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Diversity Just Isn't: The Discrepancy  
between the Marketing and  
Manifestation of Diversity at Bryant  
University

Kimberly Cole  
Bryant University

**DIVERSITY JUST ISN'T:**

**The Discrepancy between the Marketing and  
Manifestation of Diversity at Bryant University**

The Honors Program

Senior Capstone Project

Student's Name: Kimberly Cole

Faculty Sponsor: Martha Kuhlman, Literary and Cultural Studies

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## **DIVERSITY JUST ISN'T**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper will propose an overarching definition that is useful for discussing the state of diversity in higher education. It will also address the value of diversity on a college campus to its community and provide concrete examples of how a lack of attention to diversity could lead to potentially disastrous consequences. After discussing debates over the definition of diversity and establishing its worth for institutions of higher education, this study will narrowly focus on Bryant University by comparing the marketing and manifestation of diversity. The ultimate purpose of this research is to offer possible solutions of how the state of diversity at Bryant University may be improved.

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#### **A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR**

May 5, 2006. I opened to the Opinion section of the student newspaper, *The Archway*, and the topic that I would pursue as my honors thesis for the next two years was right in front of me. Brian Kennedy, an outspoken conservative student, wrote:

“The Administration’s actions are abhorrent and if the racists on the panel who made this decision get their way, then there is only one color that describes the Bryant Administration: yellow” (“For Bryant Administration” 15). The article had been written in response to a controversy over the reopening of the search for the position of Young Alumni Trustee, an incident to which I will return later. What were the circumstances that led to the occurrence of such a controversial event that a student would respond by calling the administration “racist?”

I was marginally aware of events and discussions that had been held both in public and private within the campus community during my time as a student, but I was just beginning to see the depth and intricacies of how diversity manifested at Bryant University. This incident motivated me to investigate what institutional conditions led to the event.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

##### **Diversity – Definition, Value, and Approach**

Within the last twenty years, diversity has burst onto the scene as the slogan of the workforce and the educational system. Despite diversity's apparent popularity as a discussion topic, few agree on what it encompasses, the best way to endorse it, and its function in society. What is diversity, anyway? It would be an imprudent endeavor to engage in an intellectual discussion of diversity without first addressing the controversy surrounding its definition. Theorists debate about definitions of diversity that range from overly simplistic mere impressions of what diversity might be to complex explorations of diversity and its historical and contemporary implications. Traditionally, discussions of diversity have been narrowly

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focused on solely the relations between races. More expansive definitions, however, include differentiating factors such as sexual orientation, religion, and gender.

This study will focus specifically on the value of diversity in terms of higher education. What can a university and its students gain from a more diverse community? What do they stand to lose if diversity is ignored or denied? To tackle this question, I will first consider two major approaches to how diversity is presented. Dinesh D'Souza (former White House domestic policy analyst and current research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute) and his colleagues argue that there is little to be gained from diversity in higher education. D'Souza supports the principle of equalization; those who follow this doctrine seek to promote diversity by acting as if differences between individuals simply do not exist. Other academics, such as political theorist Charles Taylor, Professor Cornel West of Princeton University, and feminist/social activist bell hooks are vehement advocates for recognizing differences between individuals. This paper will analyze these approaches in terms of their philosophical and legal bases.

Once we have established that diversity is inherently valuable to a university community, we will consider how diversity should be promoted in institutions of higher education. By considering Bryant University's policies and experiences with diversity in the context of the broader national debate on these issues, my intention is to offer insights and suggestions for how to improve our dialogue on diversity at Bryant.

#### Bryant University – Marketing and Manifestation

From the introduction of the Diversity Contest in 2006, which invited students to submit creative work explaining what diversity meant to them, to hotly debated articles in its student newspaper, *The Archway*, it is clear that the issue of diversity is as prominent at Bryant University as it is at other institutions of higher education. After establishing a strong foundational understanding of what diversity is, its value in institutions of higher education, and approaches to promoting diversity through university organizations and institutions, the focus of this study will address how diversity specifically affects the Bryant University campus. My aim is not to analyze Bryant's Affirmative Action policy as it relates to student

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recruitment, but I will instead study the institutions and initiatives on campus that seek to promote and support diversity.

The discussion of Bryant University will be limited to 2004 through 2008 in order to examine how the issue has evolved over the course of one typical college student's experience. This study is based upon information from students, faculty, and staff, drawn from a wide variety of media. First, selected marketing materials as well as publicly available documents will be used to analyze the image of diversity that the University projects. Second, I will examine how diversity is manifested on campus using evidence drawn from articles in the student newspaper, emails sent out to public list-servs, ten interviews, and many other forms of communication. In particular, I will examine two specific events: the Facebook Incident (where a student posted a racist comment on a public networking site) and the aforementioned debate surrounding the selection of the Young Alumni Trustee in 2006. Due to the limited scope of this study, I will focus on race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation as the main dimensions of diversity on campus. After a comparison between the marketing materials and evidence of the current state of affairs at the University, this study will draw conclusions about how the image presented about diversity on campus differs from reality. Finally, suggestions from faculty, staff, and students for improvements to the University's current diversity initiative will be presented.

## **CHARACTERIZING DIVERSITY**

### **Broad Conception of Diversity**

R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., President of the American Institute for Managing Diversity and author of *Building on the Promise of Diversity*, defines diversity through broadly conceived terms. He discusses how the politicized version of diversity has become synonymous with Affirmative Action and equal opportunity. He theorizes that diversity discussions are difficult because society has come to associate a concept (diversity) as a euphemism for a much debated policy (Affirmative Action). Hoping to challenge this conflation of diversity and Affirmative Action, Thomas postulates that diversity should be separated from its politicized



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perception and defined more simply as “a set of differences and similarities along any dimension” (Thomas 14). Thomas’s definition of diversity, although helpful in establishing a general foundation from which to build our understanding, does little to answer the question of what makes diversity a controversial topic.

bell hooks, noted feminist, provides a more constructive view of diversity than Thomas. In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks cites Paul McLaren in an interview printed in the *International Journal of Education Reform*:

Diversity that somehow constitutes itself as a harmonious ensemble of benign cultural spheres is a conservative and liberal model of multiculturalism that, in my mind, deserves to be jettisoned because, when we try to make culture an undisturbed space of harmony and agreement where social relations exist within cultural forms of uninterrupted accords we subscribe to a form of social amnesia in which we forget that all knowledge is forged in histories that are played on in the field of social antagonisms (Paul McLaren, qtd. in hooks 31).

McLaren argues that diversity must be understood within a historical context of “social antagonisms.” Diversity cannot be relegated to the interplay of “benign cultural spheres” because this would be subscribing to a form of forgetting.

Margaret Himley, Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Writing Program of Syracuse University, and her colleagues go further than McLaren by distinguishing between two distinct types of diversity: “benign variation” and “conflict diversity.” She laments that students are experiencing a “diversity fatigue... diversity has come to mean nothing more than having readings about oppressed groups ‘shoved down their throats’ as [one] students wrote on [a] course evaluation” (Himley, Farris, and Marzluf 451). She claims that an incorrect version of diversity, which “invokes difference, but does not evoke a commitment to action, to social change, and to redistributive justice,” is the sole focus of many college curricula (Himley, Farris, and Marzluf 452). To exemplify the definite line between the two versions of diversity that Himley references, she cites a study she performed at Syracuse University during the fall of 2007. Himley and her colleagues selected 462 responses to

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interpret of over 3,000 surveyed freshmen; more than half (52%) of these first-year college students defined diversity in terms that Himley coins “benign variation” (454). Laurie Hazard, Director of the Writing Center at Bryant University, mentioned this study in the chapter she authored for a Bryant textbook. She summarized Himley’s study by stating that these students “thought diversity referred to any type of difference. Different ideas, differences between plants and animals, and differences among groups were examples provided by students” (Hazard 90). These particular students discussed diversity without considering the historical and current conflicts associated with it. Like Thomas, these students would only recognize the denotation of diversity as benign differences without acknowledging its historical importance. In terms of higher education, this definition of diversity falls short. Benign variation – referring to any type of superficial difference – would include ice cream preferences, for example; but this is obviously not relevant in a university setting where students are learning about cultural differences. Therefore, we must turn to conflict diversity in order to understand what is at stake in diversity discussions on campus.

#### Conflict Diversity

As McLaren points out, benign variation is severely inadequate for discussing diversity; however, what definition of diversity is adequate for productive diversity discussions? According to Himley’s study, another 40% of the surveyed individuals revealed that they had an understanding of diversity that exceeded the understanding of those who could only identify benign variation (Himley, Farris, and Marzluf 454). These individuals acknowledged that diversity is founded in a historical context of social struggle for equality. In contrast to benign variation, this understanding of the social injustices associated with the term is referred to as “conflict diversity.” Himley eloquently distinguishes between benign variation and conflict diversity:

Thus, for over half of these definitions, diversity is a constantive... or perhaps a pseudo-constantive – it makes a statement, but with no real historical referent at all (6). It fetishizes or naturalizes diversity, removing it from histories of struggle and liberation. The other definitions use *diversity* as performative –

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that is, to say *diversity* is to commit to action (6). It refers to and insists on the struggle for equality, the uneven playing field, the lived realities of oppression and privilege, and the desire to improve on this situation (Himley, Farris, and Marzluf 455).

This understanding of historical context and promise of action begins to explore how conflict diversity is a more complete definition of diversity than benign variation.

In *Understanding Diversity: An Introduction to Class, Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (2006), Fred L. Pincus, an Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, elaborates upon this notion of conflict diversity. After discussing social-scientific definitions that Pincus finds unacceptable, he claims that “conflict diversity... [is] understanding how different groups exist in a hierarchy of inequality in terms of power, privilege, and wealth” (Pincus 4). While benign variation acknowledges only the differences between individuals that are not controversial, conflict diversity specifically acknowledges points of divergence that result or have resulted in a socially constructed hierarchy.

Although he does not employ the term conflict diversity, noted scholar Cornel West provides insight as to how the historical significance of race conflict affects our current understanding of diversity. In his book, *Race Matters*, he states that “to engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society – flaws rooted in historical inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes” (West 6). He warns that ignoring the important role that history plays in the enduring legacy of white supremacy would make intellectual conversation about race issues impossible. West regards “the history of American democracy in regard to black people from 1776 to 1965 [as] a colossal failure” (xiv). West argues that race relations in the current context cannot be understood without considering where such racist sentiments originated. In order to grasp the history of racial relations in the United States, it is important to remember that segregation was only abolished forty-four years ago with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, well within the living memory of an older generation. He argues that society is conditioned to accept racial hierarchies through the troubled history of slavery and Jim Crow Laws. West’s

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sentiment that “no other people have been taught systematically to hate themselves [as black people have been]” begins to delve into how societal discrimination or prejudice against a group may be internalized by individuals of that subset as truth (West xiii). Moreover, West claims that discrimination often leads to a harmful misrecognition of self.

West’s argument is grounded in the work of W.E.B. DuBois, civil rights activist, educator, historian, and author of *The Souls of Black Folk*. As early as 1903, when *The Souls of Black Folk* was first published, DuBois had already written about the danger of discrimination against the minority. He warned that it would result in self-misrecognition by individuals belonging to that minority; this is the same predicament that West cites nearly one hundred years later. According to DuBois,

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps him from being torn asunder (Du Bois 5).

In this famous quote, DuBois deftly describes how society may interpret an individual’s identity as characterized by the membership of that individual to a larger group rather than based on the unique qualities of that person. More importantly, he states that the individual characterized will often internalize society’s interpretation of his or her personality as truth. DuBois is referring specifically to members of the black community facing discrimination and being indoctrinated to believe that their identity is defined by society’s prejudiced assumptions. DuBois’s idea of “double-consciousness” is revived years later in West’s acknowledgement that African Americans have been systematically trained to internalize racism.

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West's argument is useful in a discussion of diversity for two reasons. First, his explanation of how historical context affects race matters today establishes a framework for how ineffectual ahistorical representations of diversity are. Without understanding how race relations evolved to their current state, it would be useless to attempt to dissect how they manifest today. Since it is vital that diversity be placed into an accurate historical context in order to fully understand its present complexities, we must understand where diversity and the discussion of diversity have played a role in the past rather than expect diversity to exist in an ahistorical environment.

A second aspect of diversity that West helps us to better understand is why discussions of diversity are so often limited to race. Because of the prevalent historical and current inequality between races, society is often preoccupied with making amends for past errors through programs such as Affirmative Action. In the fight for diversity in higher education, diversity is often incorrectly conflated with racial equality alone because racial and ethnic struggle are possibly the most historically extensive examples of the harmful effects of failing to promote and recognize diversity. Many discussions of diversity even today are limited to racial and ethnic dimensions. This is not to say that race and ethnicity should not be involved in the process of promoting diversity; rather, it is to suggest that racial and ethnic differences should be one component of many different types of diversity rather than the sole focus of discussion.

Although we accept conflict diversity as a more complete definition of diversity than benign variation, the characteristics that differentiate between individuals still remain to be established. To consider this question, we turn to legal precedents on the value of diversity in higher education.

#### Legal Definitions of Diversity in Higher Education

In determining what variables should be considered as diversity in addition to race, it is important to bear in mind that differences should be based on an understanding of conflict diversity rather than only benign variation. Additionally, we must recognize how the law has historically considered race and other factors of diversity in higher education. When Brown

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v. Board of Education (1956) overturned the 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the racial segregation of public schools was ruled unlawful, and the long legacy of legal conflict over diversity in education began with vigor.

In 1978, the infancy of Affirmative Action had begun to affect the composition of institutions of higher education; in the case of the Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, the Supreme Court was asked to determine the legality of Affirmative Action policies. The majority opinion issued by former Justice Lewis F. Powell stated that although racial quotas were unconstitutional, universities were allowed to consider race to some extent in the admissions process. Justice Powell maintained that “racial classifications... are constitutional only if they are narrowly tailored to further compelling governmental interests” (“Supreme Court Collection: Grutter v. Bollinger”). The Bakke case has since served as an important legal precedent in determining legality of racially conscious admission processes. For more than thirty years, universities have had to find the “hair-splitting distinction between race as a ‘plus factor’ (allowed) and numerical quotas (forbidden)” (Kantrowitz and Wingert 30). Some states have begun to move away from recognizing racial classifications as appropriate even to the extent allowed in the Bakke case. For example, California residents passed the California Civil Rights initiative (Proposition 209) in 1996 which forbade the consideration of race as any kind of a factor in admission to public institutions of higher education or hiring in government employment positions (Leonhardt 1). Although Proposition 209 has faced numerous lawsuits, its ruling still stands today.

Since the Bakke decision was announced, universities have had to weigh the extent to which it is appropriate to consider race in admissions. One recent case that garnered a great deal of attention was that of the University of Michigan’s undergraduate program which was discussed beginning in 1997 and decided in 2003. The case, Jennifer Gratz *et al.* v. Bollinger *et al.*, questioned the use of the University of Michigan’s point system for admissions (“Research Law”). Due to an overwhelming number of applicants and a small admissions staff, the University used a point system to classify its prospective students into subcategories for admissions consideration. Despite the fact that “out of a total of 150 possible points, a student [could] get up to 110 for academics,” controversy arose when it was revealed that

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twenty points were awarded if a student self-identified as an “underrepresented racial/ethnic minority” while a mere twelve points were deemed equivalent to a perfect score on the SAT1 or ACT (Kantrowitz and Wingert 32, 34). Ultimately, on June 23, 2003, former Chief Justice Rehnquist found that since the point system used by the University of Michigan assigned race a direct point value, it was unconstitutional because the system was equivalent to assigning racial quotas rather than only considering race as a “factor.”

Also in 2003, diversity in higher education came to the forefront of the judicial process in the case of *Grutter v. Bollinger*. Barbara Grutter questioned the use of racial criteria in the admissions process of the University of Michigan Law School after being denied acceptance on what she believed to be racial grounds. The University was charged with proving first, that admissions decisions were made in an effort to promote diversity by factors more than just race, and second, the irrefutable importance of a diverse student body. The majority opinion, written by former Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, offers a legal definition of diversity and an argument for its value on college campuses.

The University of Michigan Law School argued that “the broad range of qualities and experiences that may be considered valuable contributions to the student body diversity” were not limited to racial and ethnic diversity (“Supreme Court Collection: *Grutter v. Bollinger*”). In proving the validity of this claim, the institution noted numerous students who had been accepted on the basis of extensive experience abroad, fluency in more than one language, overcoming “personal adversity and family hardship,” impressive community service or work experience in fields unrelated to the practice of law, or any other experience or strength deemed as potentially beneficial to building the character of the campus community (“Supreme Court Collection: *Grutter v. Bollinger*”). Each applicant to the University of Michigan Law School was given the opportunity to discuss in depth any personal convictions of individual diversity through a personal statement, letters of recommendation, and an essay. This case provides evidence for an understanding of diversity that is more expansive than the traditional discussions of race and ethnicity; however, not all of the “diverse” qualities argued by the University of Michigan Law School meet the requirement of historical context for conflict diversity. As previously mentioned, it is important to remember that aspects of true

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diversity should be based on historical conflict between people because of those differences. It is true that community environment, as provided as an example of diversity by the University of Michigan Law School, could constitute a conflicting history; a person with an underprivileged socioeconomic background and little access to public services or education has been faced with adversity that another individual who received specialized private education and lived in a safe, upper-class community would not have. Despite the fact that diversity in this case was not constrained to the terms of conflict diversity, the Michigan case makes it clear that universities can take race into account in their admissions decisions, along with a variety of other factors.

#### Conclusions about Defining Diversity

Based upon an examination of debates about diversity, I argue that conflict diversity emerges as the most complete characterization of diversity in both legal and social contexts. Without recognizing how historical and current conflict affects diversity in a community, it would be useless to discuss it. If the differences between individuals that constitute as diverse qualities were merely benign, what would be the reason for discussing them? As stated above, there is nothing important to be gained from a debate about how the experiences of a person who likes vanilla ice cream differs from a person who likes chocolate ice cream. In contrast, however, a discussion about the differences between the experience of a homosexual male and a heterosexual female might result in a more productive debate about gender or sexual orientation issues.

The legal precedents demonstrate that discussions of diversity must not be limited to racial and ethnic differences that have most frequently arisen in historical discussions; legal standards have demonstrated that the definition of diversity should be related to conflict and include factors other than race and ethnicity that have traditionally been neglected. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1999) which granted civil rights protection to citizens with mental and/or physical disabilities, the Equal Pay Act (1963) which mandates equal pay for men and women who perform significantly equivalent work, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (1967) which prohibits age discrimination in employment demonstrate that



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legal civil rights protection for diversity includes those with disabilities, of both genders, and of all ages in addition to those who are racially or ethnically diverse. To date, no federal protection prevents discrimination based on sexual orientation or socioeconomic status, yet these factors of diversity must not be forgotten in understanding diversity on college campuses.

In 2008, Damon A. Williams, Assistant Vice Provost for Multicultural and International Affairs at the University of Connecticut, and Katrina C. Wade-Golden, senior research specialist in the Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives at the University of Michigan, were key investigators in a study regarding diversity's contribution to the quality of education. At the conclusion of their research, Williams and Wade-Golden contributed an article to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* discussing the importance of having a chief diversity officer on campus. They found that:

Campus-diversity efforts are no longer important simply because they are morally right, a continuation of the civil-rights movement. Diversity efforts are important because they are fundamental to quality and excellence in the world in which we live today. Moreover, diversity is more than a black-and-white binary; it now includes race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, nationality, religion, and a host of other dimensions (“The Complex Mandate of a Chief Diversity Officer”).

There are two important things to note about this passage. First, as the legal precedents demonstrate, Williams and Wade-Golden stress the importance of expanding our understanding of diversity to include more than only racial and ethnic differences. Second, they cite diversity as a way to improve the quality of education. Given that conflict diversity is a more complete definition than benign variation and that diversity encompasses more than solely racial and ethnic differences as Williams and Wade-Golden allude to here, an imperative question remains. Why do institutions of higher education believe that they should foster diversity? What value do they hope to gain from having a diverse campus?

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## **THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY**

### Introduction

Although there are those who argue that diversity holds no inherent value, research indicates that majority of academics believe that diversity in higher education provides many advantages to a university. A diverse campus community is reflective of society, helps to promote acceptance and understanding, and provides students with a higher quality of education.

### Acceptance and Understanding

In his book, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*, Dinesh D'Souza states that "although university leaders speak of the self-evident virtues of diversity, it is not at all obvious why it is necessary to a first-rate education" (D'Souza 230). He notes the foundation of such prestigious institutions of higher education such as Brandeis (Jewish-sponsored), Notre Dame (private Catholic institution), and Mount Holyoke (women's college) as indicative of homogeneous environments of religious or gender sameness where quality education can take place without diversity. With such impressive universities as those listed above having achieved high regard without attention to diversity of religion or gender, the value of a diverse campus seems to fade. Is it only for the sake of being politically correct that institutions of higher education seek to foster a diverse student body or are there other benefits they might hope to receive in exchange for promoting such an environment?

Both the Bakke and Grutter v. Bollinger cases refute D'Souza's claim that diversity in higher education has no value. If we recall the ruling of the Bakke case, racially conscious decisions were deemed to be constitutional so long as "compelling governmental interests" were furthered by the inclusion of such factors ("Supreme Court Collection: Grutter v. Bollinger"). Given that the legal system found that the racial classifications used by the University of Michigan Law School to deny Grutter admission were indeed constitutional, exactly what kind of "compelling governmental interests" are furthered by the use of such volatile categorizations in an institution of higher education? The Supreme Court Justices closely

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examined the reasons why the University of Michigan Law School sought to promote a diverse student body. The University asserted that having people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds discussing issues together in the classroom and interacting socially on campus promoted an environment of interracial acceptance that would otherwise be impossible. They emphasized the importance of a diverse student body in breaking down stereotypes and preventing one or a few students on campus from becoming the tokenized as the spokesperson for their race, economic status, or other distinguishing characteristic.

#### Reflective of Society

In addition to promoting an accepting student body, a diverse campus is important for providing an environment that is reflective of society. During the Grutter v. Bollinger trial, studies included in works such as *Compelling Interest: Examining the Evidence on Racial Dynamics in Colleges and Universities* and *Diversity Challenged: Evidence on the Impact of Affirmative Action* were provided as evidence of diversity's importance. O'Connor stated that according to these sources, "student body diversity promotes learning outcomes and 'better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals'" ("Supreme Court Collection: Grutter v. Bollinger"). As a law school, the University of Michigan specifically stressed the importance of exposing the nation's leaders of tomorrow to the same diversity that they would see in the workforce while they were still on campus. By creating a diverse group of leaders, the University of Michigan felt that their students could more effectively contribute to society after graduation.

Lee Bollinger, current President of Columbia University and former President of the University of Michigan, published an article in 2007 revealing his inside opinion of the Grutter v. Bollinger trial. Throughout "Why Diversity Matters", Bollinger provides a strong argument for the importance of diversity within higher education; he even goes so far as to call diversity "one of the greatest strengths of American education." Bollinger insists that it is the purpose of a university to prepare its students for life after graduation. He states that being exposed to a variety of diverse individuals in the student body is "essential to students' training for this new world, nurturing in them an instinct to reach out instead of clinging to the

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comforts of what seems natural or familiar.” It is the responsibility of the universities, according to Bollinger, to train future leaders in a diverse environment so that they may be well-versed in a variety of global issues. He states that diversity is “vital for establishing a cohesive, truly national society – one in which rising generations learn to overcome the biases they absorb as children while also appreciating the unique talents their colleagues bring to any equation.”

#### Quality of Education

Not only does a diverse campus create an atmosphere that is reflective of society and foster acceptance and understanding, but it also increases the quality of education. University of Michigan Law School claimed educational advantages to their racially conscious admissions process. At the time the case was heard, the law school accepted only 10% of its applicants. The University praised the importance of having students from all different backgrounds because as a result, “classroom discussion is livelier, more spirited, and simply more enlightening and interesting” (“Supreme Court Collection: Grutter v. Bollinger”).

The importance of a diverse environment is also emphasized by bell hooks (professor, well-known author, feminist, and social activist) in her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. According to hooks, dissenting opinions in the classroom serve as a catalyst for productive discussion. hooks argues that differing opinions in the classroom are the best way to foster intellectual development because professors and other students alike are challenged to defend beliefs that they may or may not have logical reason for maintaining. hooks describes this theory as a liberatory practice and compares discussions driven by diversity in the classroom to discussing social situations with children. She believes that because children have not yet been socially educated to accept certain things as universal and static, they often stimulate the most intellectual conversations. hooks states that adults are conditioned to accept the status quo as unquestionable truth; when an adult is asked by a child to prove something that he or she takes for granted as self-evident, the adult must reexamine his or her own thinking to either solidify or challenge held beliefs. Likewise, a diverse

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student body in the classroom challenges both instructors and peers to reexamine closely held “universal truths” and perhaps recognize that truth is not always universal.

Gerald Graff, Professor of English and Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, also supports hooks in her claim that a diverse student body improves the quality of education at colleges and universities. He discusses the increasing prominence of social issues and cultural differences in institutions of higher education by encouraging readers to “acknowledge the legitimacy of social conflict” as a place for productive intellectual conversations to arise (5). Graff states that the increased level of conflict over diversity issues in higher education is indicative of the progress of intellectual development on university campuses. The relatively recent arrival of a group of diverse individuals in the campus community (including homosexual, female, and multicultural students) has led to the discovery of new ways of approaching and discussing traditional academic theory. These newly admitted students may demand more from the curriculum than has conventionally been included. Graff states that a diverse student body and faculty “[dramatizes] the fact that culture itself is a debate, not a monologue” (8). By allowing the debate to occur, the traditional canon of thought is challenged thereby affirming or demanding reevaluation of beliefs that were previously believed to be self-evident.

Because of societal discomfort with conflict, it is oftentimes incorrectly assumed that disagreement surrounding social issues in the classroom is unproductive. Contrarily, Graff (like hooks) discusses the importance of presenting these conflicting opinions because it forces professors and students alike to argue and find reasoning for their beliefs rather than simply taking them for granted as universal truth. He claims that “[good teachers] know that student docility is a far more pervasive problem than student intransigence” (9). Graff wisely states that: “like the American University, a good deal of American life is organized so as to protect us from having to confront those unpleasant adversaries who may be just the ones we need to listen to” (viii).

Theorists and professors are joined by students who also recognize the importance of diversity in their college experience. In the September of 2007 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Maya Dean, a student from Mount Holyoke College, describes how a diverse

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campus improved the quality of her college education. As a woman of Native American and African American descent, Dean's search for a university was specifically focused on finding an institution that was as diverse on her campus tour as it appeared to be in its marketing materials. Dean found Mount Holyoke College to be true to its marketing, and she argues that she experienced a better quality of education as a result of being a part of a diverse student body. Mount Holyoke College has students from more than seventy countries; there are students who speak many different languages, practice a variety of religions, espouse conflicting political views, and vocally differ in opinion about sexual orientation and gender.

Though such an environment seems like a natural place for cultural, religious, political, and linguistic barriers to form, instead it opened up a large arena for dialogue to take place between people of varying backgrounds. Each student enters the institution with a sense of identity based on characteristics about herself that she feels are important. The foundation of her identity is severely challenged during her first year of college by discussions about the philosophical critique of race as a social construct, about religious prejudices against Muslims, or about discrimination against homosexuals, for example. Those everyday challenges were exactly what I was hoping to encounter in college. They have shaped me into a woman comfortable with her biracial identity, her faith, and her outstanding academic capabilities (Dean).

From her own self-reflection, the quality of Dean's education was vastly improved because she was challenged by those who think differently than her. Based upon her account, it becomes clear that both academics and students themselves recognize how significantly a campus can benefit from a diverse student body.

## **APPROACHING DIVERSITY**

### Equality?

The true definition of diversity must be founded on the idea of conflict rather than benign variation. We also accept that fostering diversity on college campuses does indeed have

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value. However, it remains to be discussed exactly how diversity should be addressed. In contemporary culture, there are two distinct approaches to accepting diversity. The first approach to promoting diversity is by disregarding differences among individuals or groups in order to create a sense of equality and commonality between citizens. There are those who believe that establishing sameness by ignoring differences is the best way for a diverse group of people to experience equality. Dinesh D'Souza, as previously mentioned, is an example of one critic who subscribes to this notion. He encourages institutions of higher education to stop promoting a student body that is diverse in race, gender, and ethnicity and instead consider only the importance of a campus community with "diversity of mind" (D'Souza 230). He discusses how diversity of mind relates to merely differences of opinion on issues such as social organization or philosophical convictions; D'Souza emphasizes that these differences of opinion can be found not only between ethnically or racially diverse individuals, for example, but also between individuals with exactly the same skin color, gender, and background.

Beyond claiming that only "diversity of mind" is important, D'Souza states that by categorizing individuals as members of a minority group and acknowledging their separation from the larger student body, universities are increasing conflict between minorities and the majority:

Instead of treating [minorities] as individuals, colleges typically consider minorities as members of a group... if the university model is replicated in society at large, far from bringing ethnic harmony, it will reproduce and magnify the lurid bigotry, intolerance, and balkanization of campus life in the broader culture (D'Souza 230).

D'Souza is a proponent of leaving differences between people unacknowledged in order to invent a shared identity of equality for all people.

#### Recognition of Differences

There are many theorists who support the recognition of differences between diverse people rather than demanding equality through homogenization as D'Souza suggests. Charles

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Taylor, political theorist and author of “The Politics of Recognition,” argues that the recognition of differences is important simply because acknowledgment is a basic human need. Western thought is often grounded in ethnocentrism, the belief that one culture is superior to another. He argues that this superiority complex is a legacy from colonialism that manifests today with certain groups believing that their cultural traditions and values are inherently more valuable than other cultures’. He argues that the identity of individuals belonging to the supposedly culturally inferior group is often imposed by others. Taylor states that “due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need” (250). If society fails to recognize and find inherent value in each culture, Taylor warns that the members of those cultural groups may internalize their cultural inferiority.

The most important role of recognition of differences, according to Taylor, is to prevent misrecognition. Bluntly stated, misrecognition can result in prejudice or discrimination. Taylor argues that an individual’s human identity is created dialogically; that is, an individual’s relationships with others determine his or her perception of self. If an individual is raised in a society where prejudice or discrimination against one of his or her defining characteristics exists, he or she may internalize that prejudice and come to define him or herself by those terms. This is of particular importance in examining the curriculum of institutions of higher education. The traditional works included in the syllabi of institutions of higher education are generally written from a Euro-centric perspective. The legacy of a canon written by, about, and for wealthy men of European descent taught in universities across the country perpetuates the problem that Taylor identifies here. Students belonging to cultural groups that differ from the culture of the canon are inadvertently educated to believe that their culture does not merit inclusion in the canon because it is inherently inferior. This may lead to the aforementioned misrecognition of self.

Taylor claims that misrecognition is an even more grievous offense than failure to recognize differences by noting that “what has come about with the modern age is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognized can fail” (255). He fears that by not correctly recognizing the differences between a diverse group people belonging to a variety of cultures, society is allowing misrecognition to take place. If society were to



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accept the first proposal of promoting diversity by ignoring differences, Taylor argues that we would be creating an environment for prejudice and discrimination to flourish.

Taylor's argument about misrecognition recalls the writing of West and DuBois. All three of these men warn of the danger associated with the failure to acknowledge differences between people. By not recognizing differences among people, society fosters an environment where discrimination exponentially increases over time. Discrimination not only misinforms people who do not belong to the group but more devastatingly results in the DuBoisian "double-consciousness" of members of the group. Taylor is insistent that a successful society based on equal recognition of differences between individuals and social groups "is not just the appropriate model for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it" (Taylor 255). Ultimately, Taylor eloquently distinguishes between imposing homogeneity and the recognition of differences:

With the politics of equal dignity, what is established is meant to be universally the same, an identical basket of rights and immunities; with the politics of difference, what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else. The idea that it is precisely this distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity. And this assimilation is the cardinal sin against the ideal of authenticity (Taylor 257).

Taylor claims that falsely placing diverse individuals together into one homogenous group is simply disingenuous and counterproductive.

## **MARKETING OF DIVERSITY AT BRYANT UNIVERSITY**

### Challenges

As we can see from the varying discussions about defining diversity, there are many challenges faced by every institution of higher education in effectively placing diversity into an appropriate context. Each institution strives to defend the value of having a diverse student body and struggles to successfully implement diversity initiatives. As institutions place

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increasing importance on diversification, administrations are often clumsy about effectively executing programs in part due to their inexperience with the issue as it has come to the forefront only in recent years. From valuing diversity to appropriately recognizing differences, all institutions of higher education are challenged by how they must market diversity.

Although all universities are challenged by diversity, some institutions have been more successful in implementing programs than others. Ideally, the student body, faculty, and staff should be diverse in thought, religion, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and mental and physical abilities. More importantly, the community should strive to learn from one another and use the diversity of campus as a learning opportunity; both the students and the administration should actively seek to educate themselves. Although some institutions are more successful than others, it is impossible for any university to fully realize a successful diversity program. Promoting diversity is a process that must be pursued on an ongoing basis as the challenges regarding diversity are dynamic and must be addressed with flexibility and patience.

#### Public Portrayal of Diversity Initiatives

After establishing some theoretical and legal discussions of diversity, we need to examine how Bryant University conceptualizes diversity in order to discuss how it specifically pertains to the campus community. In the student handbook for the 2007-2008 academic year, the Notice of Nondiscriminatory Policy as to Students appears as follows [emphasis added]:

Bryant University admits students of any **race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, color, national and ethnic origin** to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally afforded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate unlawfully on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, national and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school administered programs. In addition, Bryant University does not discriminate unlawfully against persons

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with a **disability** and is in full compliances with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Bryant University, *Student Handbook* 124).

The same information appears in the Undergraduate Course Catalog for 2007-2008 which also includes the “Bryant Principles.” These principles state that “Bryant University is a place where the sacredness of each person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued” (Bryant University, *Undergraduate Course Catalog* 8). The catalog also lists disability services, emphasizes the University’s international focus, and discusses student services focused on diversity issues such as the campus ministry, Intercultural Center, and Women’s Center. The undergraduate mission states that the University seeks to provide “a culturally enriching campus life that encourages personal growth by offering opportunities for involvement in the arts, music, theater and forms of creative activities... [and the] cultivation of a global perspective” (Bryant University, *Undergraduate Course Catalog* 53). In publicly printed documents, Bryant University focuses on the same diversity issues as the rest of the higher education community throughout the country; they include equal protection for individuals of many diverse backgrounds that satisfy an understanding of conflict diversity. In addition to university policies on diversity, it is pertinent to this study to closely examine how the University portrays the subject throughout its promotional materials in images and text.

#### Analysis of Marketing Materials

In an effort to better understand what marketing materials Bryant distributes, I analyzed a selection of documents distributed to prospective students in the spring of 2008 as well as some material distributed to the campus as a whole. The following analysis of a selection from these materials makes no attempt to explain all information or messages contained in these materials but instead seeks to create an overarching picture of the message about diversity presented to the campus community. What image of diversity at Bryant University is presented to prospective and current students through promotional materials? Does it accurately reflect the manifestation of diversity on campus? It is important to remember that

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these materials are, in essence, advertising. My criticisms of these pieces are based on their fair or unfair representation of the reality on campus, but we must recognize that they are designed for the purpose of university relations.

In September of 2006, Bryant distributed an academic calendar to the students, faculty, and staff titled “Diversity Just *Is*: The Diversity of Character, The Character of Success.” The cover of the calendar provides a good starting point for a discussion of how the University presents diversity in its marketing materials (see Appendix A). The smiling faces on the cover are a variety of different skin tones. Men and women of different races have their arms around one another in celebration of their graduation. A disabled student is depicted tossing a basketball in the hoop with the support of her teammates. Whether taking notes in the classroom, shooting hoops on a basketball court, or strumming their guitar on the campus green, these students all seem unified, happy, and harmonious. The cover page of this calendar presents a benign image of diversity on a fully integrated campus and makes no reference to conflict.

The title of the calendar is explained on the first page as having been inspired by Mohammed Bilal, a musician, writer, speaker, and mostly famously a celebrity from “Real World” on MTV. He spoke on the Bryant campus in the fall of 2005 about the importance of diversity. In a personal interview with Renee Buisson, who helped to organize his appearance, she revealed that the attendance that this event was extremely poor. This fact begins our discussion of whether or not the “Diversity Just *Is*” calendar is a fair representation of Bryant’s campus. Given that only a small percentage of the student population attended the Bilal event, it is somewhat disingenuous to use it as the emblem of diversity on campus. It is equally problematic that this same calendar presents a harmonious atmosphere of diversity acceptance that is perhaps insincere; if so few students attended an event specifically focused on diversity, is it fair to present a calendar in which all students are aware of diversity and promote it daily?

The first month of the calendar, September, depicts a scene of the Rotunda in the Unistrukture (see Appendix B). From the photograph depicted, it is clear that it was taken in the time between classes when many students walk through the Rotunda to return to their dorm rooms,

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eat lunch in the dining hall, or hang out with friends before their next class. The accompanying quote states “the Unistrukture Rotunda is a favorite gathering spot for students in between classes. It’s a great place to see the whole community” (Bryant University, *Diversity Just Is*). Although it is true that the Rotunda is where most of the community can be seen, the calendar does not allude to the clear segregation witnessed in the Rotunda. Students at Bryant all utilize the Rotunda, but there are clear areas where certain segments of the student body might be found. Racial minority students tend to occupy the round benches in front of the door, while sorority sisters sit on the steps in front of Café a la Carte, the small café where students can have a quick snack or a coffee. The football team often congregates at the railing at the top of the stairs, overseeing the rest of the Rotunda from their second-story perch. In fact, a student survey compiled for The Princeton Review revealed that Bryant students thought that “the whole campus is ‘very cliquy’” (“Bryant University: Student Body”). It is interesting to note that in this context, the calendar presents the Rotunda as an example of a place where the community comes together. In actuality, the Rotunda may be one of the clearest places where the segregation of the community can be visually perceived.

Flip the calendar to the month of March (see Appendix C). Here, the calendar represents gender diversity by depicting six women; some of the women are focusing on academics while others are socializing. A rosy picture of gender diversity on campus is created. It is interesting that of the six women, only one (whose face is just a profile) is white: two women are black, one is Latina, and two appear to be of Asian descent. In the fall of 2006, 85.3% of the women on campus identified as white. Another 2.5% identified as black (non-Hispanic). 4.2% of the female population identified as Hispanic while 2.9% identified as Asian Pacific. The diversity calendar’s gender diversity page presented a campus where one out of every six women at Bryant (roughly 17%) are white. This stands in stark contrast to the 85.3% figure reported in the fall of the same year the calendar was printed (Bryant University, *Internal Document*). Given the small percentages of minority women on campus, would it be likely to see a group of five minority women with one white student? The picture of racial diversity on campus is enormously exaggerated in these representations. More curious is the fact that the

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focus of March is listed as Women's History month. Even in a month where gender diversity is the main focal point, racial diversity is clearly emphasized.

The calendar concludes with the month of August which depicts a gay pride flag flying against the backdrop of a blue sky (see Appendix D). It displays a quote from Symphone'e Willoughby, class of 2008 and an active member of Bryant Pride, citing that "staff and faculty [at Bryant] are honest about how critical the issue of sexual orientation discrimination is, and they ask students to question the status quo and to ask themselves whether or not we are contributing to a solution or adding to the problem" (Bryant University, *Diversity Just Is*). The sterile background of the gay pride flag is somewhat telling. A survey of the campus will reveal that no pride flag flies from student windows, in front of buildings, or anywhere else. It would have been difficult to place a pride flag against a Bryant backdrop for this photograph; students, faculty, and staff would have instantly recognized that the image was staged. In order to prevent the community from rejecting the picture as false, it was instead presented as an antiseptic image of a flag against a blue sky that could have been taken anywhere. To use this picture as a representation of sexual orientation diversity on campus seems artificial.

The months of January (see Appendix E) and October (see Appendix F) are of particular interest to this study. January features Pam Malcolm, a full-scholarship basketball student who was permanently disabled immediately prior to the start of her freshman year. Malcolm, supporting herself on a crutch, is using her free hand to drop a basketball into the hoop during her senior night as a few of her teammates smile and applaud in a circle around her. This month is clearly touting Bryant's appreciation for students with disabilities. October, on the other hand, displays an image of Brian Levin as Student Senate President leading the discussion during a meeting. The quote accompanying the picture cites how Bryant's environment is one where there is "room for every point of view" (*Diversity Just Is*). Both of these students were active student leaders during their time on campus and played an important role in dialogues on diversity, a point to which I will return.

The "Diversity Just Is" calendar, like Bryant's professed principles, demonstrates a fair, well-rounded representation of diversity that includes more than racial and ethnic differences but

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includes differences of age, sexual orientation, cultural backgrounds, gender, and disability. However, as we have begun to witness, some of the images may not reveal the entire history of diversity on campus.

Like the calendar, “Bryant University: A Premier Education with a Global Focus” (a pamphlet and an interactive CD distributed to prospective international students), helps to develop how diversity on campus may be exaggerated through marketing materials (see Appendix G). The CD outlines student life at Bryant largely through student and professor testimonials; it serves as a video tour of the campus for international students who may be unable to physically visit the campus before making an admissions decision. Throughout the video, students interviewed are identified by their name and home country or state. Of the forty times that a label appears, students are listed as from somewhere within the United States twenty-three times while students are labeled as international from countries such as Saudi Arabia and Jamaica seventeen times. The prospective students watching the video saw 42.5% of the testimonials coming from international students and 57.5% from American students. In the fall of 2006, only 2.5% of men and 1.9% of women on Bryant’s campus self-identified as international students (Bryant University, *Internal Document*). Despite this fact, they are presented in this piece of promotional material as having a major presence on campus.

By specifically indicating where these international students are from, they are in a sense tokenized. The purpose of this may be to attract international students to campus; if they believe that they will be part of a large population of non-American students, they may be more comfortable applying to Bryant. However, is it fair to inaccurately depict the percentage of international students on campus? Is it beneficial to tokenize international or multicultural students who are on campus or does it have some harmful consequences? During an open forum on campus regarding diversity and sexuality issues, Marguerita Vasquez, an African American, noted that “some of her teachers make her and her African-American friends ‘black ambassadors,’ i.e., African-Americans who are expected to know everything about the history of slavery and acknowledge whether something is okay to say or not” (Drew, “Open Forum” 6). By asking the relatively small number of multicultural and

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international students to speak on behalf of their race or culture, they are elevated to a spokesperson status that separates them further from the rest of the campus community.

In addition to the over-representation of racial and ethnic diversity on campus, “Bryant: Enrichment through Diversity,” demonstrates how diversity in marketing materials is oftentimes conflated with only race and ethnicity (see Appendix H). The pamphlet specifically focuses on Bryant’s diversity initiatives and opens with remarks from T. Abraham D. Hunter, former Director of the Intercultural Center for International Education and Multicultural affairs. He states that it is his responsibility to develop “programming to better serve Bryant’s international students, students of color, and other underrepresented groups” (Bryant University, *Enrichment through Diversity*). He concludes by stating that his hope is to work with students to “promote a tolerant, enriching, and diverse learning community” (Bryant University, *Enrichment through Diversity*). There are specific features on two current students and one alumnus. One of the current students is black; the other student and the alumnus are both Asian. The pamphlet includes information about the Intercultural Center, the International Business major, the Multicultural Student Union, athletics, and general application/admissions information. The pamphlet is obviously focused on international and multicultural students. The question is, why is the pamphlet titled “Enrichment through Diversity,” when only one aspect of “diversity” (as the University publicly defines it in the institution’s principles) is included? If the University seeks to promote a campus that is diverse in all of the ways that it defines publicly, then it seems that the pamphlet targeted at diverse students should discuss support programs and services available such as the Women’s Center, Bryant Pride, and campus ministry. However, information regarding programs focused on aspects of diversity other than race are conspicuously absent.

In an effort to understand racial representation in marketing materials, it is helpful to refer to a past study performed at the University. In the spring of 2006, graduating senior Shawn Benham presented “Analysis of University Marketing Programs,” his senior honors thesis, in which he compares Bryant University’s marketing materials to those from other institutions. His examination of Bryant’s promotional materials is particularly pertinent to this study. In the brochures that he analyzed, Benham identified 698 people who were clearly visible. He



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reported an equal number of males and females were presented. This contrasts fairly significantly with officially reported number of females (41%) versus males (59%) attending Bryant in 2006 (Benham 32). Benham's examination of racial diversity presented in marketing materials revealed that Asian, Latino/a, and "other" classifications were fairly represented. However, he found that the representation of black students in the photos (6.9%) more than tripled the 2% reported black students (Benham 32). 69.5% of students in the promotional materials were identified as white; this considerably under-represents the 86% reported white students on campus (Benham 32). According to Benham's findings, marketing materials used by Bryant University represent a campus that is more diverse in race and gender than is reported in actuality.

Benham performed a survey of Bryant students in the spring of 2006 that asked them to compare their expectations about diversity at Bryant prior to their arrival on campus with their experience as students. In this study, he reported that 67% of students thought that the manifestation of diversity on campus was equal to or better than their expectations before attending Bryant (Benham 29). In the same survey, 80% of students stated that faculty and staff diversity was equal to or better than their expectations prior to enrollment. From these results, it would seem that Bryant marketing materials accurately present diversity on campus; a majority of students claim that campus diversity was as they expected. However, this directly contradicts the findings of his aforementioned study. He found that promotional materials visually presented equal representation for both genders on campus when reported numbers show that men outnumber women nearly three to two. Additionally, white students are underrepresented in materials by 16.5% and black students are overrepresented by three and a half times. What accounts for the disconnect between Bryant students' perceptions in this survey and the reality of diversity on campus?

#### According to the University

Renee Buisson, Executive Director of University Relations at Bryant University, provided a sampling of the marketing materials and discussed the reasoning behind such publications. According to Buisson, the Bryant administration seeks to support diversity through its

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promotional materials. She commented that although they do attempt to visually portray diversity in the photographs used for materials, she added that they “try not to over-represent the situation here at Bryant, but we try to create a truly reflective picture” (Buisson). Buisson explained that the promotional materials printed by the University helped to promote an inclusive campus by attracting multicultural and international students to campus. Buisson emphasized the importance of displaying diversity in promotional materials; students of self-identified groups (gender, race, ethnicity, religion) are more likely to attend a university where they feel there are others who share that common background. She stated that at Bryant, the campus is “living the brand, living to support an inclusive community” (Buisson).

#### Accurate or Inaccurate?

For an external view of the institution’s public image, it is instructive to consider the Bryant University entry published by The Princeton Review. The entry is comprised of material provided by Bryant and contrasts this information with the views of Bryant students based upon a survey. In the 2009 edition of *The Best Colleges in the Northeast*, Bryant is described as having “close to 80 student clubs and organizations that benefit many social causes” and “promote[s] intellectual exploration” (“Bryant University: Student Body”). The section also outlines Bryant’s transition to Division I athletics and gives a brief overview of many student organizations on campus. The section submitted by Bryant presents a similar picture to that presented in its marketing materials. However, this image contrasts strongly with the next section titled “Bryant Students Say...” The Princeton Review conducts a survey at the end of each year that gives students from universities across the country the opportunity to describe their institutions. These statements are compiled into a short summary utilizing students’ words to create a picture of how the campus is in reality. From the 2008 survey, the Princeton Review states that [emphasis added]:

**Students at Bryant are very similar**, with similar goals and objectives in mind.”

There’s kind of a “common mold” here of “health-conscious” **suburbanites “from the Northeast”** who have “aspirations to make good sums of money after entering the job market.” “The administrators and teachers are pretty much the most liberal people

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on campus,” explains a senior. “We are a relatively **conservative** school.”... **Preppy attire dominates and “clothes often seem to be a big deal.”**... “There definitely are **students who deviate” from the norm but there aren’t many and they “don’t fit in as well.”** Some students contend that this place is “**diverse economically.**” Others tell us that “**the typical student is white, middle to upper middle class.**” **Ethnic diversity is “rather low” and minority students “tend to stick together.”**

International students do, too. In fact, the whole campus is “**very cliquy**” (“Bryant University: Student Body”).

This survey tells a very different story from what Bryant reports to the Princeton Review and what the marketing materials display. The comments allude to a community that has very little socioeconomic diversity as most students are “middle to upper class,” well-dressed “suburbanites” who wear “preppy” clothes and are status-conscious. In comparison with the marketing materials which present a community of racially and ethnically diverse students, students view the campus as mostly “white” with “rather low” ethnic diversity. If we compare this characterization to the photograph of the Rotunda scene from the “Diversity Just Is” calendar, a different picture of the student body emerges. Although the whole community “comes together” in the Rotunda in the photo, the students feel that international and minority students “tend to stick together” and that, on the whole, the campus is “very cliquy.”

An examination of selected marketing materials depicts an optimistic view of the state of diversity on campus. If Buisson is correct that the marketing materials do not over-represent the situation at Bryant, then Bryant is an extremely diverse campus that seeks to provide equal protection to students that are diverse in a variety of ways. However, certain events on campus suggest that Bryant is still struggling to diversify its campus. To cite just one example, in the fall of 2006, the Women’s Center hosted an interracial dating panel called “Getting Your Swirl On: Interracial dating on the college campus.” Thirty-five students joined the lively discussion. At first glance, it would seem that this well-attended event is proof of the success of Bryant’s diversity initiatives. However, the article that reported on the event in *The Archway* stated that the students in attendance “talked about the stress of diversity at Bryant and the distinct, incongruous lack of it” (Drew, “Get Your Swirl On” 3).

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If students, or at least some of them, feel that there is a “distinct, incongruous lack” of diversity, then how do the optimistic marketing materials present a picture that is equivalent with the manifestation on campus?

What are the implications of misrepresenting diversity on campus? Why would the University intentionally present itself publicly to be different from how students, faculty, and staff experienced the campus in reality? Roland Barthes, a French cultural theorist, provides important insight to this question. In his essay “Myth Today,” he discusses the purpose of myth and how it functions in society. Specifically, he states that “myth has the task of giving [a] historical intention a natural justification” (Barthes 117). According to Barthes, myths appear to be neutral but are actually motivated; the myth is intended to convince us to believe a certain version of reality. Based upon the images that we have seen, Bryant’s promotional materials construct the myth that the University has already achieved diversity. By representing the institution in this way, the administration hopes that the myth will be accepted and eventually become reality. By exaggerating the number of international students at the University (which was in actuality less than 3% for both men and women in the fall of 2006, as previously mentioned), the administration hopes to attract more international students and achieve a multicultural student body, which is, by itself, a laudable goal. However, Barthes objects to myth because it distorts reality and erases the historical context of an image in order for the myth to appear natural and eternal. In this case, Bryant’s historical struggle for diversity is omitted for the sake of furthering the myth. As we will explore in the following section on the manifestation of diversity, the glossy photos in Bryant’s marketing materials do not accurately reflect the historical and current controversies surrounding diversity on campus.

#### Faculty and Staff Define Personal Diversity and Diversity on Campus

In addition to public proclamations of how diversity is defined at Bryant University, faculty and staff provide better insight to diversity’s manifestation on campus as first-hand observers of the evolution of campus over time. In theory, the University promotes many factors of diversity including race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and gender. As we have

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begun to see in the presentation of information in marketing materials, the public representation of diversity appears unproblematic and harmonious. How do the faculty and staff see diversity evidenced in reality?

As the Director of the Women's Center and Advisor of the Alliance for Women's Awareness, Toby Simon remarked that diversity encompasses a range of differences between people extending to religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical or mental disabilities, and geographical location; she lamented that the discourse on campus is often limited to racial and ethnic discussions. Simon commented that an important issue faced by Bryant diversity initiatives is that the campus is generally comprised of small-town New Englanders who have never been exposed to diversity. As an employee at Brown University for fifteen years, Simon described Bryant University as far behind in its student awareness of multiculturalism issues. In Simon's experience, Bryant students tend to have a less global awareness or knowledge about local diversity issues than those on other campuses. Simon subscribes to Charles Taylor's view that celebrating diversity through the recognition of differences is more effective than homogenization. Despite her understanding of the importance of recognizing differences, she commented that Bryant students do not have the same knowledge. She stated that "students say, 'it's all the same to me,' but the fact of the matter is that we're not all the same" (Simon).

Shontay Delalue King, the Director of the Intercultural Center, expressed that her views of diversity are dynamic; they must be flexible to change as situations evolve and new information arises. She included anything unique that people bring to a group discussion as important elements of diversity. According to Delalue King, Bryant University is "in its infancy of defining diversity... maybe its adolescence." With the existence of programs such as the Diversity Council of Champions (DCC), the Intercultural Center (ICC), and the construction of the Interfaith Center, Delalue King remarked that championing diversity is at least in the University's top-down strategic plan rather than only part of a grassroots student awareness. Like Simon, Delalue King noted that it was important to identify differences between people; she stated that it would at least be disingenuous if not even presumptuous and

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offensive to homogenize differences instead of acknowledging the individual hardships each person faces.

To Reverend Joseph Pescatello, the campus Catholic priest, diversity is “acknowledging that we’re all the same common humanity, but it is important to know that we’re all unique.” He stated simply that diversity is important in higher education because “diversity is reality” (Pescatello); since diversity is prevalent in the workforce and society, students must be exposed to diversity on campus. Pescatello discussed the University’s focus on educating students about diversity through a variety of programs but ultimately commented that efforts did not completely succeed; I will return to his specific criticisms later.

Laurie Hazard, co-creator of Bryant’s freshman Foundations for Learning (FFL) class and Director of the Writing Center, generally agrees with Pescatello’s sentiments that differences between people must be recognized. She coauthored the *Bryant University Foundations for Learning Textbook*, which was required reading for all incoming freshman students at Bryant University in the year 2007. One chapter, “Reconceiving Diversity,” outlines the specific issues regarding diversity that freshmen students might face during their time as university students. Hazard explains Himley’s benign variation but quickly dismisses it for its failure to consider historical associations of power and changes regarding diversity issues over time. Ultimately, Hazard concludes that “respecting diversity means more than being on a campus with people different from you in a number of ways. It also means examining the way in which you interact with others who are different and how they interact with *you*” (87). Hazard also describes the importance of diversity and specifically points to its importance in a business education; she states that the discussion of “sensitive topics, such as... religion or Affirmative Action, can result in some productive tension, possibly causing students to reevaluate their own ideas” (Hazard 84). The “productive tension” Hazard mentions echoes Graff’s sentiments that controversial diversity discussions can be useful learning opportunities.

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#### **MANIFESTATION OF DIVERSITY AT BRYANT UNIVERSITY**

##### Diversity Initiatives and Programs

Bryant makes a concerted effort to offer diversity resources and support to students. The distribution of the “Diversity Just *Is*” calendar is one such example. Continuing efforts toward the furthering of diversity include the introduction of the Diversity Contest in 2007, which invites students to define diversity through creative media. Marcus Lindsay, alumni of the Class of 2008 and co-captain of the Bryant football team for the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 seasons, won both contests to date (2007 and 2008). In 2007, Lindsey’s winning entry was a video he created during his spring break trip to Arkansas to visit a Historically Black College/University (HBCU). As one African American among many other black students, Lindsey was impressed by how even students who shared a common racial heritage held very diverse opinions. Inspired by the diversity he saw among a group of individuals who many people would say were very similar, he interviewed dozens of strangers along his journey about what they thought the term diversity meant. He compiled their responses into a video for the competition. For the 2008 contest, Lindsey discussed the duality of diversity in a visual slideshow accompanied by a live rap performance. He began by reminding the audience that the United States, “a nation of immigrants... was once so divided because of our many differences. Difference was a fire that almost burned us to the ground. And now, maybe more than ever, diversity (in its many forms) is the same fire powering us into a better future” (Lindsey, “Re: Interview”). He wanted to remind the audience that diversity is innate; its existence cannot be changed, but how society approaches it can.

After his experiences with the Diversity Contest, Lindsey commented that it “*can* be... used as a tool to make the Bryant community more aware of the importance of diversity... the contest is a step in the right direction in an attempt to cultivate diversity; getting students, faculty, staff to actually think about it, discuss it, recognize it, act with it in mind.” Although the contest demonstrates that the University is moving in the right direction, Lindsey was concerned that the event “hardly filled the first two rows last year” and stressed the

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importance of encouraging students to attend by “[making] attendance mandatory for freshman (at the least), as well as any students/classes in which diversity can be mentioned.”

In addition to the diversity contest, another diversity initiative is the Diversity Council of Champions (DCC). The purpose of the DCC is to “[build] awareness of the importance and contribution of diversity in student learning, institutional performance and [the] achievement of the University’s strategic focus” (Bryant University, *Diversity Council of Champions Charter*). The DCC meets monthly and organizes several campus-wide events and speakers throughout the year. The council also funds diversity sensitivity training classes that are offered to its members. Perhaps the most important aspect of the DCC is a subgroup known as the Bias Incident Committee. This committee offers a safe place for students to anonymously report bias incidents on campus; the committee is then responsible for investigating the claim and helping to determine appropriate action.

Multicultural and international student issues on campus fall under the umbrella of the Intercultural Center (ICC). University Relations and Admissions are responsible for attracting multicultural and international students to Bryant, but the ICC is responsible for retaining those students currently in attendance. The ICC provides many programs specifically for multicultural and international students such as a Dean’s List Reception, access to BROSSIS (a public list-serve for minority students), an invitation to 4MILE (an orientation program for minority first-year students), a Multicultural/International Alumni Association, and a Multicultural/International Parent Association. The ICC also works closely with the Multicultural Student Union (MSU) and the International Student Organization (ISO) in sponsoring different programs that are open to all students. The ICC is integrally involved with programs such as global community hour (which invites students to sample music, food, and stories from a country other than their own) and Lunar New Year in conjunction with the China Institute. These programs “give everyone an opportunity to investigate a culture outside of their own” (Delalue King).

In addition to some of its racial and ethnic diversity initiatives, Bryant University also promotes religious diversity through services offered by campus ministry. The role of campus ministry is to help provide a safe space for students to connect with others and to



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reflect upon their spirituality. Reverend Joseph Pescatello (Catholic priest), Navah Levine (Jewish rabbi), and Reverend Philip Devens (Protestant minister) work cohesively to provide a campus environment that is safe for the practice of all religions. Although there are only specific chaplains on campus for Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, campus ministry is focused on providing a safe place of worship for students of all faiths. According to Pescatello, students of faiths outside of the three represented are invited to speak with any of the members of campus ministry; upon student request, campus ministry may be of assistance in contacting off-campus spiritual consultation for students not of the aforementioned three faiths. The chapel on campus is open to all students for practicing their faith at any time. For example, the chapel is used on Sunday evenings to host Mass, but it is also utilized by Muslims to break Ramadan fast as a group and perform noonday prayers.

Campus ministry hosts interfaith dinners, the Festival of Lights (an annual event held in December including speakers and a candle-lighting ceremony celebrating all faiths), and other social events that invite all students to utilize the space provided by the campus ministry. In an interview in October of 2008, Pescatello shared his excitement for the construction of the Interfaith Center on Campus (slated for completion in June of 2009) because it will further the effectiveness of Bryant University's religious diversity initiative. He says that the center will serve as a "safe haven for everyone... [it will be] a place of reflection, peace, prayer, and religious understanding" (Pescatello).

Pescatello noted that he makes a concerted effort to connect with all members of the campus, not just those who utilize campus ministry, by offering to speak with Foundations for Learning (FFL) classes. The FFL course at Bryant University is a requirement for all freshman and transfer students; it provides information on campus services and college transition support. Pescatello speaks with FFL students about spirituality and the services offered on campus for spiritual health. Campus ministry reaches out to students of all faiths and also those who choose not to practice any particular faith.

In addition to offering services related to spirituality and religion through campus ministry, the Women's Center, directed by Toby Simon, offers a wide variety of services to students about gender issues. The Women's Center presents a short skit called "When a Kiss is Not

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Just a Kiss” during the three-day Bryant Experience that all freshmen are required to attend in order to help educate first-year students about date rape and sexual assault. The Women’s Center helps to facilitate a student organization focused on gender rights called the Alliance for Women’s Awareness (AWA). AWA meets biweekly to provide information and support about women’s issues and hosts a variety of programs available to the campus throughout the year. The Women’s Center itself is responsible for handing out hundreds of condoms each year while providing sex education pamphlets and support on sexual and relationship issues. New as of the fall of 2007, the Women’s Center also offers a free hotline, “Women on Call,” to assist sexual assault victims 24/7.

In addition to the programs listed above, there are a few student groups on campus that address other aspects of diversity. For example, Bryant Pride is a student organization dedicated to GLBTQQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, queer, and questioning) information and support, an point of contention on campus which I will return to later.

#### Incomplete Success

It is clear that the Intercultural Center, campus ministry, the Women’s Center, and many other programs help to promote and protect diversity on campus. It is also clear that students on campus are inundated with marketing materials from the University about how diverse the campus is. However, the topic of diversity still elicits heated debate on campus. Former *Archway* staff writer Brian Kennedy discussed student reactions to his articles from the previous semester in “Satisfactory Semester Summary.” He states that “the topic which consistently garnered response were the columns on diversity” (“Satisfactory Semester” 16). With the espoused commitment of the University to a diverse community and plethora of diversity programs available, why do students still react strongly with regard to such discussions? Given Bryant’s dedication to the promotion of diversity in its public documents and statements, why have these initiatives had limited success?

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## **CONFLATION OF RACE AND DIVERSITY**

### Introduction

If promoting diversity on college campuses is a means of correcting past wrongs committed against certain groups, obtaining a racially and ethnically mixed campus would be the clearest route to achieve the goal as these groups have arguably faced a long history of oppression in this country. However, a diverse campus is inherently valuable in higher education not only as a means of righting past wrongs but also because it fosters productive discussion and results in a better quality of education. Although racial and ethnic differences help to promote a diverse campus, international and multicultural students do not provide the only diversity that adds to a college community. But do diversity initiatives at Bryant sometimes conflate race and ethnicity alone with diversity?

Although there is a well-intentioned effort to create a diverse campus, it has often been counterproductive due in part to the fact that diversity is sometimes defined solely in racial terms. A clear example of a misguided diversity effort was witnessed by the campus community with the controversial selection of the Young Alumni Trustee for the graduating class of 2006.

### Young Alumni Trustee Selection 2006

Each year, Bryant University selects one graduating senior to serve on the board of trustees for three years as a Young Alumni Trustee. This prestigious title is given to a graduating student who applies and is chosen by the selection committee. In 2006, the normally uncomplicated process became a hotly debated controversy.

In April 2006, the Young Alumni Trustee selection was well underway. All of the applicants' submissions had been reviewed; by mid-month, an email was sent out to seniors Brian Levin and Cathleen Doane notifying them that they were the two finalists who would advance to the next stage of the process. Both Levin and Doane were well-qualified for the position having contributed to the campus in a variety of ways during their time on campus. Both were members of Student Senate; Levin served as a Resident Assistant and Doane welcomed

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incoming freshman as an orientation leader. But on April 25, 2006, an email was sent out to all seniors reopening the application process. Laurie Musgrove, Vice President of University Advancement, spoke on behalf of the committee: “we did not want the nominating committee of the board to come back and say we aren’t seeing a lot of diversity – we don’t mean just in the color of students skins, but in their experience – commuters, athletes, students who may not have been involved in the traditional ways on campus but were still active” (Hanlon 1). The nominating committee at the time included President Ronald K. Machtley, Board of Trustees Chairman Thomas Taylor, and two other trustees.

When the application process was reopened, Doane and Levin withdrew their applications almost immediately. They believed that they were “questioned, not on [their] merit, but on [their] diversity” (Daley, “Saddi Gets the Vote” 1). Both Levin and Doane lamented that “they are not ‘discounting the importance of diversity or the need for it on any committee; rather [they felt] it inappropriate at [that] point in the process to be forcing it in” (Hanlon 4). Doane and Levin were not the only students perturbed by the belated introduction of “diversity,” which they perceived as a synonym for race in this instance, as a requirement for the position. Joseph Harding and Michael Oliveri, two students on the committee to choose the Young Alumni Trustee, both expressed sentiments that the “decision came too late in the process and would have been more appropriate for consideration next year” (Hanlon 4).

Racial and ethnic diversity in a student body is inherently valuable; the same could be said for racial diversity on this important committee. However, prior to Levin and Doane being selected as the finalists in the process, the Young Alumni Trustee was designated as the most distinguished candidate from the pool of applicants with no mention of racial or ethnic diversity. If the administration was seeking a minority candidate, this criterion should have been listed as part of the description so that each applicant was given an opportunity to explain his or her personal diversity as well as his or her academic and student involvement. If the committee wished to privately consider the diversity of each candidate, it would have been an appropriate consideration; however, as Oliveri and Harding identified, it was inappropriate to select two finalists and then reopen the process.

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Archway staff writers were quick to criticize the actions of the selection board. Kennedy claimed that “the Administration is reopening the position and basically saying ‘whites need not apply’ ... this is not diversity; this is racism” (“For Bryant Administration” 15). He argued that both Doane and Levin were “diverse in experience” and more than qualified to fill the position; the only possible reasoning behind reopening the applications, according to Kennedy, was that neither candidate had a darker skin tone. Kennedy claimed that “the Administration’s actions are abhorrent and if the racists on the panel who made this decision get their way, then there is only one color that describes the Bryant Administration: yellow” (“For Bryant Administration” 15). After delaying the selection of the Young Alumni Trustee for several months, Saddy Williams was chosen to fill the position in September of 2006. Like Doane and Levin, Williams was well-qualified to fill the position of Young Alumni Trustee. He was the former President of the Bryant Christian Fellowship and a veteran football player.

Since the committee determined that Williams was more “diverse in experience” than the original finalists, a comparison may provide insight into what aspects of diversity were valued in this case. Both Williams and Levin are heterosexual males. Like Williams, Levin was a Christian on campus; Williams was a part of the Bryant Christian Fellowship while Levin attended Catholic Mass on Sundays. Both Williams and Levin were active leaders on campus. Williams was a football player and member of the Multicultural Student Union during his time at Bryant while Levin was President of Student Senate and a Resident Assistant. It is clear that both Levin and Williams were involved in a variety of ways on campus and that each could be said to be “diverse in experience;” both are well-qualified by merit to fill the position. The only identifiable aspect of diversity that distinguishes between the two is that Levin is white, and Williams is black.

The administration was well-intentioned in attempting to attract diverse candidates to the Young Alumni Trustee position since having individuals from different backgrounds can lead to productive discussions. The Bryant Board of Trustees could arguably benefit from appointing an African American or an international alumnus or alumna to bring variety to debates; similarly, the committee could have benefitted from the selection of an individual

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who was considered diverse for reasons other than race or ethnicity such as sexual orientation or socioeconomic status. However, the approach to this initiative was counterproductive. Despite the University's public proclamations that diversity encompasses more than solely skin color, their actions in this case created a disconcerting impression on campus that diversity to the Bryant administration is equivalent to race alone. By reopening the application process after the finalists had been announced, the actions of the administration exacerbated racial tensions on campus. This divisive atmosphere is demonstrated in the emotional and combative tone of Kennedy's *Archway* response.

#### 4MILE and BROSSIS

In order to fully understand the second of two key events that demonstrate a conflation between race and diversity, it is crucial to understand the purpose of two institutions on campus, 4MILE and BROSSIS. Four is equivalent to the numbers of years a student will spend at Bryant University while the acronym for Multicultural International Leadership Experience is MILE. Thus, 4MILE is a leadership program provided to first-year multicultural and international students at Bryant. The Director of the Intercultural Center, Shontay Delalue King, explained that the purpose of the 4MILE program is to prepare multicultural and international students for the oftentimes difficult transition into college. She stated that students are introduced to the challenges that they may face as a first-year college student and more specifically to the responsibilities that surround being an instant leader on campus as a result of being a minority. Delalue King stated that multicultural and international students are automatically leaders when they arrive on campus whether or not they choose to take on leadership roles because they are different and set apart from the campus community. The students selected for an invitation to the program are compiled in a list from the Admissions Office of those students who self-identify as a minority or an international student on their application. On the application for students of the class of 2013 (posted in 2008 on the Bryant webpage), students may identify as any of the following: African American/African/Black, Native American/Alaska Native, Asian American, Asian (including Indian Subcontinent), Hispanic/Latino, Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian, or Other. The twenty-five to thirty

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counselors at the event are oftentimes past participants, but the application to lead the event is open to all students who choose to apply (Delalue King).

The BROSSIS (brothers and sisters) network is created with a list of participants compiled in the same way that invites are sent out to 4MILE participants; self-identified racial minorities are automatically signed up for the list-serv when they arrive on campus. Other students may specifically request to be added to the mailing list, but this service is not advertised. A message is sent out from the ICC welcoming students to the group. The purposes for BROSSIS include creating a community among multicultural and international students, sharing information about opportunities for multicultural and international students, providing academic support, facilitating appropriate discussion, and alerting members of events on campus such as those hosted by ISO and MSU. The list also includes “empowerment” as a use of BROSSIS, and cites the importance of “keeping in touch with one other on a regular basis to create strength in numbers” (Intercultural Center). With an understanding of 4MILE and BROSSIS, we can better analyze the following event.

#### The Facebook Incident

Although there have been many examples over the years of clashes over diversity on campus, one event involving racial diversity that students have come to call “The Facebook Incident” is unique because of the extremely well-documented student response that demonstrated its divisive consequences. On Thursday, November 16, 2006, a striking controversy burst over the BROSSIS electronic mailing list (further referred to as BROSSIS or list-serv) in an email sent out by Adrian Fowler, then a freshman at Bryant University. Over the following weeks, hundreds of students responded to the incident, debating the state of racial relations at Bryant and what proper action should be taken. Adrian’s email alerted BROSSIS recipients of a controversial note that had been posted on Facebook, a social networking website designed for college students, by another student. He copied the exact message as it appeared on the website: (Please note that grammatical, spelling, and punctuation changes have been made to all email communications listed with regard to this incident without altering the content of the messages for clearer presentation.)

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Fuck Bryant.

I refuse to call it a “University.”

Hey, I’ve got an idea! Let’s go recruit a bunch of minorities who are much less intelligent than the rest of the student body and destroy any reputation the school still had! And then, let’s go find all the athletes we can and give them all the scholarship money! Then let’s put all the smart people in the same classes that they took over two years ago so all [of] the athletes and minorities can catch up! And let’s call this giant mess Bryant “University.” And when there’s an open house, we’ll show the few smart people and cover up all the beer cans and party cups and lure people in by inviting them to an Honors Program that’s really only honourous [sic] in name. I hate this place. I’m going to try and get out of here in three years so I don’t have to waste more of my life paying athletes’ and minorities’ tuition so that they can be baby-sat at this fucking place (Badowski qtd. in Fowler, “Note on Facebook”).

Even after the offensively bigoted message was first sent over BROSSIS, the meaning of the posting took a graver turn when the author of the note, Kevin Badowski, added a comment to the note that he wished to burn down the main building on campus, the Unistrukture, and punch the President of the University, Ronald Machtley, in the face.

The students’ reactions were widely varied and began pouring over the list-serv literally within minutes. Most were outraged by the blatant racism in the message and insistent upon the need for administrative action before matters were physically dealt with by students offended by the message. Some students, such as Lorenzo Perry, expressed sincere indignation about the incident. Perry sent out an email to BROSSIS that included phrases such as “this racist motherfucker needs to be thrown out of this school” (Perry). Others, such as Jesus Picatoste (a student from Venezuela), simply dismissed the author as ignorant, claiming “this guy doesn’t have a clue of what life is about.” Other students took a more practical approach and saw the incident as an opportunity to fight racism. Once the name of the student (which had originally been withheld) was released to the public, Wilberte Paul,



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President of MSU at that time, sent out an email to BROSSIS encouraging an open dialogue between the members of the list-serv. She stated that “it is a little messed up that people of such ignorance attend this institution” but continued on to encourage BROSSIS members to “be aware, watch what you say and do every day. Let us not feed the stereotypes! Strive to be better and become educated” (Paul).

As the issue began to blossom into a campus-wide frenzy, dozens of students requested access to Badowski’s profile on Facebook (which was only available to users that he specifically approved). In a mass response over Facebook, Badowski denied these students access to his profile and explained that his posted note was “an experiment to gauge reactions to something that may be viewed as racist” and requesting cooperation in collecting data for his stated experiment (Roy). Rationalizing his work with the “pseudo-science of racial discrimination – that is – how people try to justify racial beliefs,” he concludes by denying that he is a racist and claiming to have withdrawn from Bryant. He apologizes to those who requested to see his profile for his actions and explains future plans to make a public apology although no public request for forgiveness ever came to fruition (Roy). Many students were only further outraged that the author of the note would attempt to deny his racism and defend it on behalf of a social experiment.

It did not take long for the administration to react by admonishing Badowski and calling for change. An email response titled “Message from the PRESIDENT” was forwarded by Symphone’e Willoughby to BROSSIS on Friday, November 17, 2006, one day after the original note was sent over BROSSIS. In the message, President Machtley assured Willoughby that the matter was being address by Dean Thomas Eakin and went on to state that “we have no place for this sort of published statement, even if the writer mistakenly thinks their [sic] Facebook gives them some sort of privilege to say anything” (Machtley qtd. in Willoughby, “Message”).

Machtley’s word choice is one of the first missteps by the administration during this event. He is correct that Bryant University does not “have a place for this sort of published statement;” yet, perhaps it is precisely these contentious statements that must be addressed. If students at Bryant who hold bigoted views (of which there are many) are simply censored,

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these students will leave the University without these ideas ever having been challenged. I postulate that instead of simply dismissing these types of comments, the University should take advantage of them as a valuable learning opportunity. It is indisputable that Badowski is not the only Bryant student who holds racist views. Having an open forum where even bigoted students can comment and have their views challenged might produce (as Graff states) a productive learning opportunity. Naturally, this forum would have to be a safe, closely monitored discussion lead by individuals trained in diversity issues who could keep the conversation productive instead of argumentative.

Machtley was not the only administrator to respond. The Bryant Community was sent an email on November 17, 2006, from Thomas Eakin, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students. His email, titled "Diversity at Bryant," stressed the importance of diversity at Bryant and encouraged students to continue the discussion of diversity issues. He specifically cited the Facebook Incident as "a posting that was very critical of the University and that attacked minority students and athletes," but never assigned specific blame for the incident. He invited the community to a campus-wide discussion the following Sunday, November 19, 2006.

Although the meeting was well-attended, many students left unsatisfied. Those who participated felt that the administration spoke generally about tolerance (or lack thereof) on campus but failed to directly discuss the Facebook Incident or allow students to debate about the event among themselves. This town hall meeting was an excellent opportunity for students to voice their opinions about what had happened and exchange ideas for turning a serious incident into a learning opportunity for growth and connection between community members. When the incident was discussed at a forum in March of 2007, student Carly Warland stated in *The Archway* that she "didn't think the administration handled it very well – she thought they brushed it under the rug" (Drew, "Open Forum" 6). Similarly, another student who spoke at the forum (who was identified only as "Brian"), felt that the event was handled in an effort to be "politically correct... 'We've all been trained to say the right things,' he said. '[We need] more of the truth, less p.c.'" (Drew, "Open Forum" 6). Both students expressed their disappointment that the issue was not confronted honestly. As Graff

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states, productive debate about controversial issues is perhaps one of the most educationally valuable contributions of diversity to a student body. By avoiding directly confronting the issue at hand and prohibiting students from having a frank discussion about the highly emotional episode, the administration failed to take advantage of an educational opportunity that could have aided in the promotion of diversity acceptance on campus.

In addition to feeling dissatisfied that no public discussion of the event ever took place, some students were upset that Badowski's punishment (if any was assigned) was never made public. Fowler, the catalyst for the Facebook Incident debate on BROSSIS, sent an email to Eakin the day following the town hall meeting expressing his displeasure. He voiced the concern of students that Badowski was still a member of the Bryant community; according to Fowler, students felt unsafe with Badowski on campus and insisted on his expulsion (Fowler, "Follow-up"). He asked, "if he is not punished, what is this telling everyone at this institution? It's okay to say things like this without having any consequences. Not punishing him is like a slap in the face to every minority, athlete, and student on this campus" (Fowler, "Follow-up"). Fowler asked that Badowski serve as an example and stated that inaction would give the impression that the University was condoning racism. Eakin responded in a personal communication to Fowler which was then forwarded to BROSSIS. He noted his understanding of student frustration and assured Fowler that action would be taken after appropriate investigation. He stated that: "[the Facebook Incident] highlights the fact that Bryant must continue to address issues of diversity so that our entire community better understands and appreciates the needs and contributions of each individual... now we have another opportunity to show how strongly this administration feels about creating a more welcoming campus for everyone" (Eakin qtd. in Fowler, "Fwd: RE: Follow-up"). Eakin highlights the importance of addressing diversity, yet the public meeting held by the administration failed to do just that.

Despite Fowler's passionate defense on behalf of what he claimed to be the entire student body, not all students felt the same way. Marcus Lindsey, the two-time winner of the Diversity Contest, responded to Fowler's remarks. Lindsey, who identifies himself as both an athlete and minority in his email communication to BROSSIS on November 20, 2006, states

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that he thinks Badowski should not be punished. He claims that “punishment imposed on Kevin – for the sake of discouraging further postings – would do nothing to educate the remainder of the population... Kevin’s opinion is just that: his opinion” (Lindsey “A different view...”). Lindsey reaches past the desire for retribution against Badowski and instead encourages the campus community to use the episode to educate the campus. In a personal interview, Lindsey elaborated on his comments:

Anti-[whatever] comments are always the symptom of the problem – never the root. We would love to think that Bryant is a hate-free community. It’s not quite. That’s not a knock on Bryant; the statement can be extrapolated to many communities around the world. But rather than try to silence the few who harbor hateful views, I’d rather have seized the opportunity to discuss it at large, and fix the root: ignorance... there is no harm in opinion sharing, as long as it remains respectful and constructive. But somehow we’ve gotten afraid to let students express what they feel is important to them... Controversial topics aren’t always evil. Some of the best ideas in history spur from disagreement (Lindsey).

His enlightened statements again echo Graff’s sentiments that diversity discussions with people on both sides of the issue can be some of the most educationally productive learning opportunities for a college student. Shying away from controversial topics in an educational environment hinders valuable learning opportunities.

The emails sent out on BROSSIS after the Facebook Incident provide an insight as to how many Bryant students (particularly minorities who are on BROSSIS) view diversity on campus as volatile and the community as intolerant. Nakul D. Roy stated that “this school is at a very heated stage in regards to discrimination and prejudices” (Roy). Yohan Sachdev added his experience at Bryant to the discussion about diversity: “I have faced racism very often on this campus... I lived in London for two years and no one ever insulted me... well, being here for three months, I have faced four incidents of racism” (Sachdev). Perhaps one of the most telling comments was posted by Wade Jubrey after the town meeting was hosted.

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Why do we [minorities] have to make the effort? Because trust me, I've only been here for three months, and any effort I've tried to make was either rejected or not cared about. The majority of this campus (Caucasians) [is] indifferent towards diversity. Most of them have no care in the world whether or not there are minorities on this campus and the ones who do care usually have negative views towards this (Jubrey).

These telling comments by students demonstrate that diversity at Bryant University is not an issue of the past. Rather, students are still struggling with these questions, and the Facebook Incident only reveals these divisions.

Although the Facebook Incident did not come to a public close, it exemplified how discourse on race was polarized after the incident. Throughout the hundreds of email responses, dozens of students repeated references to others on the BROSSIS list-serv as "my people," "us," "we," and utilized phraseology such as "we need to stick together" and "minorities need to take charge." One specific instance of this phraseology is found in an email sent out on BROSSIS from Fanta Kaba. Near the conclusion of the incident, she stated: "I want to congratulate all the minorities at Bryant because we really showed how bound we are when something bad is said about us" (Kaba). Her email went on to encourage the continual rallying of the minority community at Bryant campus behind the issue. Since most discussion about this incident took place over the BROSSIS network, it is possible that many nonminority students were unaware of the event and explosive reactions to it. However, at least a small percentage of the nonminority population attended the campus-wide meeting and wrote comments in *The Archway* referencing the incident. Despite the fact that these nonminority students publicly stood by the minority population during this incident, Kaba's email makes no mention of the community bonding as a whole. Her comments exemplify how instead of resulting in productive debate, the Facebook Incident increased the divisive atmosphere on campus.

Seth Ragland touched on this issue specifically in his email to BROSSIS entitled "Questions to invoke solutions" on November 21, 2006. His comments are so enlightening that they are worth including almost in their entirety:

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As the emails are piling up, I'm starting to see a reoccurring theme in the discussions about diversity and how it is affecting the Bryant community. A lot of the emails included some segregating phrases and words. It makes me wonder if people are chasing their own tail trying to accomplish a good cause, because their choice of words is contradicting to the very goal. How could one fairly address the idea of diversity and at the same time include segregating words like 'we', 'us', and 'them'? It seems counterintuitive when so many seem to be working towards a common good but include such words which by nature are contradicting to the issue they wish to address. If people are to get along with people, then there should be no separation.

Ragland astutely identifies how the discussions held on BROSSIS revealed the division between minority and nonminority students on campus by utilizing exclusive terminology.

The existence of BROSSIS itself is not really the problem; it is important to recognize differences between people. The existence of BROSSIS is commendable in that it provides a safe atmosphere for minority students to discuss issues that directly affect the minority community. However, without a public dialogue that includes both minority and nonminority students, the result is a monologue whose harmful effects include the creation of a segregated campus. The BROSSIS list-serv would be complemented by a dialogue between all students, regardless of minority or nonminority status, who are passionate about diversity issues.

Badowski's comments were inappropriate and offensive, and the explosive reaction from the community about the incident is understandable. It is also reasonable that minority students on campus found comfort in discussing the issue with other minorities. D'Souza reminds us that "the impulse to retreat into exclusive enclaves is a familiar one for minority groups... they feel there is strength and safety in numbers, and tend to develop group consciousness and collective orientation partly as a protective strategy" (234). Despite the importance of open dialogue for members of the minority community (and a select few nonminority students who specifically requested to become members of BROSSIS), the students' and administration's reactions to the Facebook Incident revealed how divided the campus is when dealing with

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diversity issues. The racial segregation on campus witnessed during the aftermath of the Facebook Incident suggests that achieving a racially diverse student body is not enough. Even if the University were to achieve a truly racially and ethnically diverse campus as is advertised in the brochures but this racial segregation were still to exist, the institution would be no closer to achieving the benefits of an integrated, diverse campus.

The Facebook Incident could have served as an important tool for the Bryant administration to educate the community about diversity but instead only further polarized the campus between minority and nonminority students. The campus-wide meeting could have served as a productive debate for members of the community to discuss the true state of diversity on campus and have an honest discussion about potential improvements. Instead, the meeting was largely unproductive because students did not feel that they were able to openly discuss their reactions to the Facebook Incident. The discussions held over BROSSIS, instead of uniting the campus community for an important cause, further divided students through hostile generalizations and group identities.

#### Questioning BROSSIS

The Facebook Incident and the selection of the Young Alumni Trustee in 2006 led many students to question the existence of programs such as 4MILE and BROSSIS. As previously noted, one purpose of BROSSIS is to create “strength in numbers” (as cited from the “Welcome to BROSSIS” email). This statement catalyzed a certain amount of response from members of the Bryant community after the Facebook Incident. A self-proclaimed conservative student, Brian Kennedy, wrote in *The Archway*:

How could we be able to have BROSSIS sending out emails about “strength in numbers” to minority students if there was no alleged white power structure running the show? So, I have but two questions to ask all our minority students on campus: 1) Do you think a policy which assumes you need assistance based on the color of your skin or your ethnicity is racist? 2) When did the segregation of students based on race or ethnicity become a good thing? Last [time] I checked, Martin Luther King Jr. was all about integration. He'd

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surely roll in his grave if he knew that in our 'progressive' society we only sent BROSSIS emails to minorities, at the exclusion of those of us cursed with a legacy of pale skin ("Real Racism" 13).

Kennedy questions the ethics of programs such as BROSSIS and 4MILE because they select their members by self-identified race and ethnicity. If such a program were in place that only automatically signed up those who self-identified as "White/Caucasian" to participate, it would be rightly deemed as racist. However, BROSSIS and 4MILE exist to exclusively aid multicultural and international students and are considered appropriate. What Kennedy fails to recognize here is the importance of acknowledging differences between people. If every student were invited to these programs, it would defeat the purpose of having a support network among minority students. There are certain issues that only face students of particular characteristics; for example, a Jewish student on a predominantly Christian campus might need special information about how to access religious services. Contrarily, a Christian student at Bryant would likely receive this information readily. It is valuable to have programs for minority students (females, homosexuals, etc.) because they are faced with specific challenges as a result of their minority status.

However, the volatile terms that Kennedy uses, particularly his vehemence about integration, directly addresses the problem on campus. The existence of such programs is not necessarily the problem but rather a symptom of a larger issue. Events such as the selection of the Young Alumni Trustee and the Facebook Incident divide the campus. These programs, although valuable as a support network to members of the minority community, are not enough for the discussion needed on campus. Minority and nonminority students need to have productive debate about these issues or else the campus is only further polarized.

Kennedy's reaction to BROSSIS exemplifies an inherent problem with diversity initiatives on campus. Programs that offer assistance to those who may need extra information as a result of their particular circumstance can be helpful; the effort aims to recognize differences between people and provide services and information to those who can benefit from them. However, there are unintended consequences of such programs that may, in fact, exacerbate



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racial tensions on campus rather than promote diversity. To create “strength in numbers” certainly connotes a certain “us versus them” mentality that is often manifested on campus. Since Kennedy witnessed how BROSSIS acted as a segregating tool during the Facebook Incident, he states that the list-serv is about exclusion rather than “integration.” *Archway* writer Ryan Daley agrees with his colleague, Kennedy; “the existence of programs such as [4MILE and BROSSIS], which simply segregate our community” result in excluding multicultural and international students from the community rather than integrating them, creating a “separate but equal” environment (“Diversity just is” 11). Despite its inherent value as a tool for connecting members of the multicultural and international community, the unintended consequences of BROSSIS and 4MILE were clearly manifested directly following the selection of the Young Alumni Trustee in 2006 and the Facebook Incident.

#### Questioning 4MILE

As with BROSSIS, 4MILE came into the limelight in the emotionally heightened period following the Young Alumni Trustee controversy and the Facebook Incident. One *Archway* writer, Ryan Daley, questioned “who is the ICC to tell us who is and who isn’t ‘multicultural?’” (“Diversity just is” 11). He went on to state that “simply because [he doesn’t] meet their requirement of [his] skin being as dark as someone else’s,” other possible aspects of his personal diversity were not considered for acceptance to the program (Daley, “Diversity just is” 11). After the divisive Facebook Incident, students began to question to existence of 4MILE and BROSSIS. As with BROSSIS, the well-intentioned 4MILE program has unintended results. Although both programs are important in terms of recognizing differences and retaining minority students, such controversial events was the Facebook Incident caused students to question their existence.

4MILE’s goal is a valuable one. It fosters an environment where international and multicultural students are empowered as members of their minority group. 4MILE allows these students to move into their dorms a week before the rest of the students arrive and to establish bonds with other multicultural and international students before meeting those who are different from them. The support system provided from friendships formed during

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4MILE likely increases student retention. Tarang D. Patel, an international student who participated in the program, stated that 4MILE has “created a comfortable and supportive environment for multicultural and international students” (12).

However, what kind of a lasting dynamic does this initial separation between international and multicultural students from the rest of campus create? Delalue King stated that “it is safe and okay for people of like-minded experiences to stick together.” Despite the importance of retaining multicultural and international students as a goal of the ICC, the diversity initiative of the University also seeks to integrate these students into campus life. If the University is seeking to unify people who are different, why risk establishing a precedent for segregation beginning before first-year students even meet each other? A separation between students risks establishing exclusivity between minority and nonminority students that could manifest throughout the rest of the college experience.

Despite the risk of separating students prior to the start of the school year, the 4MILE program does recognize that international and multicultural students are distinct from other students on campus and often need different information than nonminority students. As Charles Taylor reminds us, this celebration of differences is an important step to effectively promoting diversity. A frequent argument for 4MILE is that international students need an orientation to life in the United States. They need help setting up a bank account, learning about public transportation, and a general introduction to some basic cultural etiquette. I would agree that those international students who have not spent a significant amount of time in the United States previously need to attend a special orientation session prior to the start of the semester as most are not able to attend the regular orientation. However, why are multicultural students who grew up in the United States or international students who attended high school in the States grouped together with international students new to the country as having a similar need for this program? Students who have already spent a significant amount of time in the country do not need an introduction to American life. Rather, the argument for including the aforementioned students in the program is that these minority students find themselves on a campus that is predominantly different from their life experience and may need additional information.

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Given that other than first-comers to the States, the purpose of the program is to provide support for students who feel distinct from the rest of the campus community, a major flaw in the 4MILE program appears. The process used to choose who is invited to participate is ineffective. 4MILE in itself is valuable, but it has been partially unsuccessful because it is targeted incorrectly. Students who self-identify as a racial minority do not necessarily face the difficulties associated with being multicultural or international nor are necessarily the only students who experience difficulties or feel separate from others on campus because of their background.

For example, one student, who preferred to remain anonymous, spoke about her discomfort with the 4MILE program. She is a Portuguese American student; Portuguese is her first language and is the only language that her parents speak. She grew up in a low income home and experienced a family life defined by Portuguese language, food, and traditions. On the self-identified list of her college applications, she marked that she was either "Other" (but did not specify) or "White/Caucasian." As a result of her selection, she was not invited to participate in 4MILE. Another student, who also wished to remain anonymous, was asked to participate in 4MILE. She is of Korean descent but was adopted when she was only a few months old. Her first language is English, and she grew up in suburban, upper middle class home. The self-identification process for choosing 4MILE participants selected one student who felt that her daily life experience was relatively unaffected by her genetic background while it did not offer an invitation to a student who felt that her ethnicity had a significant impact on her college experience. If students knew that this self-identification would be used for selection for such a program, it would likely become more effective at selecting the students who could most benefit.

The selection process for invitations to 4MILE again demonstrates an administrative conflation between diversity and race. 4MILE is aimed at preparing students who are different from the majority students on campus with information about how to have a successful campus experience. In addition to students who may face adversity as a multicultural or international student, there are many other groups who could largely benefit from a 4MILE experience. Homosexual students in an overwhelmingly heterosexual

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environment, Jews and Muslims on a predominantly Christian campus, students of a lower socioeconomic status on a seemingly elite campus, and transgendered or transsexual individuals in a binary-gendered community experience the same sense of disconnect with the campus as international and multicultural students. By only offering such a well-intentioned program to multicultural and international students, the administration again conflates diversity with race. Perhaps because it is easier to visually identify racial or ethnic differences between people, other minority students who may find themselves as “instant leaders” on campus because they are different from the majority are neglected. Again it becomes apparent that the selection process for deciding who is invited to participate in such programs is ineffective. If students were allowed to indicate their interest in a program that offered assistance to students regarding diversity issues (including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, and socioeconomic background), perhaps it would improve how such programs would be targeted.

If the University seeks to recognize differences between people and provide disadvantaged students with an advantage through programs such as 4MILE, it takes a valuable first step but fails to meet this goal. Students who genuinely face difficulty as a result of their background do not necessarily self-identify as a racial minority on applications. To truly achieve diversity initiatives, it is important that the University extend services offered to multicultural and international students to other minority students on campus.

#### Distribution of the “Diversity Just Is” Calendar

The “Diversity Just Is” calendar was released in September of 2006; its close proximity to the Facebook Incident and the Young Alumni Trustee selection perhaps explains volatile student reactions to the publication. For instance, as previously mentioned, the month of October features a large photograph in which Brian Levin is the clear focus of attention. It is problematic that only four months after determining that Levin was not “diverse in experience,” he was featured as demonstrative of diversity in a university publication. His picture is accompanied by the quote: “Bryant students develop the critical thinking skills they’ll need to engage in thoughtful and dynamic discussions with peers and faculty. Here,

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there is room for every point of view” (Bryant University, *Diversity Just Is*). The fact that Musgrove stated she feared the committee would say “we’re not seeing a lot of diversity” specifically with regard to Levin and Doane when four months later Levin is used as an example of Bryant’s diversity is incredible. It is little wonder that students who had just witnessed two events that exemplified the prevalence of diversity issues on campus criticized the calendar as superficial. *The Archway* was one outlet that demonstrated a fair amount of student response. Kennedy states:

Bryant is diverse where it counts: thought. The grievance-mongers only care about seeing more dark-skinned faces. It’s too bad Bryant Administration is complicit in this: I’ve heard people say that Bryant only selects them for pictures because they have a darker skin tone... I, at least, know that we have plenty of qualified Black, Hispanic, Arab, and Asian applicants, and I don’t need a ‘Diversity Just Is’ calendar to prove it (“The Last Blast” 16).

Kennedy’s language here demonstrates his opposition to the calendar and also suggests his belief that the administration’s actions equate race with diversity while the calendar depicts many other factors of diversity. In a different article, Kennedy also notes that race is equated with diversity on campus: “the only diversity that will be tolerated [at MSU discussions and on campus] is diversity of skin color” (“Satisfactory Semester Summary” 17). Again, Kennedy’s reaction to diversity on campus is perhaps directly linked to his provocation over the racially motivated selection of the Young Alumni Trustee. The aggressive language used in both of these articles suggests that he was reacting to recent events on campus. The antagonistic tone demonstrates how exacerbated racial tensions on campus were a reaction to the 2006 selection of the Young Alumni Trustee and the Facebook Incident.

Adding to these criticisms, Daley penned an equally controversial article in his weekly column in which he states that “most of us see diversity at Bryant for what it really is... superficial” (“Diversity just is...” 11). He lamented that the printing of the calendar was a factually unsupported ploy by the administration to over-represent the true state of diversity on campus. He admonished that “Bryant is far from achieving true diversity, and it can’t be

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until we're integrated that we can truly say we're 'diverse'" (Daley, "Diversity just is..." 13). Daley's acknowledgement of the lack of integration on campus is perhaps drawn from the polarization students witnessed in the reactions to the Facebook Incident. Daley's article also discussed the apparent conflation of diversity and race on campus. He states that "diversity isn't only about appearance- it's about our abilities, our experiences, our talents, our beliefs, and much more!" (Daley, "Diversity" 11). He went on to protest that diversity does not only include race but other factors such as religion and gender as well. The close proximity of this article with the Young Alumni Trustee controversy suggests that Daley, a white student, felt antagonized by the actions of the administration during the event. He responded to what he saw as a conflation between race and diversity by censuring the administration and student body as a whole.

Daley's article garnered a fair amount of response in the forms of Letters to the Editor, many refuting his claim of the superficiality of diversity on campus. Tarang D. Patel, a student who wrote a letter to the editor, states that Bryant University succeeds at promoting diversity on campus but admits that "some of Bryant's attempts at representing diversity are at times superficial, especially when considering the disproportionately high number of multicultural and international students posing in pictures for Bryant's marketing materials" (12). Despite the fact that Patel praises the University's diversity efforts, he discusses his thoughts of transferring during his first year because of "Bryant's lack of diversity" (12); his involvement with the ICC encouraged him to stay, speaking to the usefulness of that student service. Patel concluded by stating that "diversity is clearly a hot topic at Bryant... Bryant clearly needs to become more diverse as a whole, but it is getting better every year with its commitment to diversity" (12). Even Patel, who states that the University has made progress in promoting diversity, cites that the marketing materials the University uses seem to over-represent racial minorities on campus.

#### Equal Protection for Sexual Orientation?

In addition to racial tension, issues involving sexual orientation on campus have been particularly contentious. Bryant Pride is an alliance between a community of both

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homosexual and heterosexual students who seek to promote awareness of lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgendered, queer, and questioning (LBGTQQ) issues in the Bryant community. Sam Schultz, 2007-2008 president of the organization, was interviewed in the fall of 2007 on the status of difference on campus. Like Charles Taylor, Schultz stated that equating unequal individuals does not promote diversity but instead blinds people to true celebration of that diversity.

Before coming to Bryant University, Schultz assumed that the campus was conservative and primarily Caucasian due to its long history as a business institution, yet he remained hopeful that he would interact with students who were accepting of homosexuals. Over his first three years as a Bryant student, Schultz surmised that the student population is generally wealthier and even more predominantly Caucasian than he had expected. A common question asked of Schultz when he is actively promoting gay rights' campaigns is "I'm fine with gay people, but why do they have to their rights down our throats?" (Schultz). This sentiment is one that Schultz and other gay rights' activists face not only in society at large but also locally on Bryant campus. Several articles have been printed in *The Archway* that display this attitude. Brian Kennedy stated in the spring of 2007 that "homosexuals should feel free to express their love of each other in private, but don't expect the other 90% of society to start calling it normal" ("Pacing Moral Relativism" 11). More than a year later during the fall of 2008, Matt Vincunas voiced the same opinion in his article "Gay Marriage is Useless." He commented that "it does not make my life any worse if there are gay people in this world, as long as I do not have to deal with it. What they do behind closed doors is something I do not want to know about, and it should stay like that" (Vincunas 11).

The position that homosexuals may be themselves in private but not in public is a direct attack on the idea of recognizing differences. A.J. Sorbera, class of 2009 and the 2007-2008 vice president of Bryant Pride, stated in a feature on the Bryant website about the Gay Pride Film Festival that "students must not feel afraid to express their identities, especially in an institution of higher education" (Bryant University, "Bryant Pride"). The fact that both Vincunas and Kennedy publicly proclaim their beliefs that these students should not express their identities in public is demonstrative of a larger issue; if there is an attitude on campus

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among students that homosexuals cannot express their identity in public, the safe atmosphere that Sorbera references is inexistent.

Does the Bryant campus foster an environment where individuals are free to express their sexual orientation in public? On February 8, 2008, Jessica Komoroski and Celeste Tennant printed a weekly edition of their column, "The Fashionistas," in *The Archway*; the column is a satirical commentary on the fashion of Bryant campus. One section of this particular article criticizes overweight women for wearing pants that do not fit properly. The authors ask "are you trying to emulate George Michael or Michael Jackson? Women should never impersonate gay men. That ain't right" (Komoroski and Tennant 15). The following week, Drew Green responded in a letter to the editor. He reprimands the authors for falsely referring to Michael Jackson as homosexual, and then refers to the comment in general by stating that it was "highly homophobic and offensive" (Green 16). He expresses his disbelief that the article was ever allowed to print in the student newspaper with such a controversial statement. It is true that students who hold bigoted views should be allowed to discuss those views in mediated forums where productive discussion can take place. However, if the campus should be a place where all students are free to express themselves, a University-sanctioned newspaper is not the place for gross generalizations about how homosexuals dress to be expressed.

How would the treatment of this situation been different had the group attacked been based on race rather than sexual orientation? It would be interesting to know if the same article would have been sent to print and what student, faculty, and staff reactions would have been if the article used racial stereotypes instead of heterosexist labels. For instance, say the article read as follows: "to all of you white boys out there wearing bling bling, a sideways hat, pants down to your ankles, and an oversized jersey... are you trying to emulate 50 Cent or Snoop Dogg? White boys should never impersonate black guys." It is doubtful that this racist statement would be even considered for publication in *The Archway* because it stereotypes all African Americans as "gangsta rappers" who subscribe to a certain fashion. Why, then, was the article that generalized that all homosexual men dress in tight clothing allowed to be published? Only two students reacted to the article as written in the form of a letter to the



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editor; would there have been more student response or a public administrative reaction if the racial slur had been printed instead? If the University seeks to provide equal protection for those of all sexual orientations as it does to those of different races, it must treat both of these situations accordingly.

Incidents on campus involving homophobia are occurring as recently as the month prior to the conclusion of this study. On October 30, 2008, Dean Eakin alerted students of a bias incident on campus that had occurred only the day before; the word “fag” was burned onto a student’s door. Eakin stated:

At Bryant we have adopted strong principles on respect, civility and accountability as part of our Bryant Pledge and as the basic standard of what we expect as we live and work together. Despite this commitment, there are occasions where members of our community are experiencing such incidents. These situations, generally the actions of a small minority, are wrong and violate the standards of civility so vital to our learning community (“A Bias Incident”).

Ami Shah sent out an email to BROSSIS and the student senators alerting them of a march to be held on Friday, November 7, 2008. The purpose of the march, according to Shah, was to focus specifically on the toleration of sexual orientation but also to promote diversity in general. He called on the students of BROSSIS and the senate to help “CONVEY A CAMPUS WIDE MESSAGE: DON'T HATE! TOLERATE! APPRECIATE! CELEBRATE!” (Shah). At the march, various administrators spoke including President Ronald Machtley. A conspicuous absence from the march, however, was a student leader speaker. Not a single student, either gay or straight ally, stood up and spoke out against the author of the gay epithet. No open dialogue occurred at the event. Many of the same problems noted with how the Facebook Incident was handled were repeated; no catharsis was allowed through productive debate.

At the time of this study’s conclusion, this incident has not yet been resolved. The Department of Public Safety and the Smithfield Police Department are currently investigating

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the incident; Eakin is encouraging all members of the community to support the student involved and try to promote a safer community in the future.

Kennedy claims that Bryant has “students here ‘combating homophobia’ where there is none” (“Pacing Moral Relativism” 11). The burning of “fag” onto the door of a student in the fall of 2008 is evidence that Kennedy is wrong; homophobia and heterosexism exist on campus with astonishing prevalence. It is alarming that the University purports equal protection for people of all sexual orientations as they offer to students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds and yet, this does not appear to have become reality. How does the University display a gay pride flag as a photo in the “Diversity Just *Is*” calendar as representative of harmonious relations between homosexual and heterosexual students when such controversy still surrounds the issue on campus?

An issue of specific importance on campus is the casual and pejorative use of the words “faggot,” “fag,” and “gay.” Students frequently walk about campus referencing one another as “faggot” or “fag” as a slang insult. If a student is displeased with a test, professor, or an event, it is not uncommon to hear the phrase “that’s gay,” where “gay” is used as a substitute for “stupid.” Why have terms that were originally descriptive of a homosexual man and person’s sexual orientation become negative slang? The more pertinent question for the Bryant community is regarding the tolerance for such words on campus. If, as Symphone’e Willoughby stated in the “Diversity Just *Is*” calendar, staff and faculty “ask students to question the status quo” and understand “how critical the issue of sexual orientation discrimination is,” how do faculty and staff overhear such comments in silence?

As with the article “The Fashionistas,” compare this heterosexist situation to a racist one. If a student were to say to his or her friend, “don’t be such a nigger” rather than “don’t be such a fag,” many members of the Bryant campus would be outraged. It is a problem that students and faculty are more sensitive to the use of racial slurs than to the use of heterosexist or homophobic terms. If we truly seek to promote a more accepting community, we must champion diversity of sexual orientation with the same zest that we promote racial and ethnic acceptance. If we refuse the use of racially charged words such as “nigger” and “spic,” then we must also demand that “fag,” “faggot,” and “gay” be removed from the collective dialogue

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of the campus. It is not enough to profess equal protection for all aspects of diversity unless the actions of the administration and the community demonstrate the same commitment.

#### Equal Protection for Mental and Physical Disabilities?

Bryant University touts its equal opportunity and protection for students, faculty, and staff not only of all races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations, but those with mental and/or physical handicaps as well. Recall Pam Malcolm, featured in the “Diversity Just *Is*” calendar.

Malcolm, who graduated in May of 2006 with a degree in Applied Psychology, is a prime example of the University’s dedication to this form of diversity. Malcolm, a native of Colchester, Connecticut, was one of the top 100 women’s high school basketball players in the country during high school and was offered a full athletic scholarship at Bryant University. Just before her freshman year was to begin, however, her fate took a twist when she was involved in a near-fatal car accident and was told that she would never walk again. The women’s basketball coach, Mary Burke, worked with the administration to ensure that Malcolm would still attend Bryant University on full scholarship; she served as manager and cheerleader throughout her four years with the team (Bryant University, “Spotlight”).

Despite this example of Bryant University’s dedication to the fair treatment of disabled students, there are also less flattering stories to be heard. One student of the graduating class of 2008 (who wished to remain anonymous) had a disturbing experience regarding a lack of respect for the disabled during her Bryant experience. In an airport in another city with her sports’ team, this individual noticed a man in a wheelchair just outside of the airport who was obviously mentally and physically handicapped. As the team waited outside for a ride to their hotel, the head coach of the team proceeded to “make fun of him by rudely mimicking his movements and making faces so as to look like a ‘retard’” in full eye and earshot of the handicapped individual and those with him (Anonymous). This player was outraged by the coach’s “despicable and horrendous behavior” and confronted the coach angrily (Anonymous). The coach was shocked that the player was bothered by her actions but made no offer of an apology. No other players on the team were as openly offended as this student;

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the antagonized student was made to feel as if he or she was simply overreacting to the incident and should just forget it ever happened.

The incident passed without ever having been made public. No bias incident report was filed, no apology was issued, no disciplinary action was ever taken; the coach's blatant disrespect for the physical and mental capabilities of the stranger at the airport was left unacknowledged. This particular coach continues to shape the attitudes of athletes at this Division I institution.

As with the use of the words "gay" and "faggot" on campus, I would like to draw a comparison between how this situation would have been treated at an airport if the situation had involved a racial incident. If this same coach had, within eye and earshot of the individual, mocked someone of Arabic descent in the airport by calling him or her a "terrorist," how would the team have reacted? Is it possible that more than one student would have been sensitive to the issue and a bias incident report may have been filed? If a bias incident report had been filed, the administration would have taken swift action to castigate the coach. Ultimately, the issue here is the environment on campus. An athletic coach at the college level and the student body should be sensitive enough to diversity issues to recognize the inappropriateness of the situation. If the University hopes to provide an environment that equally protects the disabled, it has failed to create an environment where faculty, staff, and students are sensitive to these issues.

#### Religion: Recognizing Differences or Homogenization?

The Festival of Lights is a campus-wide event hosted every December for the purpose of observing Christmas, Hanukah, Kwanza, Diwali, and the Muslim Eid celebration with the campus community. In an article submitted to *The Archway* in December of 2006, Reverend Pescatello stated that "it is a time when we recognize and celebrate our differences and yet recognize all that we share in common... true diversity is recognizing the religious and cultural differences that exist among us and allowing each of us to express that which makes us unique" ("Tis the Season" 17). Pescatello is a vocal proponent of recognizing the differences between people; in a personal interview, he discussed the issue particularly with

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respect to his experiences with religious diversity on campus but mentioned that it needed to extend to all areas of diversity at Bryant.

Despite its longstanding tradition of more than 30 years at Bryant, the Festival of Lights still causes a certain amount of discomfort for some members of the campus. According to Pescatello, displaying any “visible Christian symbols” on campus has been problematic; this is specifically important in the lighting of the tree and the Menorah at the Festival of Lights ceremony:

Every year at this time there is much debate over the use of the word ‘holiday’ rather than Christmas in regards to the terminology used in reference to the Christmas/Holiday tree. We can sometimes become distracted by the terminology chosen and get caught up in a web of debate rather than merely enjoying the season. As a result we can lose sight of the deeper message of the season which is fostered in a spirit of good will and mutual respect. So let us celebrate diversity and help each other to celebrate that which gives each of us meaning and joy through our various cultural and religious traditions (Pescatello, “Tis the Season” 17).

Pescatello exclaimed “yes, it is Christmas. Yes, it is Hanukah. Yes, it is Diwali;” he was emphatic that it is important to recognize every holiday rather than refusing to acknowledge the differences between them. If there is controversy about the tree being referred to as a Christmas tree rather than as a “holiday tree,” it is confusing why there is no debate about referring to the Menorah as such instead of calling it a “staggered holiday candle,” for example. Pescatello questioned why the promotion of religious diversity in this case seems to mean to many not only the promotion of minority religions but also the “suppression” of the majority religion on campus, Christianity. As of the fall of 2006, 50% of the student population identified as Roman Catholic. Another 27.5% indicated that they were affiliated with another Christian denomination (Bryant University, *Internal Document*). In a student population where three quarters of the students self-identify as Christian, why is there controversy over “visible Christian symbols” or referring to the Christmas tree by its rightful name? If the situation were reversed, that is, that the Menorah was referred to as a “staggered

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holiday candle” while the Christmas tree was rightly named, it would be instantly named as anti-Semitic. In an environment where we are expected to protect all religious affiliations, it is a wonder that this can even be called a legitimate debate.

Another example of the “suppression of the majority” is seen in the printing of the program for Opening Weekend (Pescatello). Traditionally, Pescatello asked that the location, date, and time of the first Mass of the semester be printed in the program in order to alert first-year students of the event. One year, Father Joe was quietly asked that he remove such advertising from the program as it was deemed controversial. In prior years, between forty and fifty first-year students attended the first Mass of the school year; that year, seven students were in attendance (Pescatello). Many emails poured in over the ensuing weeks asking about the availability of a Mass on campus by confused first-year students who did not know where or when to meet in order to worship. In the years since, Father Joe has found an acceptable compromise; both Catholic Mass and an interfaith service are now advertised in the Opening Weekend program. As with the “holiday tree” at the Festival of Lights, the advertising of Mass on campus is frowned upon because it is a majority religion and therefore not deemed worthy of the same protections as Judaism, for example.

Pescatello stated that his experience as a Catholic leader on Bryant campus has made him witness to several interesting phenomena with regard to diversity. He stated that some people who were the most zealous proponents of diversity sometimes have the tendency to become “myopic” and “undermine their own cause” (Pescatello). He cited the importance of balance and moderation in presenting and promoting diversity on campus; he continually works to remind students, faculty, staff, and the administration that respecting the practices of minority groups on campus does not mean “suppressing the rights of the majority” (Pescatello).

The language that Pescatello uses to describe the situation of religious tolerance on campus is understandable given his position and experience on campus. His use of phrases such as “suppression of the majority,” for example, is evidence of his position as the leader of a majority religion on campus. He is personally affected by the events linked to Christianity. However, Pescatello overlooks other factors of religious diversity on campus.

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Despite the importance of celebrating the majority religion in addition to minority religions, it is equally imperative to remember the role religion plays on a campus that is not religiously affiliated. Prayers are often recited at campus-wide events such as convocation and graduation. Should atheists, Muslims, or Jews be subjected to a moment of group prayer that is led by a Catholic priest? In instances where all faiths have a place (such as the Festival of Lights), it is only fair and just that the majority religion (Christianity) is also presented. However, in a ceremony where many students of all faiths (and also atheists) are in attendance not for the purpose of religious celebration but to commemorate graduation or commencing a four-year commitment with the University, perhaps all prayers are better left unsaid.

In addition to celebrating the majority religion and dismissing religion from ceremonies where it does not belong, it is important to consider the experience of students from minority religions. An interview with Navah Levine, the Jewish rabbi available to students on campus, revealed that some students of minority religions experience the isolation of attending a majority Christian university. Although she acknowledged a sincere effort from the administration to make students of all faiths feel welcome on campus, she cited the “white, Catholic feel and culture” of campus and lamented that many Jewish students “feel invisible” (Levine). In her interactions with the student body, she stated that many non-Jewish students are ignorant of even a basic understanding of Judaism. This problem is also relevant for students of other religions such as Islam; the student population is largely uneducated about these religions and does not understand what the experience of a student of that religion would be like on campus.

Like Pescatello, Levine mentioned the interfaith services on campus, but she offered a different view of their effectiveness. In her experience, an interfaith service might contain readings from the Koran, the New Testament, and the Old Testament; this terminology is problematic to Levine as a representative of the Jewish students on campus. The term “the Old Testament” is a Christian term and suggests that “the ‘New’ supersedes the ‘Old’” (Levine). It would be more appropriate, Levine suggested, to refer to the reading as from “the

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Torah or even the ‘Hebrew Bible’” (Levine). In order to have a truly respectful and effective interfaith ceremony, it is necessary to ensure the appropriateness of terminology.

As both Pescatello and Levine point out, although Bryant espouses protection for students of all religious faiths, there is still progress to be made toward the realization of this goal. The University cannot subscribe to a D’Souzian viewpoint of suppressing differences between individuals to pretend that all people are the same with the same experiences. Instead, the administration should strive to recognize religious differences between people (including those of the majority) while recognizing that religious references are inappropriate at campus-wide events. It is also imperative that close attention is paid to the terminology used during religious ceremonies and that a focus of the administration become educating students about the religious experience of minority students on campus.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE**

### Introduction

From the general state of religious affairs on campus to the racially charged selection of the Young Alumni Trustee in 2006, it is clear that success has not yet been achieved in an effort to promote and protect a diverse campus. Across the United States, universities and companies alike are struggling with how to best support diversity. Although some institutions have been more successful than others, none have fully achieved the goal. There are many theories about how to improve diversity initiatives that could prove instrumental to improving diversity on Bryant’s campus.

### Promoting Diversity on Campus

Amy Gutmann, editor of *Multiculturalism*, suggests that part of the solution to incorporating diversity into the educational system is to ensure that the liberal arts curriculum includes works by and about minorities:

American universities may aspire to be more international, but to the extent that our liberal arts curriculum along with our student body is still primarily



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American, it is crucial... that universities recognize who “we” are when they defend a core curriculum that speaks to “our” circumstances, culture, and intellectual heritage (Gutmann 15-16).

Gutmann states that non-canonical work must be included in the curriculum before a university can truly respect and promote diversity; the current prevalence of literature written by members of hegemonic groups in university curricula is rightfully criticized as reflective of a “lack of respect for members of these groups, or disregard for part of their cultural identities” (18). It would seem that with the addition of the Women’s Studies, Africana Studies, and Latin American Studies minors at Bryant, there is movement in the right direction. It is important that the University continue with this commitment to include nontraditional courses, minors, and majors.

Gerald Graff concludes that “that the best solution to today’s conflicts over culture is to teach the conflicts themselves, making them part of our object of study and using them” (Graff 12). Rather than simply being exposed to different opinions, Graff encourages students to become active in their own education by discussing and debating differing opinions. According to Graff, curricula should integrate controversies rather than excluding them.

Elizabeth Aries, Professor of Psychology at Amherst College, discusses the importance of hosting structured dialogues focused on racial and socioeconomic issues on campus; this would allow students to reflect on their personal experiences and learn from others. Aries cited the importance of having “trained facilitators who know how to create an environment in which students feel safe in both expressing what they honestly believe and having those beliefs examined”. Aries studies relations between students along two dimensions – black versus white students and wealthy versus poor students – at Amherst College. She found that open dialogue between members of different groups was essential in that it allowed students to discuss assumptions they held about other members of the student body.

Aries suggests that a campus community can foster structured dialogues between students through several steps. Administrative leaders must send out a strong message that the University is institutionally focused on welcoming diverse students and helping all students to

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understand their differences. Like Gutmann, Aries focuses specifically on concrete changes in curriculum that would lead to a better student understanding of campus diversity.

Traditionally, classes that focus on racial issues have been better attended by black students than white students. Along the same vein, lower-income students have been more often enrolled in courses regarding class issues than students from affluent homes. The problem with this situation is that it creates a more divisive atmosphere on campus. The students of the majority (be it white students or those from affluent backgrounds) perhaps are in even more need of a critical perspective of diversity issues than those of the minority. Aries suggests that it would better serve the campus community if majority students as well as minority students were encouraged to enroll in courses that teach about diversity issues. In the Bryant context, it would be fairly simple to incorporate diversity issues into mandatory courses.

In the past, FFL as well as the required freshmen English courses in the Literary and Cultural Studies department have included the topic of diversity into their curricula. Although some business courses have begun to address diversity issues, it is not pervasive enough given that diversity is such an instrumental part of the business world. If the business leaders of tomorrow at Bryant University are not exposed extensively to diversity issues in their core business classes, how can they be expected to fairly understand it in the workplace? Diversity could easily be incorporated into marketing courses (how is the female experience different from the male experience; how do you market to them respectively?), management courses (as a manager, what types of diversity issues might you face – homosexual employees, transgendered individuals?); almost all aspects of business are affected by an increasingly diverse workforce. Why then, in a university where all students are still required to take a business core curriculum, isn't diversity integrated more thoroughly into every core class? By making diversity an important part of a variety of courses, its importance could be subtly stressed without having it forced upon students in one or two courses during their first year.

In addition to encouraging majority students to participate in courses about diversity issues, Aries emphasizes the importance of better training faculty to deal with heated debates. Faculty members must be educated to more adequately handle diversity discussions in the

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classroom; few debates are more personal, emotional, and potentially hurtful as those concerning diversity issues. Most professors are not properly trained to have productive discussions about diversity. This is perhaps one issue of importance at Bryant; it is possible that one reason why business professors shy away from teaching diversity issues is because they feel that the liberal arts professors are better equipped to teach such contentious issues. Every professor at Bryant could benefit from better training on handling emotional debate in the classroom.

#### From the Campus Community

In addition to Gutmann, Aries, and Graff's persuasive arguments, it is important to consider suggestions for change from the faculty, staff, and students of the Bryant community. Based upon interviews with the Bryant community, four main suggestions for improving Bryant's diversity initiatives emerge. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is to diversify the student body and faculty/staff composition. Second, the Bryant administration must seek to educate students about diversity issues by integrating diversity learning into the curriculum and sponsoring programs about diversity. Third, students themselves must take a proactive role in learning about one another. Finally, the administration must sponsor constructive debate among Bryant students about diversity issues in order to create an open, intellectual environment.

In order to create an environment that is reflective of the diversity of the workforce, Bryant must seek to attract faculty, staff, and students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Toby Simon stated that admittance of more students from outside of the New England area would improve student awareness of multiculturalism issues and promote a more diverse student body by drawing from individuals with a wide-range of experiences. The University does offer a fly-in reimbursement program to high school students and prospective transfer students; Bryant will reimburse students for half of their airline ticket price of visiting Bryant up to \$150 and the remainder of the ticket price (up to a \$300 limit) should that student enroll. Students who are flying from outside of the continental United States or internationally may be eligible for further funding. Despite this program, Bryant still fails to attract many students

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from the United States who are from outside of the Northeast; Simon suggests that this area for improvement could prove vital in drawing students from varying backgrounds into the University.

In addition to attempting to attract students from outside of the New England area, Simon suggested that the composition of the faculty and staff may be improved by advertising for new positions in multiple mediums that would be accessible to a wider range of potential candidates. This broader marketing of available positions, she believes, will draw a wider variety of faculty to apply for positions with the University. Simon cited the employment of a more diverse set of individuals as an important way to promote a more diverse campus. She stressed that the movement “must be an institutional response” and supported at the highest level. According to Erika Paquette of Human Resources, twenty-five tenure-track individuals were hired during the most recent round of faculty recruitment; the incoming faculty are “36% minority (self identified), and 32% international” (Paquette); which suggests that the University is making progress in this area. The composition of a diverse group of employees with a variety of backgrounds is evidence that the administration has already begun to focus on this area for improvement.

While Bryant seeks to genuinely diversify its student body and faculty/staff composition, it is imperative that the community become educated regarding diversity issues at the administrative level through an inclusion of diversity in course curricula. Buisson voiced her frustration with scheduling Mohammed Bilal, a former television star on MTV’s the Real World, to speak on campus about diversity. Although Bilal’s speech was inspiring, informative, and appreciated by those in attendance, the number of students in the audience was dismally unimpressive. Buisson suggested that important speakers about diversity should be scheduled with the cooperation of faculty; she proposed that professors include such events on their syllabi or offer extra credit in order to encourage student attendance. Shontay Delalue King, like Buisson, stated that it was important for speakers who help us to talk about our cultural climate be invited to campus and also advertised more effectively through inclusion in course curricula.

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In addition to including diversity issues directly in course curricula, Marcus Lindsey, the winner of the diversity contest in 2007 and 2008, suggested that the University be “proactive” about diversity issues rather “reactive”. Instead of waiting for another Facebook Incident to occur, he suggested that “a public revisit to issues similar to [the Facebook Incident] can make a strong statement about the University. Not for the purpose of getting people fired-up all over again, but to say ‘we are aware that these things do happen. Here’s how we prevent it, and here’s how we handle it if it were to happen again’” (Lindsey). Lindsey believes that administrative action to promote how to best handle diversity issues should be an ongoing discussion.

As previously mentioned, Pescatello believes that the celebration of differences should include respecting the celebration of Christmas by referring to the tree by its rightful name. He stated that institutional change will occur only once all levels of the administration realize that it is better to recognize differences between people than to impose a false sameness over each student. Alternately, Levine suggests that the university focus on making interfaith ceremonies truly representative of many faiths and help to educate the student body about Judaism and other less-common religions on campus.

Although administrative action is imperative, many students and faculty discussed the important role that the students themselves play in making the community more accepting. Julie Peng offers insight in her email sent to BROSSIS in response to the Facebook Incident that cites her beliefs on the path to improving racial acceptance on campus. She discusses the separation between multicultural/international cliques and white students. While she admits that these cliques do in fact exist, Peng suggests that the reason for their existence (either because the white students do not try to be involved with the multicultural/international community or the multicultural/international community segregates itself), is unimportant. She stated: “there’s much more we can do instead of fighting amongst ourselves. I believe celebrating diversity is done by being proactive – to engage yourself enough to care about someone else to find their similarities, then you learn how to embrace and appreciate their differences.” Peng suggests that instead of placing blame on other students or claiming that

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the administration must be the catalyst for change, each student is personally responsible for taking an active role in promoting campus diversity.

Of all of the suggestions made, the repeated theme is that the Bryant community needs an open forum for discussion about diversity issues. Delalue King stressed the importance of a student-run organization focused on social justice. It is important to note that Delalue King described the organization as “student-run.” As discussed with regard to the incident where “fag” was burned into a student’s door in the fall of 2008, it is necessary to have a student voice leading the discussion in order to foster productive debate. Delalue King’s vision of this organization is a safe haven where people could have an open dialogue about diversity issues on campus. Like Graff, she cited that productive debate can arise from controversial discussions. Similar to Aries, however, Delalue King noted the importance that this forum be closely monitored by a trained individual.

Levine cited the importance of open dialogue about diversity education to help “both learn and unlearn” information about those from different religions. She advocated for a continued commitment to diversity; simply having one speaker address issues faced by Muslims is not enough to adequately educate the student body about Islam. She suggested that an open forum where students could safely question one another about their experiences on campus would be beneficial in helping to create a more understanding atmosphere. She encouraged students to ask one another “what is it like to be a Jewish/Muslim/Christian on campus?” and genuinely respect and consider the responses. She argued that only when students really understand the types of challenges faced by others on a daily basis can the campus hope to truly become integrated.

Sam Schultz praised the power of one-on-one conversation. He suggested that controversial events on campus that started dialogue be used as educational opportunities. Schultz believes that events that bring debatable topics to the forefront are important not necessarily in and of themselves but more because of the conversations generated as a result of the events; he

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stressed the importance of providing open forums for discussion about such incidents where students can exchange ideas in a safe atmosphere.

Recruiting a more diverse campus community, taking administrative action to include diversity in curricula and campus-wide events, proactive student response, and open forums for discussion of diversity issues are all important opportunities for Bryant to improve its diversity initiatives. It is imperative, however, that the dynamic nature of diversity is recognized. As the University changes, the needs of the student body will change as well. This is why the students themselves are perhaps the best resource for developing new diversity initiatives. Lindsey ultimately suggested a practical approach to helping to promote diversity on campus; pose the question to the students themselves. "The people who might know best how to bring diversity at Bryant up to par are the people in the Bryant community who *are* its very definition themselves. Seriously, open a discussion board (easily accessible to all) and post this question as the first topic. Let people ramble, disagree, pout" (Lindsey). It is important to recognize that Lindsey does not suggest an organized group where students would be required to meet monthly or a board comprised of selected students who specifically apply. Rather, Lindsey emphasizes the importance of having an opportunity such as an online discussion board open to every Bryant student who wants to express an opinion. Students could post a single comment or actively participate in an ongoing debate; this casual commitment would encourage students of all types to take part. It seems clear that students and faculty and Bryant University have many ideas for helping to improve diversity initiatives, but these suggestions must change as the situation at Bryant evolves. As Graff states, productive discussions among people with differing opinions is perhaps the most influential learning opportunity in the higher education environment.

#### Personal Conclusions

In four years' time, there have been more articles, events, and incidences than can be fairly included in a study with this scope. However, this study does help to create an honest depiction of how diversity exists on Bryant's campus. Based upon the evidence, it seems that the manifestation of diversity on campus is far removed from the marketing of diversity. In

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order for the University to achieve a campus that is truly reflected in their promotional materials, several steps must be taken.

First, diversity can no longer be conflated with solely race; in publicly printed documents, the University acknowledges that diversity encompasses much more than only race and ethnicity. If a situation arises regarding homosexuality, disability, gender, or another aspect of diversity where the correct path is unclear, it is important that the situation is handled with the same respect as it would be if it were a racial incident. It is time that the actions of the administration reflect their publicized understanding that diversity is not equivalent to only race.

Second, the University ought to follow the sentiments of many faculty and staff on campus and begin to recognize differences instead of imposing a false homogeneity. By celebrating diversity instead of stifling it, the student body will have an enhanced education experience through learning from those who are different from them.

Third, Bryant should attempt to learn from how other institutions of higher education have promoted diversity. No university has perfected its diversity initiatives, but it is important that Bryant learn from the initiatives of other organizations and integrate successful programs into their own approach.

Fourth, Bryant should aim to better educate their faculty and staff about diversity issues. If professors were better equipped to handle diversity discussions in the classroom, productive debate that might otherwise turn counterproductive could take place in coursework.

Productive debate is characterized by respectful, genuine questions and responses that are aimed at educating one another about differing life experiences that contribute to personal diversity. If these debates become argumentative, the conversations become angry and perhaps violent. These types of conversations could result in more harm than good; therefore, it is imperative that the teaching community at Bryant be trained with how to provide a controlled environment for productive debate to occur. If professors were better educated about leading diversity discussions, it would be easier to fully integrate diversity into every



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curriculum; since diversity is present everywhere throughout society, it is important that it is integrated into all subjects rather than relegating it to liberal arts classes.

Fifth, student leaders should be involved in the diversity process to better lead discussions among their peers. If events, such as the March for Tolerance, feature only administrative speakers with no student leaders, an opportunity for student unity is missed.

Finally, and most importantly, the University must foster an open dialogue on campus for diversity discussions to take place. Instead of shying away from contentious conversations, the administration should encourage students to debate these topics. The students of Bryant University deserve the higher quality of education that comes from productive debate.

Despite the fact that the marketing materials of the University over-represent the acceptance of diversity on campus, the student definitions of diversity in the diversity contest are evidence that the students themselves are starting to help shape the campus. In 2007, Lorenzo Perry, a student at Bryant University at that time, contributed a poem to the contest. He asked “what is diversity? Whether it’s in the workplace or a university, the term is always accompanied with adversity... What is diversity? Past history shows us that we need it; if you don’t learn from the past, you are doomed to repeat it.” The best definition for diversity in higher education is conflict diversity. If we do not stop to examine the shortcomings of past actions, the University cannot hope to successfully move into future. As an institution, it important not to confuse progress with success; instead of marketing a campus that is more diverse than Bryant really is, efforts should be focused on making the myth a reality.

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#### **APPENDICES**

Appendix A – “Diversity Just Is”: Cover

Appendix B – “Diversity Just Is”: September

Appendix C – “Diversity Just Is”: March

Appendix D – “Diversity Just Is”: August

Appendix E – “Diversity Just Is”: January

Appendix F – “Diversity Just Is”: October

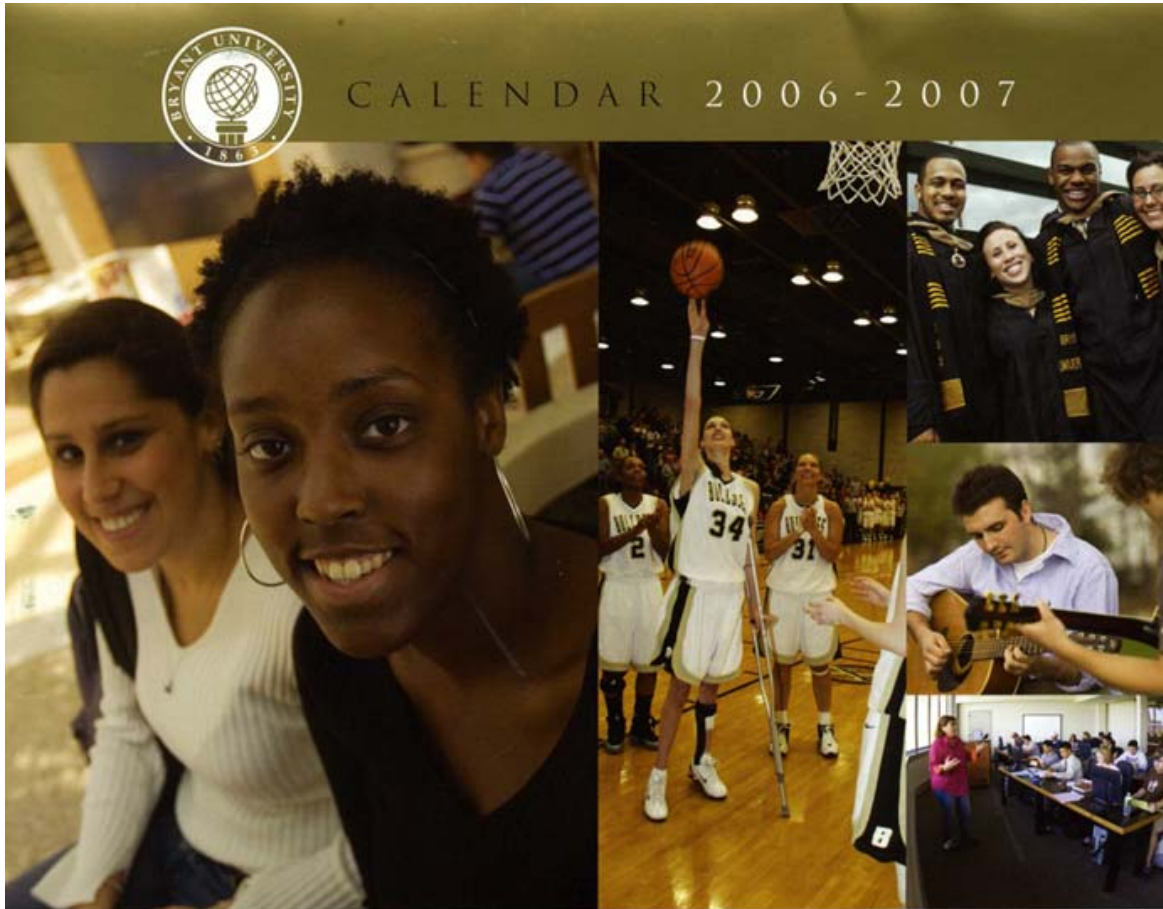
Appendix G – A Premier Education with a Global Focus

Appendix H – Enrichment through Diversity

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Appendix A – “diversity just is:” Cover



diversity just *is*

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#### Appendix B – “diversity just is:” September



The **Unistucture Rotunda** is a favorite gathering spot for students in between classes. It's a great place to see the whole community.

**Diversity just is.** An important step in embracing diversity is to know yourself. Research your family tree, write down your passions, beliefs, and discomforts. Sometimes it's just a matter of becoming comfortable with who you are that enables an attitude of acceptance and curiosity about others and who they may be.

Mohammed Bilal, musician, writer, speaker, and star of MTV's "Real World" was a featured speaker at Bryant in the Fall of 2005.

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Appendix C – “diversity just is:” March



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#### Appendix D – “diversity just is:” August



Staff and faculty here are honest about how critical the issue of sexual orientation discrimination is, and they ask students to question the status quo and to ask themselves whether or not we are contributing to a solution or adding to the problem.

Symphone'e Willoughby '08

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#### Appendix E – “diversity just is:” January



Coming to Bryant helped me get stronger and more independent. In addition to my physical therapy and recovery from my injury, I was able to focus on studying, making new friends, and, of course, the team. I still have the goal to play again – and I won't give up hope.

**Pam Malcolm '06**  
Bulldogs Basketball Team

*It is important to support every member of the Bryant community – no matter what their ability. Basketball Senior Night celebrates the achievements of the team including **Pam Malcolm**, who set out to win no matter what the odds.*

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#### Appendix F – “diversity just is:” October



It was my dream to help Bryant students organize the Bryant University Democrats and the Bryant University Republican Club with the hope of initiating discussions on vital domestic and foreign policy issues facing our country. It is essential to have a diversity of ideas in an academic community that is committed to the development of every individual.

Glen Camp  
Professor Emeritus of Political Science

diversity just *is*

*Bryant students develop the critical-thinking skills they'll need to engage in thoughtful and dynamic discussions with peers and faculty. Here, there is room for every point of view.*





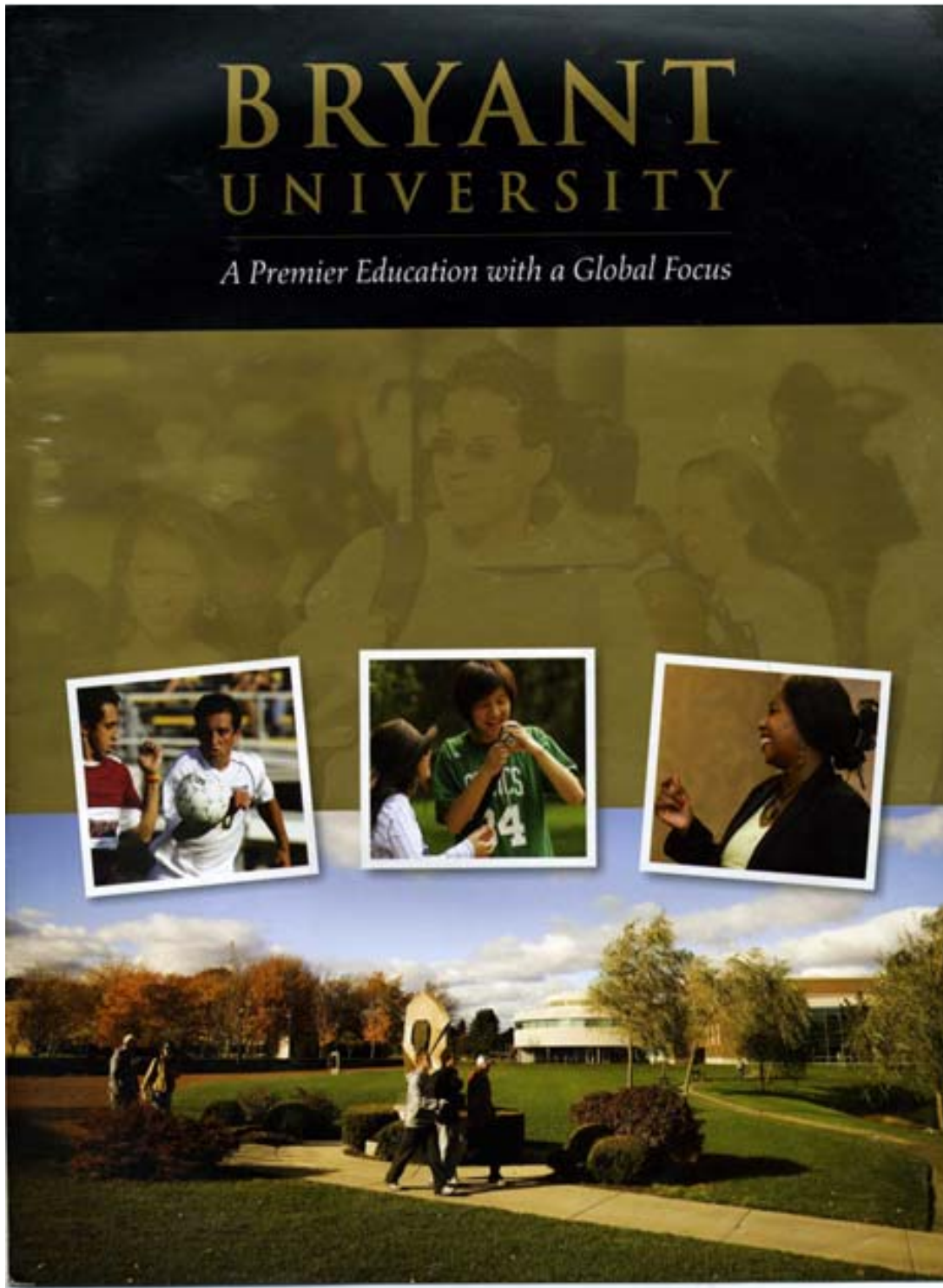
**DIVERSITY JUST ISN'T**

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Appendix G – A Premier Education with a Global Focus



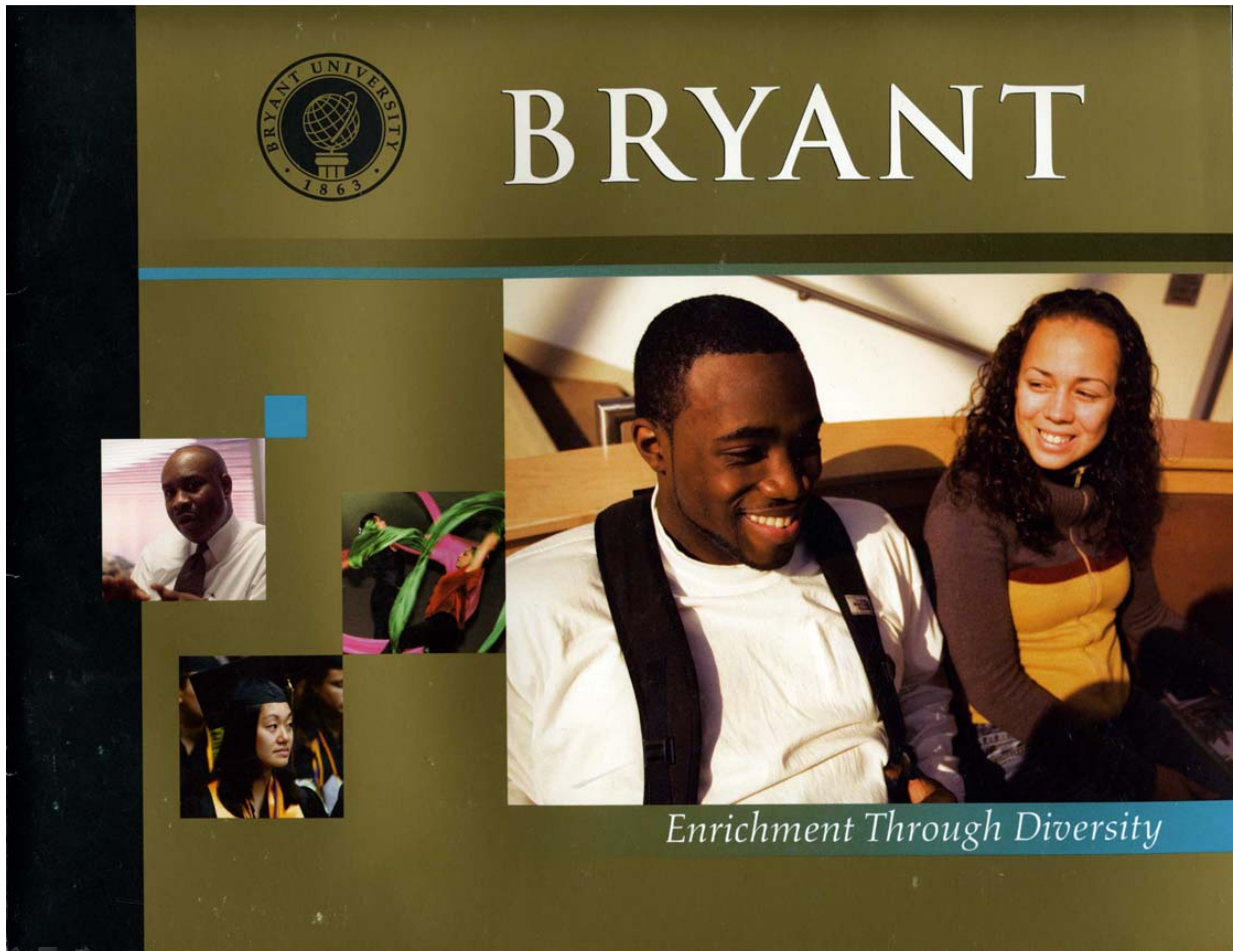
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Appendix H – Enrichment through Diversity



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