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Campus strives for equal employment opportunity despite new court ruling

By Krista Marrs
Maine Campus staff

The University of Maine uses affirmative action policies to promote a diverse faculty and will not be affected by last Monday's U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding California's ban on race and gender preferences.

UMaine's President Peter S. Hoff, who came to Maine three months ago after several years as a senior administrator in the California State University system, reacted to the court's decision by saying the campus' commitment to promoting diversity and equal opportunity will remain the same.

"UMaine's approach has not included setting preferences for women or minorities, which was the case in California," Hoff said in a press release Nov. 4. "Rather than set quotas or offer preferences, we actively recruit and advertise positions nationally to increase the likelihood that the pool of potential applicants contains a wider variety of life experiences and perspectives."

Hoff said he feels a diverse faculty is of great importance, as it has many rewards for university students.

"I am personally committed to the pursuit of creating a more diverse community with equal opportunity for all, regardless of gender or race," Hoff said. "This is one of our top goals. The educational experience UMaine offers all of its students will be further enriched by continued efforts and success."

Although affirmative action practices take place, many faculty members at UMaine feel more efforts need to be made to employ additional members of gender and racial minorities.

"The university has put together an affirmative action plan," said Adonis Ferreira, assistant dean of multi-cultural affairs. "But we've done poorly in hiring and retaining faculty members of color."

Ferreira, who has been at UMaine for two years, said the lack of diversity is evident with the population of female faculty as well. He feels recruiting processes need to be improved in order to gain a wider range of applicants in both areas.

"If the university is not getting the applications from women and minorities, we have to ask, how can we upgrade our recruiting process?" Ferreira said. "Obviously we must do different things for recruiting applicants, since what we are doing now is not sufficient."

Ferreira said advertising is not enough, and feels search committees need to do a better job at seeking out applicants.

"The search committees need to make phone calls with personal contacts, and write letters to individuals who may be interested in a position here," Ferreira said. "The university may think recruiting is a big hassle, but we have to do what is necessary to get these people on campus."

Evelyn Silver of the Equal Opportunity Office, agrees with Ferreira and feels new ideas are essential for recruiting.

"Our school is certainly lacking gender and racial diversity See ACTION on page 3"
with its faculty,” she said. “We’re pro­
gressively getting better, but we need to
work harder than we are now.”

Silver believes the lack of job oppor­
tunities on campus has hurt the universi­
y’s efforts for successful recruiting of
professors and faculty.

“The University of Maine has been
working hard over the last few years, but
there needs to be more job opportunities
available first of all,” she said. “But when
the positions are open, racial and gender
balances need to be considered.

Silver said several women faculty mem­
bers were hired due to the $4 million gift
from Stephen and Tabitha King last year.

“This is a great start,” she said.

The Office of Equal Opportunity re­
leases an annual report of full-time mi­
nority professors at the university. As of
last year, out of the 123 positions
available, there were no executive/admin­
istrative/managerial officials of racial mi­
nority, and 28 were female.

Of non-faculty professionals, 17 out
of 464 were either African or Native
American, or Asian, while 232 were fe­
male. Both areas were increased in per­
centages compared to the year before.

Ferreira believes the university is get­
ning better with its racial and gender bal­
ances, but should not be satisfied with
the results yet.

“There have definitely been improve­
ments over the last couple of years, but
still a lot needs to be done in order to
balance out the numbers,” he said.

Robert Cobb, dean of the College of
Education and Human Development, sup­
ports affirmative action practices and
feels they need to continue to be empha­
sized in hiring faculty professionals.

“We’ve made tremendous progress in
gender balance,” he said. “It is a great
concern to this college, as it is to the
university as a whole.”

Cobb believes minorities add addi­
tional ideals to their teachings, and are
crucial to have in all departments of the
university.

“Professors from different countries
bring students an understanding and ap­
preciation of various backgrounds,” he
said. “We need such representation is the
classrooms.”

The College of Engineering has a se­
vere lack of minority representation, but
is certainly improving, according to Dean
John Field.

“I feel it is very important to have
women professors in the engineering de­
partment,” he said. “Right now, this col­
lege has a big problem with gender and
racial diversity.”

There are currently 63 faculty mem­
bers in the engineering department, and
five are women, with one more being
hired in January for chemical engineer­
ing.

“When we receive applicants for a job
position, we just do not get any from
minorities,” Field said. “But we are mak­
ing progress over time.”

Field said each department needs to
get in touch with referred names and
cannot wait for a potential applicant to
come to them.

“We have to use personal contacts,
and work hard to actively seek out appli­
cants at all times,” he said. “This issue is
not something that can be dealt with in
each college. It needs to be a campus­
wide effort at all times.”

Ferreira said the entire campus needs
to be committed to striving for diversity
in the future.

“You hear a great deal of vocal com­
mitment to obtaining faculty diversity,
but you see no action taking place,” he
said. “If everyone who voiced their con­
cern really took action, things would al­
ready be taken care of. We already know
what the problem is, but what is the plan
of action to fix it? That is what the uni­
versity needs to find out.”