

PANEL ON VALUE OF DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION  
PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON RACE  
COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

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I. GREETINGS

Thanks to my esteemed colleague from Duke -- your chairman -- and board members for inviting me to be part of this historic and vital initiative.

My message is straightforward:

Diversity is an important value that must be nurtured and used in higher education. Why is that?, the American public might ask.

Your panels today offer different ways of answering that question. My approach is that of the educator. My experience, as a teacher at three institutions of higher education, and as the president of two others, is that diversity benefits students, faculty, institutions, and the world of knowledge. Diversity benefits everyone and virtually everything we do.

At the same time, I believe that a just and democratic society must appreciate the many values of diversity, both for reasons of political principle and of enlightened self-interest. Without question, success in the future will depend even more than it does today on educating men and women who are comfortable with and can lead an increasingly global -- and therefore increasingly diverse -- economy. I hear that from executives in corporate board rooms as well as from social scientists on campus.

As an educator, I can assert unequivocally that diversity is a powerful force for education. No one learns much if you're always surrounded by people who look at the world exactly the way you do. Exposure to difference -- whether cultural, social, or racial, and including differences in ideas and perspectives -- plays an essential role in the education of all students, both minority and majority. Too often diversity is seen as something that serves only minority students. It serves majority students every bit as much, bringing those in the dominant group to far greater understanding of the complexity and richness of human endeavor and experience. In recent years, we have seen the growing diversity on campus enrich entire fields of study, suggest new and exciting disciplines, and influence the way we teach and learn.

It is probably easier to measure the impact of greater diversity on institutions than on individuals -- through courses taught, faculty hirings, and programs offered. Recent research, however, confirms at least some of what we believe to be true about our students. A national longitudinal study in 1993 concluded that students from diverse backgrounds who participate in courses related to diversity, experience greater overall satisfaction with their education and greater openness to racial understanding.

These views are shared by my colleagues at Duke and elsewhere. Last spring, my fellow presidents and chancellors of the 62 members of the American Association of Universities -- the leading public and private research universities in North America -- felt compelled to issue a statement on the importance of diversity in university admissions. We speak at a time when consideration of ethnicity and race in admission decisions is poorly understood and under sustained attack.

## II. THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY: THE AAU STATEMENT

I wish to read portions of our statement of strong convictions to you today.

"A very substantial portion of our curriculum is enhanced by the discourse made possible by the heterogeneous backgrounds of our students. Equally, a significant part of education in our institutions takes place outside the classroom, in extracurricular activities, where students learn how to work together, as well as to compete; how to exercise leadership, as well as to build consensus. If our institutional capacity to bring together a genuinely diverse group of students is removed -- or severely reduced -- then the quality and texture of the education we provide will be significantly diminished."

My colleagues and I took care to explain that this country's leading research universities do not support quotas or "set-asides" in seeking to enroll student bodies that take into account many aspects of diversity. At the same time, we insisted that we, as educators, are best qualified to select those students -- from among many qualified applicants -- who will best enable our institutions to fulfill their broad educational purposes.

This is true of all of our best universities -- public as well as private. Our sources of funding may be different, but we join in passionate commitment to educating students from many different backgrounds who can benefit from the programs we offer and who, in turn, benefit our institutions. We know that this enriches the education of every single person on our campus, and it also fulfills our obligation as universities to educate leaders for the whole society, a society that is changing dramatically in our time, becoming more multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. Unless we educate leaders from and for all these segments of our society, to learn and prepare to work together for a better future, we have failed in one of our most important obligations.

Taking this point further, the AAU statement continues as follows:

"... we are conscious of our obligation to educate exceptional people who will serve all of the nation's different communities. The evaluation of an individual applicant to our universities cannot, therefore, be based on a narrow or mainly "statistical" definition of merit. The concept of merit must take fully into account not only academic grades and standardized test scores, but also the many unquantifiable human qualities and capacities of individuals, including their promise for continuing future development. It must also include characteristics such as the potential for leadership --

especially the requirements for leadership in a heterogeneous democratic society such as ours."

The statement concludes powerfully:

"We therefore reaffirm our commitment to diversity as a value that is central to the very concept of education in our institutions. And we strongly reaffirm our support for the continuation of admissions policies, consistent with the broad principals of equal opportunity and equal protection, that take many factors and characteristics into account -- including ethnicity, race, and gender -- in the selection of those individuals who will be students today, and leaders in the years to come."

### III. DUKE AND DIVERSITY

Chairman Franklin and board members, the AAU statement of last spring expresses core values of our institutions. You should know that we remain committed to those values and to the policies established in support of them.

We also remain committed to realizing the promise of diversity, which is not measured by adding up the numbers of students in various categories of interest. It's what happens to students intellectually, emotionally, socially, and otherwise in and out of the classroom -- as well as the habits of mind and heart that they carry forward throughout their lives. The opportunity for students to come to know other students and faculty of many and varying backgrounds and experiences enriches the education all of our students receive. Such involvements and exposures provide greater understanding and appreciation of the complexity of the human experience.

You will not be surprised to learn that deploying diversity in this way involves enormous effort, resources, and constant attention. We must recognize also that an education worthy of the name involves change, and fundamental change -- whether in individuals or in institutions -- does not usually come easily, quietly, or comfortably.

A few recent episodes of cultural intolerance on my own campus, mostly related to race, have reaffirmed, in poignant ways, that Duke's people must pull together and redouble our efforts if we are to realize our goal of a diverse and powerful community. The response of our faculty, students, and staff members to these events has been remarkable. I think it is probable that two events -- an open-microphone gathering in front of the Chapel in September called "Race Day," and a "study-in" by 80 black student leaders in my office last Wednesday, to commemorate the anniversary of a sit-in at Duke by black student leaders 30 years ago -- to remind us that although Duke has changed, it has not yet changed enough. These events will be remembered by this generation of students in the same way that some of us remember the protests of the '60s and '70s on campus.

We at Duke are grappling with this question: What sort of community do we want Duke to be? I believe everyone at Duke wants our community to be as nearly ideal as possible, rising above all lines of discrimination,

built upon cooperation and understanding sympathy as a bond between individuals.

At Duke, like every other college or university, this ideal is subverted by daily realities. We must struggle with poor communications, inefficiencies, misunderstandings, hard choices. But these should not become the excuse for abandoning our efforts to work toward our goals. If we maintain our commitments, our sense of humor and sense of priorities as well, we can create a community that bears a much closer resemblance to one we would call ideal.

Thanks to the leadership of lots of people -- faculty, staff, trustees and students -- there is a sense of momentum on campus these days about dealing with the challenges of diversity and justice. It's primarily a positive momentum, a sense of opportunity, but it also has a sense of urgency: and unless we seize this opportunity to make a difference, there could be a falling back into a sense of apathy and cynicism that will be even deeper for having been through a period of hope, even guarded and wary hopes.

#### VI. CLOSE

In closing, I want to reiterate two principal goals related to diversity on college campuses: the first goal is to achieve diversity on campus and to nurture it; the second goal is to realize the full benefits of that diversity in our teaching, learning, and in our lives.

The Chairman of Duke's Board of Trustees, Randall Tobias, the Chairman and CEO of Eli Lilly, has summed up the challenge facing Duke and higher education in this way: the commitment to increasing inclusiveness and affirming the values of diversity on campus cannot be a "project," to be taken up and then dropped for some other priority. It must become a way of life.

As we make this our way of life, the real and powerful contributions of diversity to the quality of education at our institutions will become more obvious and better understood. The benefits will travel forward through our graduates in their homes and communities, in their jobs and leadership, and in their children and our society.

In return, we will all experience new ways of living and learning, working and worshiping, that provide precious new dimensions in our understanding of what human life, in its multifaceted variety, is all about.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It has been my privilege and a deep pleasure.