

EXHUMING E.E.O.

Part two of four

Multiculti-calester

1969-1971

The EEO program brought several hundred students of color to mostly white Macalester, beginning a brief era of an economically and racially diverse student body. While EEO prospered, the college fell apart financially, leading to the resignation of President Flemming and a series of budget cuts which would soon cripple EEO.

By DAN GEARINO

Seventy-five students of color arrived on an almost exclusively white campus in the Fall of 1969. The words "exclusively white campus," though, do little to explain the state of affairs of pre-EEO (Expanded Educational Opportunities) Macalester. In the previous two years, mandatory chapel had been eliminated and students were allowed to live in co-ed dorms for the first time. The counterculture was at its height and drugs were relatively common and openly consumed.

"They [drugs] were tied to political statements people wanted to make about themselves," said History Professor James Stewart. "Much of what lay behind all of that was the war in Vietnam." Male students were draft age and Macalester, like many college campuses, was a home of bitter debate over the war, with students and professors choosing sides and creating an environment of palpable tension.

So what happened when an already tense, mostly white college added 75 students of color to the mix? Even more heightened tension and an even more radically different Macalester than the one from two years previous. "If you were a sophomore in 1967, the college that you would graduate from you wouldn't even recognize," said Stewart. "The change was so drastic, so enormous."

According to a 1983 report by Registrar Dan Balik called "A Report on Minority Students at Macalester College," the racial makeup of the first EEO class was as follows: 65 African-American, five Latino, five Native American and one white.

The racial makeup of the first EEO class was controversial because it was almost exclusively African-American students. The original criterion for selection was economic disadvantage, not racial or ethnic background. However, the largely African-American EEO staff limited their recruitment to almost exclusively African-American communities. The white EEO student in the first class was the only white student in all the years of EEO.

This perceived favoritism towards African-American students was unfortunate because it gave critics of the program ammunition. Critics always could say that the program cost too much, but now they could also accuse an "anti-discrimination pro-

gram" of discriminating.

On top of the 75 EEO students, the class arriving in '69 had 15 non-EEO students of color, 14 African-American and one Latino. Many non-EEO students of color received substantial financial aid packages, meaning they paid a couple hundred to one thousand dollars instead of a receiving full financial aid. Grant funds for non-EEO students came from the financial aid budget and not EEO.

Warren Simmons '73 was a student in the first EEO class. In 1972, Simmons wrote an essay for the alumni magazine *Macalester Today* reflecting on his first-year experience of going

befriend students of color, EEO students quickly separated into segregated social groups.

A lack of integration occurred in nearly every facet of campus life. According to one EEO-era faculty member, "Easily 90 percent of our EEO students were segregated on campus. They felt segregated. They weren't very bold about intruding on the mainstream group. The mainstream group felt that to make friends with minority students would be intruding on them."

The most substantial interracial interaction occurred in the classroom where EEO students were often asked to speak as a representative of their entire racial group.

The lack of social interaction between



A commencement ceremony in the mid-70s, a time when Macalester was far more multicultural than it is today.

from Harlem to Macalester. "In 1969, all I knew of Macalester was that it was a white, middle-class institution," Simmons wrote. "This may not sound like much, but to a black person it means coming into contact with people from an entirely different socioeconomic background who have little or no understanding of your lifestyle, your culture."

Simmons' first contact with the white, middle-class Macalester occurred in September '69, when upperclassmen returned to a campus that was quite different from the one they had left, but not as different as EEO administrators would have liked. While initially white students were eager—sometimes even overeager—to meet and

EEO students and the rest of the student body was a profound disappointment to President Flemming and the students, faculty and staff who had worked so hard for the program.

The original EEO proposal had two main goals. First, to provide educational opportunities to underprivileged minorities; and second, to enrich the experience of white students through social contact with minority students. The first goal was succeeding at a level that most approved of, but the second was not.

Instead of dwelling on the negative, many at Macalester were pleased that so many of the things that could have gone wrong didn't. "There was very little white

backlash," said Charles Norman, currently director of the Learning Center, who was an English professor in the late 60s and early 70s. "There was some awareness, though, that these kids had a good deal." On top of being seen as receiving a "good deal," EEO students describe being stereotyped as being at remedial learning levels. The stereotype extended to non-EEO students of color and was a perpetual source of frustration. These initial stereotypes and frustrations would continue with the arrival of a second EEO class.

Melvin Collins '75 came from the inner city of St. Louis in the Fall of '70 as a member of the second EEO class. Collins was recruited by Admissions instead of EEO staff. "We talked about admissions," Collins said. "Then when we started talking about financial aid, that's when EEO came up. It was like, 'Come to Macalester and then we will provide you support.'"

The second EEO class was much more diverse than the first. The racial makeup was as follows: 51 African-American, 12 Latino and 12 Native American. On top of the 75 EEO students, there were 49 non-EEO students of color, including 45 African-American, three Latino and one Native American. There were 124 total students of color in the class and 96 African Americans.

The presence of students of color on campus was compounded by the exceptional retention rate of the class arriving the previous year. The EEO freshmen to sophomore retention rate was 94.7 percent, compared to an 85 percent mark for all students in the class.

For a program perceived as geared toward high-risk remedial students, EEO was doing an exceptional job of retention. The high rate supports Mahmoud El-Kati's claim that, "Most of those students were not high risk." El-Kati believes that the "high risk" label was used to propagate a stereotype that EEO students had no business being at a place like Macalester.

African-American culture at Macalester flourished in the 1970-'71 school year with substantial numbers and diversity within that population. "Those black students were a healthy mix of various strata within the black community," El-Kati said. "This stratification is very rooted. These students wouldn't have met anywhere other than a place with a program like EEO."

African-American students made use of the resources given them, turning the college's Black House at Portland and Fry into a hub of Twin Cities African-American activism and culture, and publishing a newspaper called *Imani*, which was produced in the basement of the Black House. Perhaps as a result of *Imani*, *The Mac Weekly* ran few stories about minority issues in the early 70s, adding to the segregated environment, one in which the African-American college had a newspaper and the white college did too.

African-Americans in many ways overshadowed other racial groups and received substantially more college and federal funding. In March of '71 three "minority-minority" groups—Mexican-American, Native American and Puerto Rican—staged a sit-in in Old Main to protest this disproportionate allocation of federal funds which paid for the EEO counseling staff. Minority-minorities believed that they should have more of the funding for counselors from their racial groups. After five hours, administrators, EEO staffers and student representatives ironed out a plan that

EEO alumnus reflects on his first year at Macalester

The following is an excerpt from an essay written by Warren Simmons '73 in a 1972 issue of the alumni magazine *Macalester Today*.

Simmons currently lives in the Baltimore area where he works as a psychologist. Simmons served on the Macalester Board of Trustees from 1979-82.

Three years have passed since that summer day in 1969 when I, a determined black 18-year-old, left Harlem and arrived in Minnesota to attend Macalester College.

When I boarded the Northwest bird to Minnesota, my life had already changed. It was my first time on a plane. I didn't eat lunch because I thought you had to pay. I

had resigned myself to sitting tight and playing it cool.

The plane landed. I was here in my new world. I disembarked, taking each step down the ramp with measured uncertainty, taking in so many new things my senses blurred. I pulled myself together and saw a sign saying, "Macalester Over Here." Five white students greeted me with ultra-bright smiles. They threw their arms around me as if they'd known me all my life. "Here we go again," I said to myself.

September of that first year came and with it swarms of curious white students eager to meet their first negro friend and atone for the past sins of their fathers. I

didn't have a moment to myself. The EEO program did everything. If you didn't have a toothbrush, EEO provided you with one.

Wherever I went, the inevitable question was asked, "Are you an EEO student?" When you responded affirmatively, doors were opened and attitudes changed. In class I was made out to be the representative of the entire black race: "Warren, what do you think?"

I was beginning to suffocate from all that overattention and loving friendship. I began to withdraw into my dormitory room, where I would pull the shades down and wish to God I was someplace else. I was not as ready as I had thought to deal with white

America again.

With a summer's rest, I started my second year not fully recovered from the scars of the first. This time, however, I knew more about Macalester and Macalester knew more about me. The white students began to realize that I didn't want them all for friends—that I wanted to pick and choose my friends like regular people do. My professors realized I wasn't the reincarnation of Booker T. Washington.

I began to feel more like a regular student, even though the stigma of EEO was still present. I began to look beyond the barrier of smiling faces to glimpse what Macalester really had to offer: an education.

would give African-Americans 35 percent of the federal funds and give 22 percent to each of the three other groups.

Despite several small conflicts, the various racial groups got along and often planned events together. Eventually, the Black House was joined by a Hispanic house and an Indian house, all three owned by the college through the High Winds fund. *Imani's* content broadened from occasional stories pertaining to non-African-American racial groups and became a truly multicultural paper.

Students of color, EEO or not, could make friends with other students of color and could socialize at comfortable hangouts like the black house. But they still had to go to class with mostly white professors, many of whom were unprepared for dealing with students of color.



Kathy Angelos Pinkett '75, a non-EEO student of color who lamented a lack of communication between EEO staff and faculty.

Kathy Angelos Pinkett '75 was a non-EEO student of color from Harlem. "It was a year before anybody clued me in academically," Pinkett said. "I changed my major three times my freshman year. And I didn't get any good advice from my advisor. I can tell you [current faculty member] did not know how to relate to diverse students. He told me I spoke very well for someone with English as a second language. I said 'English is my first language.' He told another student that she wrote well for being from the ghetto, and she was a preacher's kid who grew up in a middle-class neighborhood." Part of the problem was the failure of EEO academic counselors to prepare faculty for students of color. "I wonder if some of those counselors interacted with faculty at all," Pinkett said.

Problems with faculty were indicative of the radical differences in cultural backgrounds of most students of color from the white mainstream. These new perspectives were jarring to many who quietly missed white Macalester. "I think they kind of had this thing where they thought they could get these kids out of the ghetto, throw all this money at them and they'll be so grateful that they'll just blend right into the

woodwork," Pinkett said. Instead of blending in, students of color stood out, walking together and sitting in the dining hall together.

Political Science Professor Chuck Green remembers a colleague remarking at how African-American students walk together. He told the colleague something to the effect of, "Nobody seems to notice or care that white students walk together too."

Running parallel to the story of the EEO students was the story of the financial collapse of the college. While the presence of large numbers of students of color represented a significantly visible change in college atmosphere, the financial collapse occurred in secret, only realized by the larger community almost a year after it began.

The crisis began in late 1969 or early 1970 when Dewitt Wallace quietly informed the college that his millions in donations would cease. The only program he would continue to fund was a National Merit Scholarship. Considering that Flemming knew the Wallaces and was hired partially because of his relationship with the Wallaces, this served as a shocking wake-up call that Macalester was suddenly on the brink of financial doom.

Outward distress did not come immediately. In the initial months without Wallace, the college seemed to be in denial. Perhaps administrators believed that it would be easier to solicit donations if the college was viewed as financially stable. Most faculty and staff had no idea Macalester was broke.

Norman remembers when he realized there was trouble. "The basketball coach stood up in the faculty meeting and said he had been down to First Bank and was chatting with one of the people there who told him that Macalester had a short term loan, which was surprising," Norman said. "What's a school with an endowment like ours doing taking out a short term loan? The Financial Vice President John Dozier stood up and said, 'We have no problem.' That was the beginning of all the frenzy. It was a huge surprise."

The denials and secrecy went on through the entire first EEO year. Widespread knowledge of the crisis did not occur until August of 1970—weeks before the arrival of the second EEO class—when it was announced that President Flemming was delegating many of his responsibilities to two other administrators. Dozier was put in charge of monitoring and approving expenditures. Provost Lucius Garvin was given control of academic affairs.

The "triumvirate" power structure came out of an August 15 trustee meeting. While it is not known exactly what was said at the meeting, the reduction in Flemming's spending authority was quite unorthodox and an indication that the board had lost confidence in Flemming and his vision for Macalester. A loss in confidence in Flemming invariably meant a loss of confidence in EEO.

Also in August of 1970, the college engaged in a "planned recession," in which programs would be reduced and academic departments would cut 4.4 percent from their previous year expenditures. Among the programs to be reduced was EEO, which would go from 75 full tuition scholarships to 40 grant/loan scholarships. The EEO reduction was only supposed to be temporary until the budget picture improved.

Explaining the changes to the faculty,



Warren Simmons '73, a part of the inaugural EEO class and later a member of Macalester's Board of Trustees.

Flemming said, "Coming to the college two years ago, I overestimated the resources that would be available to the college. As institutional executive, I accept responsibility for this error."

The early 70s were a scary time to be associated with any liberal arts college. Enrollment was declining and many schools were bankrupt or near bankruptcy, a trend that can be attributed to the perception that these "dens of radicalism" had lost sight of education and now only cared about drugs and protesting the war. Traditionally liberal colleges like Oberlin and Antioch were hit particularly hard. When Wallace was contributing, Macalester insulated itself from this national trend by giving students extremely generous financial aid packages. Without Wallace, Macalester found itself in the same boat as its peers.

"Our selectivity in general was deteriorating because the radical years were really affecting our image," Norman said. "We

were having a hard time getting parents to understand that we had a good education here. We were struggling in every way." The constant struggle would affect every student, faculty member and staffer, including those at the top.

On January 20, 1971, Flemming submitted a letter of resignation to the board. Local press jumped on the story as indicative of the collapse of Macalester. Paul Davis, Wallace's philanthropic advisor and a non-voting trustee, granted several interviews in which he said that Macalester was unfocused, spreading itself too thin.

Flemming finished the academic year and took a few months off, then was appointed by President Richard Nixon to become chairman of the U.S. Commission on Aging. Later, he continued his crusade for equal opportunity as chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Flemming remained active in politics until his death in 1996.

Flemming is remembered at Macalester chiefly for his budget deficits and EEO, two things deeply inter-related. "Most of the time when you're talking about budgets, you're trying not to talk about something else," Green said. "Budgets provide us a way of not talking about what's really important. He [Flemming] wanted to talk about what he thought was most important—social justice questions which were both economic and racial. That's fairly threatening. The resource management didn't work out, making it very easy to attack that agenda."

Flemming came to a school that was almost all-white and resigned from a school with over two hundred students of color. He built EEO and his successor, James Robinson, would dismantle it, continuing the "temporary" cutbacks begun by the voluntary recession.

Robinson arrived in the Fall of '71 and would try to cut EEO to the bone. EEO students would respond with the most well-known civil disobedience in the college's history. EEO was going down, but it would go down fighting.

Commencement photo (1977) by Phil Prowse, Pinkett photo (1989) by Jim Hanson, Simmons photo (1989) by Donna Maclean. All photos courtesy of College Relations.

In Two Weeks:

EEO students take over the Business Office and occupy it for 12 days in protest of cuts to the EEO budget. EEO is then fundamentally reshaped, setting the stage for college policy for the next 20 years.