership of AWF or AWN. Beyond the ACWF, no efforts have been made to include the leadership of AWF and AWN on the Coordinating Council for Diversity Initiatives or in any of the endeavors sponsored by the Office of the Special Assistant to the Chancellor on Diversity Initiatives. These are missed opportunities to forge an authentic partnership between the administration and our organizations to improve the climate and opportunities for women faculty. We ask that greater efforts be made by the administration to work together with AWF and AWN for the realization of what we have every hope are mutually shared goals.

We will be contacting you in the near future to arrange a meeting to discuss the issues outlined in this letter.

Sincerely,

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