

## EXHUMING E.E.O.

Part four of four

The Legacy  
1975-1998

*The EEO (Expanded Educational Opportunities) program faded away as the college entered the 80s and began a new era of prosperity. Today, all that remains of the program is its alumni, a group that is intent upon the values of EEO being represented at present-day Macalester.*

By DAN GEARINO

By the Fall of 1975, Macalester had been through its very darkest days. Things could only get better. The EEO (Expanded Educational Opportunities) program had been reduced to such an extent that it was just a blip on the college budget. The faculty and staff layoffs of the previous three years were mostly over and campus morale was improving.

EEO had been a big, costly experiment, and now it was a relatively small, less costly experiment. Instead of 75 full tuition scholarships for underprivileged students, the EEO class arriving in '75 numbered only 22 who were given only partial scholarships.

John B. Davis was hired as president and given the responsibility of picking up the pieces of Macalester's shattered spirits. Assistant to the President Sandy Hill '57 worked in the Development Office at the time of Davis' arrival and has nothing but praise for Davis. "He was quite amazing," Hill said. "He had superb communication skills. Everyone was ready for a breath of fresh air, ready to feel good about the college again, ready to get back on track."

Davis was an unconventional choice for college president. He did not have a Ph.D. and had little experience with college administration. His previous job had been superintendent of the Minneapolis Public Schools, a post he held from 1967 until he was hired by Macalester in 1975. In the late 60s, Davis integrated the schools before it was required by the federal government and was nearly fired for it. He persevered and was later hailed as a trendsetter.

The search committee thought that Davis' personality and past success dealing with trying situations outweighed any holes in his resume. Also, there were few qualified applicants since many were reluctant because of the short tenures of the previous two presidents and the lingering budget troubles.

Davis made an immediate impact on the most important of Macalester alumni, Dewitt Wallace. Within months of Davis' arrival, Wallace agreed to let the college spend several million dollars of principal from his contributions to the endowment in order to balance the budget. Previously, only the interest could be spent. Soon after, Wallace and Davis formulated what would be called "The Wallace Agreements," a

document which basically said that if the college balanced its budget each year, Wallace would give a substantial allowance for endowment and building projects.

A strict financial discipline was enforced and at the end of every year, Davis would fly to upstate New York to show Wallace the college's balance sheets. Wallace's annual contributions, along with a renewed fund raising effort on other fronts, brought Macalester its first period of growth since the late 60s. However, if ever a budget shortfall was anticipated, Davis would move to cut costs immediately so as not to jeopardize the Wallace money.

Near the end of Davis' tenure in the early 80s, Wallace donated 10 million shares of non-voting *Reader's Digest* stock that

The EEO office had its name changed to Minority Programs and had a very difficult time retaining administrators. Without the substantial numbers of students of color, many took Minority Programs for granted. EEO scholarships and the Minority Programs office were in many ways viewed as remnants of the 60s.

Soon after EEO's name change, the Black House, Hispanic House and Indian House were all closed. In their place, the college opened several "culture houses" in the area which is now the football practice field. The culture houses were created as a way to remedy the perceived exclusivity of the racial group houses.

In the early 80s, Macalester shifted its admissions strategy toward recruiting more

of underprivileged.

In 1983, instead of restructuring recruiting efforts, the college willingly allowed the federal funds, approximately \$80,000 per year, to cease. The missing funds would result in decreased programming budgets and the loss of office staff.

The loss of federal money angered EEO alumni, who saw their alma mater drifting further and further away from what EEO had stood for. In the April 11, 1983 issue of *The Mac Weekly*, EEO alumnus and current Trustee Cecil Callahan said, "There are certain things the college can do." Callahan then outlined a scenario in which the college would meet the federal requirements. In the same story, both Minority Programs Director David Taylor and Dean of Admissions William Shain said that it would be nearly impossible to make such changes.

The loss of federal funds and the unwillingness of administrators to attempt to change enrollment trends was in many ways the final death of the EEO program, the final milestone in EEO's history. EEO would now only exist through alumni and memory.

The same year that Macalester lost its federal funds, the various minority culture houses were closed. The culture houses saw little use by the dwindling population of students of color and were viewed by President Davis as not very cost effective. The houses were then replaced by a shared room on the first floor of the Union—the space that is now the South Room. Needless to say, the new cultural center failed miserably, seeing little use. Eventually the center was moved to the current Cultural House on Cambridge Street.

The moving of the culture houses was controversial because it was seen as yet another example of retrenchment, and because the language houses and Hebrew House still had their own buildings. In a *Weekly* interview, Davis cited the immense educational asset of language houses and the dietary needs of Jewish students as his reasoning for who lost their houses and who didn't.

Davis left a reinvigorated, fiscally responsible Macalester when he resigned in 1984. Robert Gavin—who had previously been provost at Haverford College—was hired to succeed Davis. The Gavin years were a time of immense prosperity. Despite experiencing some faculty resentment for various controversial moves, Gavin used the newfound wealth of the Wallace funds to recruit top-notch professors and enter into an unprecedented building campaign that would fundamentally modernize the campus.

Making Macalester more racially and economically diverse were not high priorities during the Gavin years. However, largely because of an influx of Asian-Americans, the number of students of color actually rose to an average of over 50 per year, though this number included few from lower income families.

By the early 90s, Macalester was in many ways similar to the Macalester of the early 60s: rich with Wallace funds, and populated by a white majority who were joined by international students and students of color who did a better job of blending in than their EEO predecessors. This time, the college had learned from perceived past mistakes. There would be no more blatantly reckless spending that would lead to the disappearance of newfound prosperity. Many viewed Minority Programs as reckless spending, so the Minority Programs budget was kept quite small, providing for just a skeleton office staff and an insubstantial pro-



Melvin Collins '75 is interviewed for this story near the main entrance of the Dewitt Wallace Library. Collins is one of a growing number of EEO alumni who are intent upon preserving the spirit of EEO in current college diversity policy.

would eventually go public and become a substantial part of a half-billion dollars in endowment.

While the college turnaround was taking place, EEO was dying. Graduation rates for students of color plummeted, eventually reaching an all-time low of 14.6 percent of the 48 who entered in 1979. In the late 70s, the number of EEO scholarships each year averaged just under 20.

middle-class students of color. The philosophy was that middle-class students of color would fit in better and be more likely to stay, therefore boosting the pitiful retention rates.

This strategy eventually led to the college disqualifying itself for several federal funding programs. Not only were there not enough students of color to qualify, but those students came from families whose incomes were too high to fit the government's defi-

## Macalester remembers EEO in print

Macalester remembers EEO through several college-produced publications. These versions of history tell a lot about which facets of EEO the college would like to be remembered and forgotten.

Each year, the course catalog includes a five-page history of the college. EEO is alluded to in this excerpt: "Late in the decade [the 60s], the college began a program to extend the opportunity of a liberal arts education to students of low income and culturally diverse backgrounds—a program that was acknowledged as one of the most ambitious and innovative in the na-

tion." There is no mention of the fact that the college eventually discontinued the program.

In 1989, the alumni magazine *Macalester Today* produced a story in commemoration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EEO. The story contained quotes from many of the same people interviewed for this series. Also interviewed were Thad Wilderson and John Warfield, two men who served longer as coordinator of EEO/Minority Programs than anybody else. Even with these ample sources, the story perhaps intentionally does not mention important details.

A particularly obvious omission relates to the settlement after the Business Office takeover. The story reads, "Negotiations between the students and administration brought the occupation to an end and attained a compromise: the minority program's share of the budgetary cuts would be halved." Nowhere is there mention of the trustees' subsequent invalidation of the compromise. Also there is no mention of the Hoffman Report—the study by Trustee Mary Hoffman—which led to the most substantial EEO cut in the history of the program just six months after

the takeover.

The Macalester-produced history book entitled *Macalester College: A Century and Beyond*, also discusses the takeover and also neglects to mention the trustees' invalidation of the compromise.

Aside from these three documentations, there are few remnants of EEO left other than first-hand accounts. There are no issues of *Imani*—the Black House newspaper—in the college archives. There are also few archive photos of EEO students and administrators.

—D.G.

gramming allowance.

Macalester called—and still calls—diversity one of its core values along with internationalism, service to society, and academic excellence. Student and faculty interest in diversity, though, was demonstrably minor. In the late 80s and early 90s, the only time people's interest was piqued was after a "racial incident." Occurring approximately every four years, a hate crime would lead the campus to enter into "dialogue." Out of this dialogue would come a renewed effort to recruit more students of color and faculty of color, efforts which would lead to few tangible results.

Garvin resigned in 1996 and was replaced by Macalester's current president, Michael McPherson. McPherson almost immediately indicated an interest in creating a more diverse student body and faculty, more so than any president since Arthur Flemming. As an odd coincidence, when McPherson gave the opening convocation after his arrival in the Fall of '96, he began his speech by announcing

talk and little action. "There's a concern that we talk a good game, but when it comes to the sticking point, we pull back," Ifill said.

In the past, any discussion about the possibility of bringing more economic and racial diversity to Macalester was met by the assertion that the college might be rehashing EEO. This was an incredibly negative implication because many blamed EEO for the financial crisis of the 70s. While many are still under the mistaken impression that EEO caused the financial crisis, a new variable has entered into the argument: the EEO alumni.

EEO graduates are now in their 40s and becoming more and more active within the alumni community. Within their number are many success stories, people who have become leaders in their respective fields, people who justify the hard work and risk-taking of Flemming and the EEO staff.

Juan Figueroa '78 is the president and general counsel of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. His office in the Tribeca neighborhood of Manhattan is a long way from the small town in Puerto Rico where he was born and raised. Melvin Collins '75 is managing director of INROADS, a non-profit organization that prepares youth of color for careers in corporate America. Unlike Figueroa, Collins chose to stay in the Twin Cities and works in an office building on University Avenue, just a couple miles from his alma mater. Both Figueroa and Collins have careers which showcase the values of providing opportunities for the traditionally underprivileged and the benefits of those values in action.

For Figueroa and Collins, there is no doubt that EEO was a vastly successful endeavor. They are living proof. If asked for more evidence, like a reflex they go into a list of names of EEO alumni, friends who have gone on to become successful in their chosen fields because of the generosity of Macalester and their own sheer determination. The list is a long one containing doctors, lawyers, psychologists, social workers and politicians, to name a few.

"The benefits that have been attained by this program, in terms the number of students who today are in great positions of leadership and giving back, far outweighs the problems that we had," Figueroa said. "That's the legacy that Macalester has that it isn't living up to." This legacy ties into Figueroa's distress at the state of students of color at today's Macalester. "There is lack of clearly articulated policy," Figueroa said.

He feels that this lack of a clear policy makes Macalester's students of color feel isolated and forgotten. "I came back a couple years ago and met with the Latino students," Figueroa said. "I was really saddened and really mad at the lack of support and sense

of alienation in these kids. They felt totally marginalized."

Collins is especially displeased with what has become of the Cultural House, which today is a limited-use facility expected to serve the needs of all minority groups on campus. "It's horrible," he said. "It's a physical sham. What does that say to students who come to this campus?"

Figueroa and Collins are vitally interested in McPherson and Ifill's efforts to make Macalester more racially and economically diverse. After years of talk and no action, Collins wants the process to go more quickly. "What's your time table?" he said. "Make it quick."

Figueroa also wants prompt, substantial results. "If this process ends up three years from now with a student body that is similar to the current student body and you end up with mostly middle-class and upper middle-class students of color, then we will have failed," Figueroa said. "Macalester will not be living up to its legacy of attracting students of color in a diverse way, both economically and racially. And, most impor-

about diversity. We hired some people to worry about diversity."

Whether McPherson and Ifill will enact change to the extent that EEO alumni like Collins and Figueroa desire is yet to be seen. All that is known now is that there is a more concerted effort to deal with many of the issues that EEO addressed than at any time since the discontinuation of the program.

In hindsight, there are many ways EEO could have been done better. Like any trendsetting program, though, there was no model to emulate. Administrators were left to do what they thought was the right thing. Unlike the decades since, dialogue was turned into action in a matter of months. Flemming did not have the agreement of all at Macalester, but he pushed the program through, believing that any risks were worthwhile in the pursuit of a higher good.

Twenty-five years ago, John Warfield—the EEO coordinator from 1968-73—was about to leave Macalester and was thinking of the higher good in the long term. After helping to build a grand program, he could see that financial and political realities meant that EEO's best days for new students might be past. At the same time, EEO's greatest contribution would be to the future, when alumni would take the values of the program and apply them across the country in many communities.

Several months before his departure, Warfield co-authored a report on EEO for the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. "Ultimately the effectiveness of programs like EEO are not determined by retention rates or grade averages," Warfield wrote, "but by the contributions which the student participants make to the society which they enter upon leaving college. That evaluation must be delayed for a number of years, but the initial data makes it appear likely that a significant number of young persons, both EEO participants and non-participants, will lead more sensitive and productive lives because of Macalester's decision to expand educational opportunities."

Warfield's prophetic words illustrate the difficulty in exhuming EEO: in many ways EEO is still alive, despite concerted efforts to eliminate it.

Collins photo by Julie Gausebeck, McPherson and Davis photos courtesy of College Relations.



Michael McPherson, the current president of Macalester, advocates a reassessment of Macalester's commitment to diversity.



John B. Davis, president of Macalester from 1975-84, befriended Dewitt Wallace and rescued the college's finances.

that Flemming had died the previous week.

Among the most substantial actions of McPherson's two years was the appointment of Roberto Ifill as special assistant to the president. Ifill's task is a substantial one: to help foster a diverse campus community. At the time of this writing, he has just begun.

Ifill must grapple with the legacy of EEO. "The main enduring effect of EEO is that Macalester has set an exacting standard for itself in terms of racial diversity," Ifill said. "We are not satisfied with the number of racial minorities in our student body, faculty or staff; even if the college is more racially diverse than Minnesota or most liberal arts colleges, our tradition tells us we shouldn't congratulate ourselves."

No matter what Ifill and McPherson do to make Macalester more diverse, it will not be good enough for many faculty and alumni. However, as EEO showed, a sudden rise in enrollment of students of color would cause an increase in racial tension. Tension is not nearly as significant a problem, though, if diversity efforts are mostly

tantly, giving opportunity to students who otherwise would not have an opportunity to go to a school like this." If Macalester does fail to make these changes Figueroa believes that "we should just eliminate the multiculturalism values from the school. It would be misleading."

Unlike his recent predecessors, McPherson is intent upon implementing a diversity strategy. Previously, perceived diversity inadequacies were met with the unsuccessful strategy of restructuring the Minority Programs office and re-shuffling funds. McPherson advocates a different approach. "A successful effort should be one that's very broadly owned and shared," McPherson said. "I don't want people on campus to say, 'It's not my problem to worry

### Correction:

In part 1 of this series, EEO was said to stand for Equal Educational Opportunities instead of the correct Expanded Educational Opportunities. This is a common misnomer.