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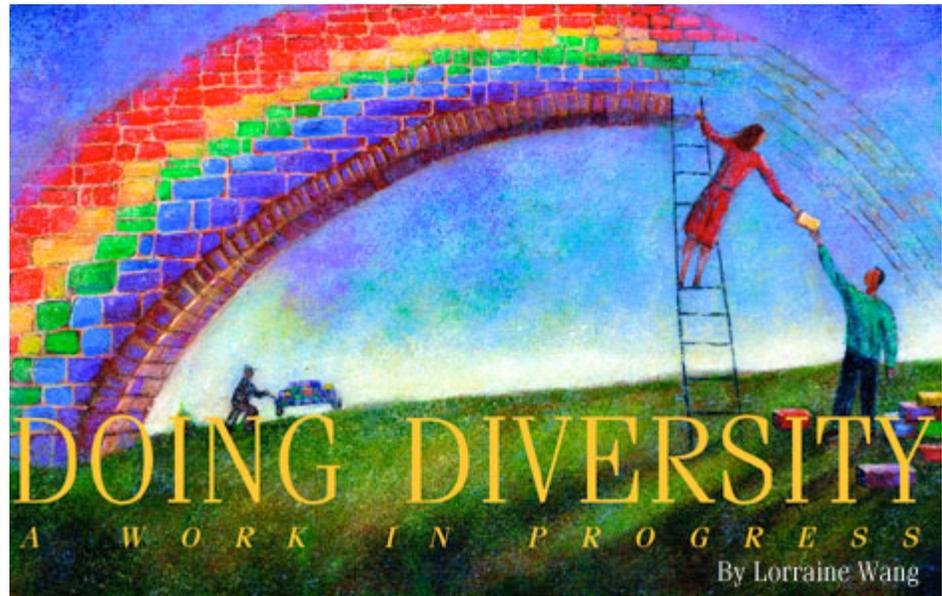
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PCM | Diversity



What is the value of diversity at an institution like Pomona? Try asking Andrew Roth, assistant professor of sociology.

In one of his environmental sociology classes, Roth had assigned readings that were critical of agribusiness practices in California's Central Valley. Two students in the class had parents who were farmers in the valley. "One of them politely the first day came up and said, 'My family is what's being described in these critiques, and it doesn't ring true with my experience.'"

"There was a diversity in my classroom that I had not expected, and that my curriculum had not anticipated, and it was valuable," recalls Roth. The two students, who happened to be Latino, brought different perspectives to the discussion, which Roth later took into account when he reformulated the course's curriculum. For the other students in the class, an even more crucial insight was gained: "It was a valuable lesson for them in seeing that the texts we were reading were representations of the world, but maybe not the representation of the world, and that there could be competing accounts."

Getting to hear these competing accounts is by no means the sole benefit of diversity at Pomona, just as the term "diversity" itself can't be confined to a single category. "Pomona defines 'diversity' in broad terms, including academic interests, ethnic background, educational opportunities, political views, socioeconomic environment and personal pursuits," says Bruce Poch, vice president and dean of admissions.

Such broad-ranging diversity is at the heart of the Pomona College experience, says President David Oxtoby. "One thinks of diversity as bringing people—faculty, students, staff, etc.—to campus. But that's not enough, it doesn't stop there. It goes beyond that to what I would call community—the type of conversations that diversity leads to."

"I think diversity is important because we are educating our students for life in the world, and the world is a very diverse place," Oxtoby continues. "So if Pomona College itself does not include and represent that diversity, then we are not really educating our students."

Signs of Progress

In the spring of 1989, an article in *Pomona College Magazine* (then called *Pomona College Today*) dealt with the need to increase racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity on the College's campus. Since then, there have been measurable changes at Pomona, particularly among the faculty. In 1989, fewer than 24 percent of the college's faculty members were women, and only about 8 percent were people of color. In the 2002-03 academic year, more than 40 percent of the faculty were women, and more than 22 percent were people of color.

"In terms of faculty, we've done a very good job," says Shahriar Shahriari, professor of mathematics and a former associate dean. He credits discussions among the faculty themselves in the early 1990s for setting the goals that have led to concrete results, but he sounds a cautionary note as well: "That doesn't mean there isn't more to be done, and that we shouldn't be continuously thinking about and moving forward, just to stay in place."

With regard to the student body, the quest for greater diversity has met with successes in some areas, and challenges in others. Pomona has achieved a much more even income distribution among its students than at other small, selective colleges with similar resources. Almost 20 percent of the students come from families in which one or both parents did not receive any higher education, and about 60 percent of the students come from public schools.

However, the enrollment of Latino and African American students has shown only modest increases in the past 14 years, and the number of Asian American students, after peaking in 1992, has begun to drop slightly. Figures for the Fall 2001 semester, the most recent breakdown available, show that out of 1,553 degree-seeking students at Pomona, 87 identified themselves as African American or partially African American; 241 identified themselves as having Asian American or Pacific Islander heritage; and 137 said they were at least partly Latino or Mexican American.

"Some groups still remain too underrepresented—African Americans, for instance," says Poch. "It's a frustration because there are still too few African American kids in the pipeline, certainly too few for higher-ranked colleges, and we compete with each other over that fairly small number of kids."

Often these highly-qualified, much-sought-after students will pick a college with greater name recognition than Pomona, Poch says. Both Poch and Oxtoby stressed efforts to increase Pomona's visibility, both locally and nationally, as one of the keys to attracting more top-caliber students from all backgrounds.



Numbers alone, however, cannot document the qualitative differences at Pomona that have arisen from increased diversity. One example is the experience of Lindsay Hill '04. When Hill started at Pomona, she was intent on majoring in biology in preparation for a career in medicine. But, "I wasn't enjoying my classes," she says.

Hill went on a retreat for students of color and listened to a talk by Sidney Lemelle, associate professor of history and Black Studies. "I kind of felt like he was talking to me, a lot of things he was saying, like, 'In high school many of you may not have had opportunities to explore certain different ways of thinking. You've all had schooling that is Eurocentric.' It was the first time I really

thought about it.”

“I talked to him for a while afterwards and told him what my plan had been and that I was unhappy, not really feeling I was sure about anything. Talking to him and sophomore year talking to Professor [Valorie] Thomas, I realized my biggest mission in life was not to become a doctor but to help people and to change the world in which we live.” After exploring different fields of study, Hill decided to switch her major to public policy.

Says Hill: “I think it makes a huge difference having more professors of color.”

Climate Changes

Hill says that she has enjoyed her time at Pomona, but that some of her friends have had a more difficult time, particularly those who experienced a kind of “culture shock” upon coming to the College: “A lot of my friends came from places where they weren’t the only black person in a room. It’s a hard, hard transition to make, and college is hard enough without adding that element into it.”

Ann Quinley, Pomona’s dean of students, concurs that the issue of how comfortable members of minorities feel once they come to Pomona is a thorny one. “We’ve done most everything that we can think of to do. And yet, if you look at data, you find that students of color do not feel as included or comfortable at Pomona as white students do. That argues that there’s a lot more to be done. The question is, what?”

Quinley says that an African American student recently said she would only give the campus climate a grade of 5 out of 10. “And she says it’s just tiny little things, but that they’re very constant.” For instance, “white people just feel apparently that they can go over and touch her hair and say, ‘Oh, that’s interesting, I’ve never seen hair like that.’ And once is OK, but the 53rd time it happens, it’s not OK.”

Finding ways to improve the atmosphere for students of color is one of the objectives of the three-year Campus Diversity Initiative, which is funded by an \$850,000 grant received from The James Irvine Foundation. In addition, help with many issues is available from Pomona’s strong support system for students of color, which includes the five-college Office of Black Student Affairs and Chicano/Latino Students Affairs Center and Pomona’s own Asian American Resource Center.

“I definitely turned to the Office of Black Student Affairs and found a group of people who—not necessarily all black—just had similar ways of thinking and were just very supportive,” Hill says.



easy.”

Andres Lopez '04, a senior from a heavily Latino neighborhood in northern California, says he found the College’s mentoring system for members of minorities particularly crucial in helping him deal with his feelings of discomfort. He admits he initially didn’t want to accept such support because he considered it a sign of weakness. “I brushed it off at first, but my mentor was so great. He just wouldn’t let me brush him off. He started getting me connected and made things real

easy.” Lopez, who moved to the United States from Peru when he was 10 years old, also praised the five-college International Place. “It was great to be around other people who were from other places,” he says.

One of the things that some students of color say is a problem is their feeling as if a spotlight is focused on them because of their race. Hill can recall several such instances: "In a lot of my sociology classes, they'll talk about issues of race or racism, or even issues of classism, and look at me. It's really funny because I'm from the same class they are. It's just an assumption that is made because of the color of my skin." "I just think it's frustrating in the classroom," she continues, "because you're not there to teach anyone and you're not the one who needs to be put on the stand."

Others, rather than feeling that racial issues are addressed too often at Pomona, think that the opposite is true.

"I think in general there's a stigma against talking about racial issues, or talking about social issues in general," says Erica Lai '05, a junior who is a head mentor for the College's Asian American Mentor Program. "We talk about political issues so fervently, but that's just because a lot of people here are liberal, and so there's sort of that common bond. When it comes to race, you're talking about it to people who have never thought about it, so it's a difficult discussion to hold. I don't think that it happens enough on campus, but it's happening more and more, which is good to see."



Pamela Burga, a senior who is a lead sponsor for the Chicano/Latino Students Association, believes that the College must ask more of its student body than simply one "Day of Dialogue" at the beginning of freshman year. "One day of this discussion isn't enough," she says. "All of these issues surface; it brings up a lot of tension that isn't resolved."

Burga is among those advocating an addition to the College's academic requirements: a course in the dynamics of difference and power, one that would study race, class and gender issues that underlie daily interactions and institutional systems. "A lot of people are opposed to it, saying it's trying to impose another ideology on students, but I think the absence of it is an ideology within itself."

Despite their concerns, however, the students say that the challenges of adapting to Pomona, and getting Pomona to adapt to them, have produced benefits. "I think some of the students who come from economic and ethnic backgrounds that are different from what's mainstream at Pomona will tell you that Pomona was one of the most difficult and rewarding times in their lives so far," says Lopez. "We have had to adjust ourselves to this Pomona culture, and then to finally feel like we were succeeding is an empowering and wonderful feeling."

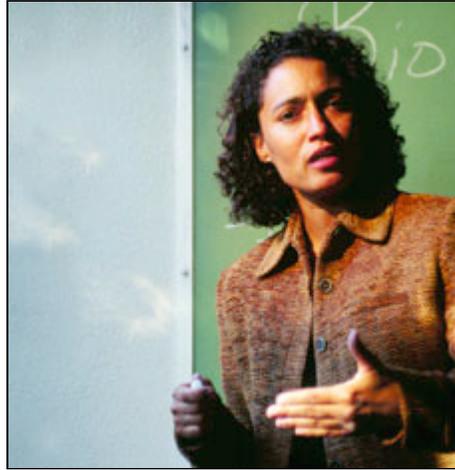
Shahriari says research done by the College shows that in terms of statistically measurable educational outcomes such as going on to graduate school and participation in student-faculty research and international study, the numbers for minority students are similar to those for non-minority students.

And as one sign of student satisfaction, Poch points to exit surveys of graduates: "Our surveys show that they really have had a significant experience in terms of learning from people and engaging with people and developing friendships with people from different races, and different cultures, and different walks of life."

For Burga, the College has provided the tools to address the social issues that concern her. "It's so important to put a theory and terminology behind your experiences," she says. "In my experiences as a Latina in these different environments, it's good to know that they're not just pertinent to myself. Pomona has helped me see that."

Hill feels that it would be helpful to the campus climate if other students' understanding of the issues were to grow as well: "I think the biggest thing I would do is try to show people what happens here on campus, what is the climate here on campus, how does it feel to be the only person of color in a classroom, how does it feel to feel like you have to prove yourself every day."

Role Models



The burden of having to prove oneself is also felt by some of the minority faculty members. "There's a pressure, a desire to serve as role models for students of color," says Nicole Weekes, assistant professor of psychology. "But it's also to have a presence on campus for the white students, so that they get an education about the capabilities of faculty of color, students of color, people of color."

The faculty members are frequently called upon by the College's administration to represent "diverse" viewpoints on committees or at College events. And because of the small number of faculty of color, inevitably the same people are called

upon more than once. "When I first got here, I was on eight ad hoc committees," says Lynne Miyake, professor of Asian languages and literatures.

The increase in the number of professors of color over the past 14 years has improved matters by strengthening the support system at the College. "I try to be there for faculty if they have a question," says Raymond Buriel, Harry S. and Madge Rice Thatcher Professor of Psychology and professor of Chicano Studies. "I don't see myself as an expert, but I do see myself as the guy who's been around the longest."

But some of the professors still say that the burden of fulfilling Pomona's aspirations for diversity falls disproportionately on them. "Diversity is an important thing, so people want to have a diversity requirement in the curricular offerings, but then whose classes are they?" Miyake asks. "They're almost all faculty of color."

The College doesn't mandate that minority faculty perform mentoring duties or sit on committees relating to diversity, says Shahriari, but the professors do so because they know how important such duties are. "A lot of it is because faculty of color feel connections to their community, that this is an important part of their lives," he says.

Another concern expressed by some faculty of color is that when the time comes for reviews and decisions on tenure, their extra work isn't sufficiently taken into account. "I think many of us have argued if we were given more credit for the fact that we serve so many constituencies, that we have so much extra pressure on us to perform in all of these different arenas, that you might feel that you're not expected to do everything everyone else does, and then an extra load on top of that," Weekes says.

Buriel says these pressures and tensions make it hard for Pomona to retain junior faculty members of color: "They are good, and other places recognize that, and they're saying, 'Hey, why do you need all this?' Retention has to be a component of diversity



as well.”

Oxtoby acknowledges that feelings of pressure can become “particularly acute” for faculty of color. “The challenge is first of all to keep recruiting more faculty, so that it’s not a small number who are doing everything,” he says.



Plans to house all of the intercollegiate ethnic studies departments in a new building, to be constructed on the site of the Baxter Health Center on Sixth Street, may also help. Faculty members who serve in those departments have long sought to be located in the same building, and the new site’s central, convenient location next to the Smith Campus Center will enable them to create a sense of community and solidarity, Oxtoby says.

He adds that he believes the College does show appreciation for the faculty’s mentoring duties. “People who are active members of the community—really involved in supporting students—are thought of very positively when decisions for reappointment, promotion and tenure come up. Maybe not as much as some would like, but I do think we take it into account.”

Additional recognition is forthcoming. Among other things, the Irvine Foundation grant will pay for five fellowships for faculty who promote diversity outside the classroom through activities such as mentoring students and committee participation.

Seeking Critical Mass

Many agree that a large part of the solution to problems involving diversity is to increase the number of minority students, faculty and staff, in pursuit of “critical mass”—a concept that was part of the recent Supreme Court rulings on affirmative action at the University of Michigan.

“If you just have single individuals, they will always tend to be thought of for their minority status rather than as people themselves,” Oxtoby says. “When you have a critical mass, then the diversity within a group becomes apparent and you stop stereotyping, and people—students, faculty, staff—each of these groups feels more open just to be themselves in the community.”

Although the ultimate end seems to be a matter of agreement, the means to that end is often hotly debated. And despite successes, such as the increase in the number of non-white and women faculty members, many argue that more needs to be done. “Unfortunately, in the last five years, we’ve kind of flat-lined,” Miyake says.

Buriel believes part of the problem in recruiting and hiring faculty of color stems from deeply ingrained biases against a “diversity of thought.” Some candidates come from nontraditional academic backgrounds, he says, and “their ideas challenge some of the assumptions that the mainstream disciplines have. Some people cast that off as showing ‘lack of rigor,’ where I see a lot of that as being creative and thinking outside of the mainstream.”

Both students and faculty say that certain departments were noticeably lacking in diversity. “I think over the years we’ve lost momentum in terms of the administration really holding departments accountable to have diverse candidates in their fields,” says Buriel. “Actually asking, ‘Why aren’t they there?’ instead of just accepting that they’re not there.”

One area in which everyone agrees there is need for improvement is minority student enrollment, particularly among African American and Latino students. In 1989, about 5

percent of the incoming class of first-years identified themselves as black, and about 9 percent were Latino. According to Poch, the most recently admitted class will be about 6.5 percent black and 11 percent Latino.

Some argue that Pomona needs to focus more on persuading the students whom it does admit to actually matriculate at the College. Hill, who works as a senior interviewer in the admissions office and served as an intern for the Minority Student Action Program, doesn't fault the way the College recruits students of color. "I think that the problem lies in convincing students of color that this is a place that they'd want to be, and that this is a place where they'd be comfortable," she says. "Because when you come to visit, it's kind of overwhelming."

Others, Shahriari among them, believe that more needs to be done in recruiting students from nearby school districts such as the city of Pomona and Los Angeles Unified. The Irvine grant, which Shahriari helped to obtain, will also help fund the expansion of outreach efforts to the surrounding community, among them a summer academic enrichment program for Southern California high school students held on the Pomona campus. If academically motivated students of color are more aware of Pomona, the reasoning goes, more will be inclined to apply and enroll at the College.

Such reasoning has already borne fruit. Since the mid-'90s, the College has had mentoring partnerships with Fremont Middle and Garey High schools in the city of Pomona. The College also participates in Upward Bound, a program that helps prepare high school students to attend four-year colleges and universities. Teens in that program attend classes on Saturdays and are tutored several times a week by Pomona students.

That personal touch is very important in Latino culture, Buriel says. Several students at Pomona who come from the local area have told him they first learned of the College through contact with an Upward Bound tutor. "If your parents haven't been to college, you can't assume parents are going to tell you, 'Go to this school, go to that school.' It's going to have to come either from your teachers, or your peers, or people who are in those positions, like Pomona students who go back. And you see, 'Well, they're not very different from me,'" Buriel says.

A Greater Appreciation

The changing of fixed ideas and assumptions is an arduous process, but one that Pomona is fully engaged in.

"I think we're making really good progress," says Daren Mooko, director of the Asian American Resource Center. "I've been at other campuses, and I can say in all honesty that this College is very genuine about its attempts and its progress. That sets Pomona apart from a lot of institutions. I think administrators on other campuses feel like they have a gun to their head, and they do it grudgingly or they do it not because they want to but because they feel like they have to."

Mooko cited the recent adoption of a hate-crimes protocol as evidence of the College's active stance toward improving the campus climate. When asked for such a policy by students, Quinley quickly worked to write and institute one, he says. "I have never, ever seen that anywhere. Usually VPs and deans won't do that until there's an incident or until they're forced to do it."

One of the perceptions that Mooko would like to see change is the belief that resources such as his center are only for students of color. Several semesters ago, the AARC surveyed everyone attending that year's events. Forty-nine percent of those who attended the lectures, performances and open house were not Asian Americans. "So when people say, 'The AARC is separatist,' that's not true," Mooko says. "Our programming is for Asian American students. But that doesn't mean that non-Asian

Americans can't learn from it.”

Lai says that she is often called upon to counsel students from the mainstream as well as her minority charges: “I see that happening a lot, actually. Mentors are assigned to Asian American students, but they can also serve as liaisons and leaders for the entire community.”

Increased diversity on the faculty has also yielded benefits for students of all backgrounds. “I’ve seen students really appreciative of what I present in class and relate that to their own lives,” Buriel says of his Chicano studies classes. “Some European American students say, ‘I see real value in what you’re offering because I see myself being someone who provides services—a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher—in the future and I know I’m going to be dealing with Latino populations.”

Buriel says he has gotten letters years later that say, “What you said in class, what you taught us about this particular issue on acculturation, I’m seeing it in my work and it’s helping me.’ And you really feel that sense of satisfaction.”

Weekes feels that sense of accomplishment as well in her work. “With more exposure, there’s a greater appreciation of what we each have to offer to the College,” she says.

The goal of appreciating and accommodating diversity on Pomona’s campus is not one that can ever be achieved once and for all, but a continual process, says Oxtoby. “I think that the challenge is that the nature of the world outside is constantly changing, the nature of society is changing, so you need to keep working on it...We need to go beyond just bringing a diverse group together. We also need to have a real community where people can feel comfortable, talk to each other, share ideas, listen—that’s part of what the College needs to do.”

—Lorraine Wang is an editor for the Los Angeles Times and a freelance writer, living in Claremont.

Illustration by Deborah Lenino and photos by Kevin Burke and Toni Tiu '04.

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