

Town Hall Meeting on Diversity:

Opening Remarks

We begin this afternoon by looking at the future of Washington University and, indeed of the greater academic community. I mean this quite literally. Would the winners of the Association of Women Faculty Graduate student Awards please stand. Kelda Martenson, a Master of Fine Arts candidate in the Sam Fox School of Art, is the recipient of the Overall Award for the Danforth Campus; Caldwell Collins, a third year student in the Law School, has won the award for the Professional Schools of the Danforth Campus; and Mary Brunstrom, in Art History, is the recipient of the award for the School of Arts and Sciences. (A detailed description follows of the stellar accomplishments of our awardees.) These exceptional women are, of course, the promise of academe and we are gathered here today in significant part to confront ways in which our institution can better support and cultivate their scholarly and professional success through a determined institutional commitment to diversity.

Washington University stands at a crossroads of institutional conventionalism and transformation. Members of the university community and especially those in positions of influence across both of our campuses must decide whether we will join the best examples of our peers and embark on the course of institutional change both to move bar graphs conspicuously in the direction of greater diversity as well as to move beyond the body count and cultivate a culture that is more inclusive and supportive of all members of the university community, but especially women and under-represented minorities.

Today, one finds the Diversity Initiatives Office with certain difficulty in a subterranean catacomb of cubicles with no sign on the door in the basement of this, the Women's Building. It is not unreasonable to ask if this unmapped, marginal placement is not symbolic of a prolonged institutional approach to the issue. Yet, the recent public commitment by university leaders to take vigorous practical action to enhance the diversity and thereby the professional fulfillment and distinction of our university community also gives us strong reason to hope in an alignment of deeds with words by which the issue of diversity will be brought into the sunlight and the center of university life.

The Association of Women Faculty has, since its inception in 1995, sought to raise awareness on the issue of diversity and to work for substantive change for the benefit not only of women faculty but all members of our community. It is in the spirit of that tradition that we have sponsored today's event.