

## Diversity should be more than a buzz word

UNC Asheville can promote ethnic diversity through more minority faculty members, financial aid, recruitment and multicultural programs.

When students and faculty say UNCA is diverse, they should reconsider the definition of the term.

Diversity, according to the university's Diversity Action Council, means creating and supporting a community where people of all backgrounds interact respectfully.

The council also says diversity includes, but does not limit, the dimensions of race, ethnicity, age, religion, disability and other differences.

"While UNCA is not nearly as diverse as many of us would like, our campus is, nevertheless, diverse," said university sociology lecturer Keith Bramlett.

Active members in the diversity council include Bramlett and other university faculty and staff.

He says the council meets every semester to discuss the issue of diversity on campus.

"Members of our community are increasingly diverse in their expression of gender and sexual identities," Bramlett said.

He also says the curriculum is diverse because the programs and departments create more diversity-inclusive and diversity-intensive courses.

Complete diversity, both ethnically and culturally, would involve the university providing more programs that help recruit minority students.

"In many ways, our campus remains a white, able-bodied, heterosexual space," Bramlett said.

The 2008-09 university fact book reports 3 percent of blacks and Hispanics out of the 10 percent of minorities make up the student body. Asian, Native American and international students range from 0



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to 1 percent.

"From the art on the walls to the people you see and the conversations you hear, members of our community are reminded of their difference and what they need to do to be accepted," Bramlett said.

Minority students who attend UNCA should be around all types of diverse people.

"In other words, UNCA is not always an equally welcoming space, but we are working on it," Bramlett said.

Recent university statistics show 12 percent of all incoming students last year were minorities.

"Diversity is not the problem at our school. UNC Asheville needs to desegregate," said Dwight Mullen, a professor of political science.

Mullen says our university often thinks diversity mainly refers to religion, economic backgrounds or sexual preference.

Diversity also refers to both cultural and ethnic differences.

"Students ask me all the time why aren't there more minority students on campus," Mullen said, smiling.

The university needs to find a way to encourage more ethnic diversity through hiring more diverse professors.

"The first step is to increase the amount of minority faculty members," Mullen said. "We came here in 1985 because the university was falling behind on federal orders."

In order to hire more minority faculty members, the university would need to recruit them as well.

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Mullen says UNCA attempted to recruit six black faculty and staff members in 1985, but a lot of them did not stay.

"Most families of minorities don't realize the number of black faculty we have at our school," Mullen said.

If these families and students met the minority professors, they would be more interested in attending UNCA. Financial aid also determines the number of minorities.

"Members from the Alumni Association and the university board of trustees often donate money toward promoting more diversity on campus," Mullen said.

The donated money went toward promoting diversity on campus, but questions whether it went toward academic scholarships, he said.

"Our university doesn't offer scholarships to minority students because it could possibly be viewed as being racist," Mullen said.

If the university provided more scholarships based on merit and ethnic background, more minority students would apply and attend.

"Another thing that really matters in bringing more minority students here is through local recruitment," Mullen said. "About 18 percent of Asheville alone is black; therefore, our university should try to recruit

black students in the area."

Recruitment of local minority students could help familiarize non-local minority students by introducing them to the town of Asheville.

Mullen says programs such as visitation weekends would allow more minority freshmen and their parents to meet the faculty members and become familiar with the campus.

"Just sending someone a brochure of the university is not enough," Mullen said. "That type of contact is impersonal. Recruitment needs to be face to face."

Bramlett and Mullen say the university plans to start a student exchange program with North Carolina A&T State University.

"I am very excited about the UNCA and N.C. A&T student exchange this spring semester," Bramlett said.

According to Mullen, an orientation of about 50 students from each university will be held along with a course that examines cultural and ethnic differences in society.

"During the orientation, it would be good if there were both minority and white students who were willing to participate," Mullen said.

Bramlett says the Center for Diversity Education and Intercultural Center plans to host events and speakers that cover the issue of diversity.

"Too often, I think, when we think and talk about diversity at the university, we are concerned with the numbers and less willing to ask ourselves what we are doing as individuals to make our campus more welcoming," Bramlett said.

Multicultural programs, financial aid and many other methods will be beneficial to recruiting more minority students to UNCA. In doing so, the students and faculty involved will learn what it means to be diverse.