Dear Colleagues,

At the beginning of the academic year, we shared with you reports of the University Committee on Diversity and the University Committee on Women Faculty and Students. These reports proposed strategies for enhancing support for diversity and for women faculty and students at Notre Dame. We also invited your comments on the reports. Many of you responded, for which we are most grateful. After reflecting on the reports in light of your comments, we are pleased to write you with our decision to pursue a series of initiatives based on the committees’ recommendations.

The University’s Mission Statement provides that “the intellectual interchange essential to a university requires, and is enriched by, the presence and voices of diverse scholars and students.” Beyond the benefits diversity brings to all universities, we hold this commitment also because Notre Dame is a Catholic university. As such, Notre Dame seeks to be a place where the richness of humanity flourishes and is celebrated as a reflection of God’s creative majesty. We therefore begin by reaffirming that cultivating a diverse intellectual community is of critical importance to Notre Dame, and that successfully recruiting, hiring, developing, and retaining women faculty and faculty of color is fundamental to this aim.

The University has made progress increasing the number of women faculty and faculty of color in recent years, but the reports demonstrate that more progress is required. In particular, Notre Dame must do better in recruiting and retaining senior women faculty, and in recruiting and retaining faculty of color at all levels. The reports suggest several strategies and actions for accomplishing these goals. Some of these suggestions are already being followed. For example, the Office of the Provost is tracking and sharing information with the deans regarding the hiring, promotion, and retention of women faculty and faculty of color to ensure that progress is monitored and that deans’ and departments’ efforts are known and rewarded. Furthermore, the deans are presently encouraged to work with the Provost to use creative strategies to hire outstanding women and minority candidates. For example, as with outstanding Catholic faculty, a department may be allowed to upgrade an open position into a more senior rank. A department also may be allowed to hire an outstanding candidate even though no open faculty line is available, with the Provost’s Office covering the salary until a line becomes available or funding for a new line is secured. Another example of a recommendation in place is that every dean will ensure that each junior tenure-track faculty member annually receives written feedback on her or his progress toward tenure and promotion. Finally, consistent with a recommendation in the report on women faculty, Senior Associate Provost Chris Maziar conducts an annual gender and minority equity study on faculty salaries and reports its results to the Academic Council. The Provost’s Office will continue to work with the colleges and schools to ensure that such progress continues.

We believe that several other recommendations in the reports can and should be acted upon immediately. For example, the Dual Career Assistance Program will now be open to the spouses of continuing faculty as well as the spouses of new faculty. Additionally, the diversity committee report recommends the establishment of a new postdoctoral training program to attract top young academics from underrepresented groups, especially women and faculty of color. A postdoctoral program would help young scholars advance their careers and provide both the postdocs and their host departments an opportunity to consider whether the postdoc might be a good fit for Notre Dame. At a recent Deans Council meeting, all the deans agreed in principle with the intent of this proposal, and asked that it be brought to the department chairs for their
consideration. Associate Provost and Vice President Don Pope-Davis and Dean Hugh Page have agreed to discuss the proposal with the department chairs. Once a program is designed and ready for initiation, funds for a two-year trial will be provided from the President’s Circle donor society.

Another recommendation we will implement this semester, though in a somewhat different form than recommended in the reports, is the assignment of oversight responsibility for women and minority faculty hiring and retention. We agree that developing a sustainable means of managing these efforts will advance the University’s goal of promoting diversity by establishing accountability and responsibility for progress. The reports proposed creating a new office to oversee all diversity efforts. When we met with representatives of each committee, we suggested that a preferable strategy would be to assign these responsibilities to individuals in the Provost’s Office, which has the necessary resources and broad oversight capacity to achieve the goals established. One person would assume oversight of efforts focused on faculty of color and another person would assume oversight of efforts focused on women faculty. Although similar, the issues in each area are distinct, and each deserves the focused attention of one individual. Of course, these individuals would be expected to collaborate closely in order to realize efficiencies between efforts and to share best practices. We believe this strategy is preferable to establishing a new office for two reasons. First, the current economic climate counsels against significant administrative and bureaucratic expansion. Funds that might be utilized to create a new office are better allocated directly in support of recruiting, hiring, and retaining women and minority faculty. Second, research indicates that activities aimed at enriching faculty diversity are most successful when the responsibility for these activities is shared across the institution by those primarily responsible for recruiting, hiring, retaining, mentoring, and developing faculty rather than centralized in a separate office.

We were pleased that the representatives of both committees with whom we met agreed with this approach. Vice President and Associate Provost Don Pope-Davis has agreed to coordinate oversight efforts relating to faculty of color. We are happy to announce that Susan Ohmer, Associate Professor of Film, Television, and Theatre, has agreed to serve as an Assistant Provost to coordinate oversight efforts relating to women faculty. There is currently an open assistant provost position in the Provost’s Office. Susan has agreed to assume some of the duties associated with this position, as well as coordinating the efforts related to hiring and retaining women faculty. We are most grateful to Susan for agreeing to take on this important role. Both Susan and Don will work closely with deans, department chairs, and others involved in faculty recruitment, hiring, retention, mentoring, and development to foster shared responsibility for progress across the University. In addition, each will now be the primary contact for departments and search committees on matters relating to the recruitment of women faculty and faculty of color instead of the Office of Institutional Equity, which in the future will focus more directly on staff recruitment.

A few of the recommendations invite special comment. One recommendation is to clarify the procedures and criteria under which regular faculty may seek part-time appointments on a temporary basis. The Office of the Provost will examine this issue and work with the deans and Academic Council to determine how best to proceed. Another recommendation asks that we encourage reasonable meeting times for various committees and other groups on campus. The intent of this recommendation is to remind those setting meeting times to be sensitive to childcare and family obligations that arise after normal working hours. We are pleased to encourage such sensitivity, but we must leave the final determination of meeting times to those who lead committees and faculty groups. Finally, concerning the recommendations involving the Early Childhood Development Center, John Affleck-Graves recently received the report of an Ad Hoc Committee on the Center. In response to this report, University funding for the Center will be increased and a standing committee of faculty and staff will be formed to review regularly the operations of the center and to advise the Executive Vice President on its advancement. We will refer the ECDC recommendations contained in the report from the committee on women faculty and students to the standing committee and are confident that this committee will consider these recommendations carefully.
With regard to many of the remaining recommendations, we believe that several—such as developing a faculty survey—require further study before determining whether to implement them. Some, such as the recommendation to create a structured mentoring process for junior faculty, will also require coordination and consultation with various offices and departments to ensure its effective, consistent, and appropriate implementation throughout the University. As the individuals who will coordinate the University’s efforts regarding women and faculty of color, Don and Susan will also manage the process of coordinating evaluation of the remaining recommendations and their potential implementation. In addition, we have asked Don and Susan to meet regularly next year with the University Committee on Diversity and the University Committee on Women Faculty and Students in order to report progress on the committees’ recommendations and to solicit further suggestions and advice.

Finally, the University Committee on Diversity made recommendations related to student life, and we have implemented some of these already. Some of the actions taken are minor but were regarded by faculty members and the Office of Student Affairs as important first steps. For example, First-Year Orientation weekend this past August reflected a broader range of musical traditions, e.g., a performance by the Voices of Faith Gospel Choir. Among new initiatives is an effort in the Division of Student Affairs to begin “Hero Days”—a program to honor people of various ethnic and racial backgrounds. We will also continue successful programs, such as the Worldview initiative of the President’s Office to promote constructive dialogue about issues of racial, ethnic, national, and socio-economic diversity through the arts. A more challenging and expensive initiative, but a critically important one, is to expand our efforts to recruit more undergraduate students of color and to increase the socioeconomic diversity of the entering class. New efforts to achieve this goal have begun. Other recommendations to enrich multiculturalism and diversity in student life are being considered by several departments and offices across campus, and as part of the process to update the strategic plan for the Division of Student Affairs.

Before closing, we would like to emphasize, as in the letter sent to you last year on the Catholic faculty report, that the University’s efforts to identify, recruit, hire, and retain women, minority, and Catholic faculty are complementary. Indeed, we are confident that—through collaboration and, where possible, the adoption of shared strategies—the efforts will be mutually reinforcing, particularly with regard to recruitment and hiring. These efforts rank among our highest priorities. Collectively, they will do much to enhance the vibrancy of the intellectual community at Notre Dame.

Please join us in thanking the members of the University Committee on Diversity and the University Committee on Women Faculty and Students for their service, creativity, and careful work. The insightful recommendations presented in their reports offer Notre Dame promising strategies for strengthening our academic community.

Thank you, also, for your dedication and devotion to Notre Dame.

Yours in Notre Dame,

Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.
President

Thomas G. Burish
Provost