

***THE EFFECT OF STUDENT DIVERSITY ON STUDENT
LEARNING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Faculty and GSI Perspectives***

In both 1998 and 1999, the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching ran a Diversity Narratives competition and solicited essays on "The Effect of Student Diversity on Student Learning at the University of Michigan." Faculty and graduate student instructors (GSIs) in all departments, schools, and colleges were invited to submit entries. A committee of UM faculty and CRLT staff selected the winners, judging entrants on their ability to articulately convey their personal experience with the complex dynamic of diversity in the University's learning environment. For the purposes of this competition, diversity was viewed as a concept that encompasses issues such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, disability, geographical region (both international and domestic), religion, and any other characteristics that the authors found meaningful. There were twelve winners of the Diversity Narratives Competition, six each in 1998 and 1999, and all twelve appear in this *Occasional Paper*.

These twelve narratives reflect the range of experiences that instructors share with CRLT consultants about opportunities and challenges accompanying diversity in the classroom. Some of the narratives show the power of individuals' personal experiences to illustrate or raise questions about the concepts in a course. Instructors and students may find it uncomfortable to hear personal stories, but the resulting conversations can enrich the learning process.

As you will see in these narratives, the development of an inclusive curriculum and classroom atmosphere requires conscious effort by instructors. The narratives remind us that, irrespective of whether instructors choose to deal with diversity, it is an issue that always emerges. When instructors actively acknowledge and address diversity, their efforts may not succeed initially. Changes, both big and small, take time; they happen if instructors are willing to persevere and students are encouraged to stay engaged. The reward for such effort is an enriched and potentially transformative educational experience in which instructors and students share the roles of learner and teacher, and the content is understood in deeper and more complex ways.

CRLT would like to recognize the 1998 and 1999 award winners for their compelling portrayals of the importance of diversity to teaching and learning at the University of Michigan.



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Lessons in Expecting the Unexpected: Diversity in the Women's Studies Classroom

by Cari M. Carpenter

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The students initially were baffled when I began by asking them to indicate the degree of diversity in their communities. However, they soon began to talk about diversity in a variety of forms: we heard from a white woman who went to a predominantly African-American school, an Asian-American man who attended a wealthy high school in Bloomfield Hills, and a white woman from a working-class Detroit neighborhood who lived in an ethnically-mixed community. Just as we were about to move on to the next question, another student spoke up. She explained that because the high school closest to her home wouldn't accept disabled students, she had found one farther away that did. She didn't mind if the rest of the students were physically able — "they" had let her in. Naming a kind of diversity that the rest of us had overlooked, she proved that diversity is not a lesson that the instructor alone can teach. No matter how promising such exercises seemed, they inevitably were upstaged by my students' ingenious ability to teach one another — and me. It's unexpected; it defies lesson plans; it puts a legal pad to shame.

I began each class by asking students to "show and tell" something that related to the current topic of the course. On the family history day, an African American student brought in an entire photo album that traced both sides of her family to a slave and her white master. When the student explained that her last name was that of one of the white plantation owners, my other African American student mentioned that his was too. Stunned, the rest of the (predominantly white) students studied the album, stared at the floor, frowned. The room was silent — that good kind of silence that comes when things are starting to sink in. Slavery, one of the white students later told me, had not been real to her until that day.

A few weeks later, the student who had shared her photo album invited her family to visit the class. Her great-grandmother, a spirited woman in her late eighties, described how she used to sneak up to the attic to hear her aunt tell slave stories. One she particularly remembered was of a slave whose face was rubbed in cat excrement after the baby she was fanning woke up early. At the age of eight, the great-grandmother told us, she had taken a shortcut through the fairgrounds and encountered a group of "men with strange white robes and pointy hats." Because of her light skin, she was mistaken for a white girl and spoiled with all of the hot dogs and candy she could eat.

When the guests' allotted hour expired and they were still going strong, I thought of my teaching colleagues who were at

least a day ahead of me. But when I noticed my students' spell-bound faces, I set my lesson plans aside. This, I knew, was a class that would stay with them years later when they saw a picture of a Ku Klux Klan rally or the scene in "Gone With the Wind" in which a slave fans a dozing Southern belle.

When I asked the students to share a time when they were particularly aware of their racial identity, an activity that I had slated for twenty minutes stretched to an hour as the students engaged in a remarkably honest discussion. The Anglo student who came from a predominantly white Detroit suburb found herself face-to-face with an African-American woman who hadn't seen a "real white person" until she was in high school. Studying each other, they realized one thing they had in common: neither was like what the other expected her to be.

These discussions have taught me that recognizing diversity is not only about encouraging stories of race, class, disability, and sexual orientation — stories that the students themselves tell best — but also about creating a space for the exchange of ideas. When one of my students declared that the course was biased because the instructors refused to acknowledge the victimization of men, I found myself angry, not because her comment opposed my own beliefs but because it made me "question" them. My students' skepticism or outright disagreement challenges me in ways that even my graduate courses in feminist theory do not, for they help me recognize the assumptions on which my convictions are based. While it was easy to dismiss their arguments as unfounded or naive or just blatantly wrong, it was more difficult — and more useful — to see how they might complicate my own. When a white woman defended her father's wealth, declaring, "He just worked for it. What's wrong with that?", I recognized my own faith in the comforting, if unrealistic, equation between success and hard work.

One of our most productive discussions occurred when I demonstrated that my beliefs were as varied and conflicted as their own. When I shared how a group of African-American men had shouted at me after I crossed a Chicago street late one night in order to avoid them, we were able to have a valuable conversation about white women's responses to black men. As one student wrote on the final evaluation of my women's studies course, "This course completely changed my perception of reality." As well, I'm happy to say, as my own.

Diversity in Engineering

by Venkatesh G. Rao

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An unknown medieval Persian writer wrote, "If a man could but have the intelligence of the Jew, the devotion of the Arab, the mysticism of the Indian, and the ingenuity of the Chinese, why then, he would be the perfect man!" That was almost a millennium ago, in the first cosmopolitan world empire — that of the Muslims. Times have changed. The known world has expanded to fill the entire globe. Attitudes have changed too — it is not very fashionable to talk in terms of ethnic stereotypes, whether positive or negative. Yet, something in that medieval poet's thought strikes a chord in modern minds. There is something very appealing about diversity.

Up here on North Campus, diversity would seem to be a non-issue. After all, the gay-lesbian rallies and the fierce debates on race and religion hardly touch us here. But despite the fact that engineering traditionally has been the preserve of politically conservative groups, there is one aspect of diversity that is showcased here as nowhere else on campus. That aspect is nationality. In the François-Xavier Bagnoud building, home of the Aerospace Engineering department where I work, study, and teach, the graduate student rooms rival the United Nations in their diversity. The many students are, among others, Chinese, Indian, Korean, Egyptian, Russian, Turkish, French, and Mexican students. The faculty is no less diverse. Two major departments — Mechanical and Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, are chaired by foreign-born professors — Turkish and Indian, respectively. While the undergraduate student body is more homogeneous, it is fairly diverse too. How does this colorful menagerie manage to work smoothly and make the University one of the top ranked in engineering? I have some ideas on why and how.

As an Indian graduate student, I have been an international GSI for four terms. Up in the dormitories, students groan when they realize they have been assigned an international GSI, yet, I believe they learn something valuable. I taught classes in Fluid Dynamics and Control Systems and a laboratory course in Instrumentation and Measurement. How on earth can nationality matter in such patently non-culture-specific fields? Superficially, it might seem that subjects like sociology or history would benefit more from such diversity. There's more to it, though.

Take a typical example: at a recent laboratory session involving a supersonic wind tunnel, a student asked me, "Can a shock wave travel beyond the throat of the tunnel?" I answered, "Of course not. Flow is always sonic at the throat." He replied, "But the XB-70 experimental bomber had problems with shocks traveling up the intake!"

I thought for a while and managed to explain the difference in the two situations.

Even to seasoned experts, it might be difficult to see any signs of "diversity" in this little "nerd" conversation. Yet, there are subtle differences in the thinking styles of Asians and Americans at which this conversation hints. Americans tend to approach problems through specific examples and counterexamples, Asians tend to try analysis from first principles. Of course, this is not a strict rule! Crude generalizations like "Americans are better at synthetic thinking, Asians are better at analytical thinking," are not really very useful. They do carry a kernel of truth in them, though — cultural differences do show up in thinking styles. Sometimes the differences are clear enough to tempt one into invalid extrapolation. Sometimes there is just a subtle hint. Examples can be found all over. Why do the Germans excel in Precision Machinery? Why do the Russians excel at Metallurgy? How do the Japanese manage to innovate their way to perfection? Why does so much software get written in India? I believe the answer lies in the subtle and not-so-subtle differences in education and culture in various countries. Sometimes it is hard to pin it down to a simple one-dimensional quality, like, "Chinese schools emphasize math." The fact that Germans make those delightfully overengineered BMWs cannot be reduced to any simple cultural factor. The fact just sits there, much like we have no idea of why the Chinese, and not someone else, perfected the martial arts.

Even among the faculty, one can clearly see differences in the teaching styles of, for instance, American and Japanese professors. One Japanese professor, needing a huge number of symbols for the course he teaches, runs through the Greek alphabet and mischievously starts using Japanese characters! The students groan, but apart from the comic relief they provide, these little incidents teach students that the same core principles can be viewed in a variety of ways. On the part of professors and GSIs, the exacting task of conveying ideas to a largely strange kind of student brings out surprising depths of creativity, which often loops back and adds a new dimension of thinking to their own research.

Engineering always has had to deal, more than other fields of endeavor, with diversity. An arts major or a history major will, in all likelihood, deal largely with his or her own kind, barring specialized foreign interests. Even such fields aimed at diversity, like "Caribbean and African-American studies," are likely to be more homogeneous than the world of engineering. For the engineering student of today, the facts of life are simple. Out in industry, she will face a very connected world. She will be screaming at German designers to hurry up with the drawings, hounding Taiwanese semiconductor suppliers for delivery, and arguing about software bugs with programmers in Bangalore. At the same time, the engineer will be smooth talking sharp Arab sheiks into choosing HER company for a big project. Diversity will not be something beautiful and idealistic to talk about at university forums; it will be a live, organic part of this engineer's life. Diversity in her education will teach her

not only how to be aware of other cultures, it will enable her truly to understand foreigners. This is absolutely crucial because an engineer needs to yell and scream and get work done — while remaining capable of chilling out with a beer (or sake or sherbet) with those same people after work. Diversity in engineering is a fact of life, not a lifestyle choice!

The University of Michigan, like many American universities, has the distinction of being among the most exciting places in the world to work. I believe diversity is a large part of the reason. I love it here!

Class in the Classroom

by Troy Patrick Gordon

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Last spring I taught an English course entitled Writing Biography that included a unit on Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*, a story about her British working-class mother's life. I assigned the text to introduce the question of how to write biographical essays that pay attention to issues of socio-economic class. What differences does class make in shaping various life stories? Despite excelling in previous units on such diverse writers as Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, and Maxine Hong Kingston, the students — all seniors, all good writers, most well read, most women — hit a conceptual wall with the idea of a distinctly defined "working class." University of Michigan students are generally, if vaguely, familiar with "blue collar," "working moms," "Roseanne," and "trailer parks," but unlike Steedman in Britain, they have been given few, if any, means of analyzing or critiquing (beyond situation comedy) the socio-economic system that creates these categories. American college students often assume they have no defined socio-economic class, or they safely call themselves "middle class" when pressed, leveling any diversity. Class may be the most invisible aspect of diversity among Michigan students — a difference that for many fascinating reasons registers as no difference.

To understand Steedman's British working-class context, we first had to figure out what it was we could not see or talk about as Americans. Setting Steedman aside, I asked the students to define as best they could the concept of class. Eyes dropped to notebooks. Silence. I let the silence persist for an awkwardly long time because it was precisely this inability or unwillingness to address the topic that I wanted all of us to feel. Someone made a joke about the unusual reticence of this highly articulate group. We chuckled. It worked. A young woman from a sorority said, "Class is classiness, how you behave. You know, there are people who act classy and people who have no class at all." Others agreed with this safe and very American definition. I challenged it. "Is it only a matter of personally choosing how to behave? That seems hard to define because it's fluid and individualistic." "How about tax bracket?" another woman offered. Here we thought that we had stumbled upon an indisputable component of a definition: how much money one makes. To test it, I asked them to get personal and apply this annual income standard to define their own class.

If the discussion began with silence it now moved into shock. No one could quite believe I had asked them to divulge such sacred information, and of course, the point was to help them feel its very sacredness and analyze that. I pointed out that they could lie, or make up a story about themselves for the purposes of discussion, and no one would know the difference. (Therein lies both the advantage and disadvantage of class difference: in an American college classroom you often can fake

it.) Again they laughed nervously, and then began to work. One student said her parents started out as a receptionist and a mechanic but had risen through the ranks of their companies without any education and were now a payroll clerk and an engineer. Her family's income and class status thus had changed over time, from blue to white collar, which was the "right" direction, "although we're still the same people," she assured us. A woman in her mid-twenties claimed her father had just brokered a major international corporate merger and had made millions. She now had a trust fund and need never work. "Congratulations!...How does it feel?...Are you making this up?"

Income can change; in fact, in America it should change if the American dream works as a template of success. Defining class based on income, we eventually concluded, was still shifting and unreliable. To locate a definition, a male student suggested that class involves where one lives, property values, and neighborhoods like suburbs. But a young woman from rural Michigan replied, "I live on a farm in the sticks, in a poor community, but we have loads of money (although we try not to show it), so location can mean anything." They tried various definitions and rejected all with counterexamples from their own experience.

The discussion yielded interesting, if predictable, limitations. American students are far more accustomed to seeing racial differences than class differences, and they often bring into the classroom some apparatus for morally or socially critiquing racial differences (although that apparatus needs constant reconstruction). Wanting to marry outside one's race raises familiar debates among American students in a way that wanting to rise outside of one's class does not. Race is tied to experiences of difference, of loyalty, of morality, of injustice, while class rarely is; *Amistad* rightly incited criticism for its romanticization of black slaves and liberal white founding fathers, while the other 1998 movie about a historic ship, *Titanic*, earned Oscars despite its romanticization of steerage class. As recent debates among African-American intellectuals have foregrounded, "race" for too long has borne the burden of explaining and critiquing social differences when a "class" critique would be far more appropriate and useful. Of course they are linked, but the question is, How can one establish the conditions for class analysis in the classroom so as to redirect and enrich discourses of race and ethnicity as social experiences?

The safest way for Michigan students to talk about class — or not talk about it — is to talk about making lots of money, a kind of lottery mentality that perpetuates the democratic myth of potential access to wealth for all but actually reserves access for the few. More and more, a university education participates in this myth by being seen as ensuring an individual student's economic success, in itself a worthy goal. Yet how much money one makes is often a smokescreen obscuring other crucial issues of class: how certain jobs qualitatively differ from others in opposition to income level (e.g., a public defender might earn less than a window washer), and how few people

control vast amounts of profit. What we need to discuss class in the classroom legitimately are tools (beginning with laughter) to help dismantle the assumptions underpinning "the American dream" as a system of values. In other words, we need to be able to make visible a variety of social structures based on what people do and where their paychecks come from, not simply how much money they make. This starts, I would contend, not only with course materials like Steedman's British working-class biography, but also with students articulating details of their own lives for comparison, for analysis, for the startling experience of talking openly (even if fictionally) about class, money, jobs, and social inequities, under current conditions of pervasive cultural silence.

During the course wrap-up on the last day, two comments kept recurring about Writing Biography: that this was one of the most truly multicultural courses these seniors had taken at Michigan, and that the discussion dynamic encouraged students to say openly anything relevant. I believe both comments were linked significantly to our discussion of socio-economic class when we set aside the assigned biographical text and made up stories about ourselves for analysis.

Homophobia and Heterosexism as Classroom Topics in a Health Profession's Curriculum

by Marita Inglehart

Associate Professor in the School of Dentistry

In the spring of 1994, the dean of the School of Dentistry at the University of Michigan charged a committee to conduct a cultural audit of this school. Surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observational studies with faculty, staff, students, and patients were conducted and showed that homophobia and heterosexism were problematic attitudes held by some individuals. It seemed crucial to begin an educational process with students about sexual orientation to assure that future gay, lesbian, and bisexual patients and colleagues of the dental students educated at Michigan would be treated professionally and without discrimination.

This narrative is the history of what happened since then. I want to share it with other educators who might feel pessimistic, cynical, discouraged, or even burnt out about the state of affairs around diversity issues and classroom instruction in order to show that change through classroom teaching is possible.

The setting is a Behavioral Science class for approximately 100 second-year dental students. Imagine a large lecture hall with fixed chairs, a blackboard, and a screen up front.

Cohort 1, class of 1997: It is August 1995, 8 a.m. The instructor has invited to the class a speaker panel from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Program Office [LGBPO] of the university. Ronni Sanlo, then the director of this office, comes to class along with three current and former students to speak to the dental students. She introduces herself and the speakers, and then each person tells their own "coming out" story and some striking examples of what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual in our society. Then comes the time for questions. A male student raises his hand. When called upon he asks the panel if they have a lot of sympathy with serial killers in jail who say that they were born "like this" — as serial killers — because the speakers say that they are born "like this" — as persons with homosexual or bisexual orientations. Dead silence. Then the most amazing reply from Ronni Sanlo: "I will not answer this question until a heterosexual person answers this question, because heterosexual persons also are born like this — so they could answer as well."

After the class, one of the students calls the instructor and gives her an ultimatum. She will tell him in writing that "these people" never will set foot in the dental school, or he will sue her for sexual harassment. Lawyers are consulted. The student does not follow through with his threat. The administrators show their clear support for the instructor.

Postscript: After this class was graduated in April 1997, one of the new graduates tells the Dental School's Multicultural

Affairs Committee that he is gay and that this panel made a big difference for him personally.

Cohort 2, class of 1998: It is August 1996, 8 a.m. Ronni Sanlo is back with a panel. Introduction of its members; coming out stories; questions. One of the discussion points: Why should we not tell jokes about gays? Don't they have a sense of humor? Other questions are curious and honest. At the end of the term, the class evaluations again reflect the negative sentiment against having the LGBPO speakers' presentation. During the year, two gay dental students are assaulted with metal chains in the Power Center parking structure. They do not dare to report this to the police out of fear that they might then be identified as gay in the dental school.

Cohort 3, class of 1999: It is February 1997, 9 a.m. The class is moved to the winter term and to a later time. This time, Ronni Sanlo comes alone and gives a great lecture about the history of the gay movement and the stages of development of sexual identity. The questions are right to the point, slightly challenging, but genuinely interested in understanding.

Cohort 4, class of 2000: It is February 1998, 9 a.m. in the morning. Ken Blochowski, the Interim director of the newly titled Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Program Office [LGBTPO], agrees to come with speakers. The instructor makes sure he knows the history of this presentation. One of the first questions concerns with the meaning of the word "transgender." Other questions address professional issues: "What would gay patients want from their dentist?"

Five minutes before the end of the class, a woman raises her hand and thanks the speakers for coming. The instructor is overwhelmed. It took four student cohorts, fabulous administrators, two courageous speakers, and persistent classroom instruction to see some change. The New Century has started, and education is the key.

Experiencing Diversity at UM: A Graduate Student Instructor Perspective

by Sayan Bhattacharyya

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I think that experiencing anything new has two dimensions to it — first, it involves experiencing something new about yourself that you had not realized or noticed before, and second, experiencing something new about what is external to you. As a graduate student who arrived here at University of Michigan from a country which is very unlike the USA, I have had ample opportunity to observe both first hand. Some of the more interesting experiences have come in the course of working as a graduate student instructor.

Because I am not a native speaker of English, before I could be a GSI, I had to take a test here at U of M's English Language Institute. I was evaluated by the resident experts as to whether I would be able to speak passable English and effectively communicate with the undergraduate students I was to teach. I can assure you that this test was much more nerve-racking than any of the final exams I have ever had to take here at U of M! I passed the test but the worries remained: what will happen on the first day of class when I go in to teach? Will I be able to make myself understood by the students? How will my young charges react to this strange person standing in front of them, speaking English with an accent that might seem to them absolutely bizarre? Will they be ready to accept me as a teacher? Will I be able to establish a rapport with them? In my state of anxiety, I went into Borders and bought *American Accent Training*, a book which promised that its diligent perusal would in no time have foreigners like me speaking English with the same accent as Americans! It seems funny now, but it didn't seem so then.

In my panic-stricken state, I also decided to consult my peers from India, people who had arrived at the UM one or two years earlier than me and had preceded me in being GSIs. They did not, however, hold out much hope. (I now suspect that maybe they were playing with me a little, seeing the panic that I was in.) One of them told me that many of the American freshmen never would have seen a person from another country in their entire lives before coming to the U of M. Another recounted how, in the hope of putting his students at ease, he carefully prepared a few jokes with which to pepper his lecture. In his first days of teaching as a GSI, he discovered, to his shock, that no one in the class would laugh at his jokes. Apparently the students did not find anything funny about his jokes at all. More disconcertingly, they occasionally burst out laughing a few times when the novice GSI did not notice having said anything particularly funny that could occasion such laughter. All in all, these "stories from the trenches" did little to restore my morale and left me with a feeling of great trepidation.

Finally the fateful day arrived, and I entered the classroom (a lab, actually) clutching my notes and feeling rather nervous. Everything, however, seemed to go quite well. Certainly, the students did not react to seeing me as if they were seeing a strange creature from outer space, nor did there seem to be any exceptional problem in communicating. Over the course of the term, the students and I actually became good friends. I think I discovered several things in the course of teaching that class. Looking back on my initial feelings and trepidation about teaching, I would like to share with you the lessons that I think I have learned over the years.

If you are unsure about how a group of people will react to you because you are *different* from them, remember that, on this campus at least, chances are good that this group consists of people who are different from each other in many ways. Because there is a lot of diversity on campus, people have grown used to seeing, meeting and interacting with — learning from and teaching to — people who are different from them. This tends to make people more accepting of someone who looks different or talks in a different way from them. In that first class that I taught, there were people with all shades of skin color, Americans as well as non-Americans, and people whose accents were probably even more strange-sounding than mine was. Is the rest of the United States equally accepting of differences? I can't tell for sure, because, other than Ann Arbor, I haven't been to places in this country for long. But from what I hear or read in the newspapers, the answer is probably not; the U of M campus is probably one of the exceptions.

My second point: diversity in the classroom is good for everyone in the classroom. Why? Because, now that we are living in a globalized world that is shrinking every day, it is almost certain that when students leave the classroom and go out into the big world, they will have to meet, interact with, and do business with a wide variety of people from a very different set of backgrounds, nations and cultures. Exposure in the classroom to people from many different cultures and backgrounds is useful preparation for this. Even if there were no pressing philosophical reasons for cherishing diversity, this single pragmatic reason alone would have been enough reason to cherish it.

This brings me to my last point. When I think of the word "university," the word that I am reminded of is *universe*. I feel that a university should be like an entire universe. And in many ways, the UM campus is, I feel, almost like a universe unto itself. Just as there is a lot of variation, diversity, and difference in the universe, so should it be so in a university as well. A university should be a place where diversity flourishes just as it does in the universe.

Discovering Yourself while Relating to Others: The Virtue of Diversity

by Alford Young, Jr.

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Diversity may appear to be a worthy, but still ancillary, issue for some at the University of Michigan. In my classroom, diversity has become an essential part of the learning process. I teach in the Department of Sociology and in the Center for Afro-American and African Studies. Consequently, much of what I research and teach concerns the social experiences of African Americans. In five and a half semesters of teaching at the University of Michigan, I find that two general types of students have entered the classroom with me. One group consists of those students who desire to learn about themselves. For the most part, they are African American students. The majority of them live in Detroit. The college experience for many of them is the first encounter with a predominantly non-African-American educational institution. They tell me, both directly and indirectly, that they seek out my courses in order to spend some time thinking about themselves rather than about people and experiences that are foreign to them.

The second group of students is non-African-American; most are caucasian. They tell me that my courses offer them a chance to think about a group of people about whom they know very little. They did not go to school with large numbers of African Americans before attending the University of Michigan. Although they now go to school with larger numbers of African-Americans, there is not a great deal of interaction between the groups. Some are quite concerned about this, others are just curious about why they know so little about black Americans and desire to learn a lot more.

In short, my classroom experiences thus far have not involved much work in getting students to pay attention to issues that they find unimportant, yet must consider in a course, in order to fulfill degree expectations. Instead, I have the luxury of having people who genuinely care to learn about African Americans, whether they live some dimension of that experience or have been far removed from it. It would appear that this kind of situation is a nice conclusion for an account of why diversity matters in the classroom, either in terms of what kinds of students enroll in a course or what constitutes the course topic. On the contrary, for me this arrangement is the basis for my discovery of how much diversity matters and why.

One day in the classroom, in a course entitled "The Social Organization of the Black Community," I led a discussion on *Tally's Corner*, a classic study of street corner men by Elliot Liebow. The book is short, free of academic jargon, and filled with anecdotes of life on the street. I imagine that, for these

and other reasons, undergraduates respond to this book with more enthusiasm than any other in this course. The discussion on this day moved toward whether street corner men could ever adjust to life beyond the corner, and what would have to happen in society to make that a possibility. A number of the students spoke up about the culture of the men on the corner and the structural forces that impinged upon their lives. Whether structure or culture was at the heart of each student's remarks, their essential point was the same; something had to be done for these men because they were beyond doing much for themselves.

After the fifth or sixth comment along such lines, Keith shouted out, "Why are we talking about these guys like this? We don't even think they can do anything for themselves. At least some of them can!"

Everyone grew silent, yet their facial expressions conveyed sentiment that Keith would not say much to create a valid alternative point of view. Keith went on to say, "We're not that far away from these guys. I AM ONE OF THEM! I used to be out there. Now I'm here with you. Don't say what they cannot do because I'm doing what you think they cannot do."

Keith went on to say how he used to hang out on the streets of Detroit before a juvenile judge made it clear to him that if he did not choose school, he would choose detention for him. The faces on the other students, African American and non-African American, changed from skepticism about his initial remarks to amazement over learning about the personal history of their classmate. The rest of our discussion for that day dealt with how and whether we make fair sense of people whose experiences differ from our own, and what our actions may mean for our ability to respond to them appropriately. On the basis of race, class, and experiential distinctions, Keith served as a decisive example of how diversity mattered in my classroom on that day. Students heard the voice of a "real" person, and not simply a character in a book and it transformed the way they considered the very ideas that the book attempted to convey. This is one of two occurrences in that classroom that exemplified my increased understanding of the virtues of diversity.

In this second case, I was lecturing about how the urban community was transformed following World War II. I wanted the students to understand how much external factors mattered in the shaping of today's urban, low-income African American community. In talking about the suburbanization of the more socio-economically privileged sectors of American society, I mentioned the creation of Levittowns, or the moderately-priced housing that was developed following World War II to give working-class citizens an opportunity to acquire property. I discussed the discriminatory policies surrounding these developments, which prevented many African Americans from purchasing such houses and moving into these neighborhoods.

Experiences with Diversity as a Graduate Student Instructor

by Jinny Suh

Graduate Student in the Department of Biology, LS&A

I concluded my remarks on this topic by mentioning how capital that has been accrued from the initial acquisition of these houses was denied to African Americans, thus establishing for many a repository of capital (including good public schools and other social institutions) that was denied many African Americans. I then informed the students that this situation is an example of how people who may not think much about race (such as some of the new homeowners in Levittown) can benefit from racial exclusion. Situations like this, I said, implicate us all in the social dynamics of race in America.

As the class ended for that day, I was approached by Adrienne. She was an active participant in class and an apparently open-minded person. She appeared to me to be someone who tries to do the right things in her everyday life without necessarily striving to be a super-hero in the quest for racial justice. She told me that she grew up in a Levittown community. She went on to say that she had no idea about the history of Levittowns. She assumed that her grandparents bought a nice house some time ago in a nice community, a home that now belonged to her parents, and that she was able to experience the benefits of what was still a very nice house in a very nice community. At that moment, it was crystal clear to Adrienne how much race mattered in her life. Her situation became another discussion topic in class.

Keith brought the inner city closer to the students in the course. Alternatively, Adrienne brought closer the relevance of race and urban processes to those who thought that they were far removed from such circumstances. Both stories occurred in one course and within a few weeks of time. It is my hope that many more like them occur throughout my career in the classroom so that students continue to learn that they are never entirely placed out of the social implications of race and class in American society. It is clear to me that the very capacity to learn this lesson results from maintaining diversity in the classroom and in the curriculum.

I started out coming from a large university in Los Angeles, California, and was used to seeing numerous examples of diversity in my everyday life. Never having seen Michigan or any part of the Midwest, I had nightmares of moving to a place that was only one color or one identity. Fortunately, my fears of living in an oppressive, homogeneous community proved to be unfounded. Instead, I learned a great deal more about diversity here at the University of Michigan than I ever did in California.

My first day of GSI training was a lesson in diversity and how to recognize, respect and turn the differences between people into positive experiences for the entire class. Being in the sciences, one of the first issues mentioned was the possibility that our students might feel differently about scientific theories and religious beliefs. We also tackled themes of gender, power and racial sensitivity. It was an eye-opening event for me, since it was the first time that I had to think about these things in an intellectual way. Before, my feelings about diversity were simply one-sided. I never had bothered to question how people of other backgrounds felt about my treatment of them, thinking only of the way I wanted to be treated.

In the days leading up to that first, frightful day of teaching, I started to think about what types of students I might find when I walked into the room. I wondered if the students might have stereotypes or other misconceptions of their new female, Korean-American GSI. I asked myself if I would even try to address the inconsistencies between who I am and what they considered a "typical Asian." In the end, my decision to hold off and let them discover me as a person turned out to be for the best. I realize now that had I started out emphasizing differences, I probably would have strengthened their beliefs in artificial racial and sexual barriers.

When new classes begin and they see unfamiliar faces, I believe that most instructors make superficial judgments about their students. My thoughts were no different. We, as progressive academic instructors, can say that we do not see color, gender, or social status when we look at a person. However, speaking from the point of view of someone who longs for the day when I am treated like all other Americans, I realize that my past experiences and society's judgments have managed to affect my views of people when I meet them. The important question to me is whether I allow myself to change those judgments based on experience. I believe I do. My students have surprised me many times, both positively and negatively, by their performance and behavior. Furthermore, I never closed my eyes to evidence that contradicts these initial judgments I make in the first few weeks of class. My allowance for change

enables me to feel that my evaluation of their work and my eventual assignment of a grade at the end of the class are both fair and uninfluenced by my feelings at the beginning of the class. This is one of many personal observations that makes me proud of my teaching abilities.

My classroom atmosphere reflects my attitude. I encourage students to speak their minds and question me about what comes out of my mouth. At the same time, I expect the same from them. My students have taught me a great deal about what diversity means and how its presence can lead to better educational experiences. For instance, when there are discussions, I make it very clear that both sides should be presented and evaluated. Also, if a student wants to make a strong statement, they know that I will exercise my right to ask them why they feel that way and expect a good reason to be the response. Even in the midst of heated debates, my students manage to listen to another point of view regardless of whether they agree. The most wonderful feeling comes over me when I see that students are altering their worldviews as a result of a unique viewpoint brought up during a discussion. These are rewarding moments both for the student and me.

As important as education is, meeting new people and learning about their personalities has to be the best part of teaching. I try to foster a sense of friendship with my students in addition to the conventional instructor-student relationship. Hearing their stories and insights never bores me. Instead, it contributes to my appreciation for the amazing diversity of the human mind. I never can stop listening to them. Their thoughts are too important to me.

I never would give up teaching since these memories represent some of my fondest. What I learned from the variety of students I have taught is immeasurable. Their diversity as a group changed my identity in subtle ways and ultimately improved me as a person and as an instructor.

Writing Communities: Cultural Diversity in the Composition Classroom

by Kelly Ritter

Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, LS&A

An age-old debate concerning diversity asks, do we classify diversity as an amalgamation of differences, a “melting pot,” or as a way to spotlight differences? At the University of Michigan, this debate is certainly at the heart of daily instruction, as we see ourselves teaching in classrooms at once diverse and cohesive, depending upon our definition of these terms. In small classes, where students bond as members of a close-knit learning community, attention to the student — via his or her race, gender, or social identity — often leads to an emphasis on cultural differences in the course subject matter. This is certainly the case in the composition classroom, where beginning writers and scholars strive to put in writing the culture taking shape around them.

This term, I am teaching such a course, the Writing Practicum (ECB 102). My section is small — nine students — and is an intimate example of how cultural diversity enables students of unlike minds to teach one another to learn. In my classroom, these students learn by highlighting their differences, guided by the subject matter and readings, inspired by the knowledge they gain by seeing through a set of eyes distinctly different from their own. In Practicum, I see “diversity” as a spotlight trained to follow each student as he or she learns, not a shadow in which one must hide as one of a multitude of faces, all labeled “diverse.”

Practicum is designed to help the underprepared writer — both American and international — “mainstream” into the standard English composition course. As the profile of each student in Practicum is individually defined, so too is the cultural perspective each student brings to the course. My section consists of four women and five men, a gender-balanced class. However, the ethnic distribution is less balanced. The two white female students are both from Michigan, but one is a native speaker of English, and the other, a native speaker of German. Three of the five male students are from Michigan, but only one is a white male (the other two are Middle Eastern). The remaining students are a Chinese man, a Korean man, and two Japanese female exchange students. When the class sits down together to learn, therefore, there is little to no repetition of perspective.

Many instructors would see this as a learning disaster — how can students learn if they do not share an educational past? Certainly in the introductory writing classroom, much can be said for a discussion based on collective experience — whether defined by age, region, gender, or ethnicity. In my past teaching experience both at Michigan and elsewhere, I, too, benefited from this cohesive classroom, in which the stu-

dents learn by virtue of shared experiences. However, in Practicum, I have found that even more can come from a course in which no one student can say, "You know, it's just like 'X'." On the contrary, in my course, students begin by saying "Here, let me explain..." This rhetorical beginning shapes my course in a number of invaluable ways.

First, as a seminar on education, the diversity of perspectives broadens what high school means to the class. Instead of simply focusing on high school in Michigan, or even in the United States, we discuss high school from an international perspective. This speaks to our reading assignments, as writers such as Theodore Sizer and Nathan Glazer comment upon the vitality and efficiency of schools in Japan while condemning schools in the US. At these points in the reading, rather than nod and say, "Yes, Japan must be better, because these authors say so," we have been able to open a critical discussion on these claims, guided by the two Japanese exchange students, Hisae and Tamaki. As an instructor, I did not have to initiate this exchange; more than one student voiced a query, and the ensuing discussion not only told us that the authors may be biased, but also that we could construct a critical counter-argument based on what the students know about their own cultures.

Second, the diversity allows many students to grow individually, as evidenced in freewriting and conferences. One white male student in particular, Kevin, told me in conference that by not only hearing about education abroad from the Asian students, but also by hearing the patterns of written and oral communication in their class work, he has been inspired to think about how international students learn and how they feel as "minorities." Kevin says the course has helped him to understand what it means for him to be a minority in the classroom, rather than a representative of the cultural elite as a white, middle-class male. Had our class not been infused with these international students, Kevin may have never seen this "other side" of diversity.

Finally, this Practicum illustrates the fact that it is not just the students labeled "diverse" who bring something to the learning experience. The American-born students work as a self-directed team, teaching the international students about elements of English language and culture they themselves previously took for granted. For example, Kevin paired up with Jeewan, the Korean student, to work on grammatical errors. Marla, the Michigan native speaker, helped translate literary and social American references in the reading (such as "Separate But Equal" and "A Modest Proposal") for Mike, who was raised and educated in China.

In my Practicum class, no student is passive in the learning process. This is an active classroom, shaped by its distinct members. Rather than use the class to illustrate whether at the U of Michigan diversity is good or bad, present or absent, I hope my experience illustrates how the diverse classroom works and helps its members to grow and learn.

Law School Clinics and Diversity

by Paul D. Reingold

Clinical Professor in the Law School

The Law School's clinical law program is one of the few parts of the University that gets students involved with low-income people in the community. Clinical law students represent welfare recipients, low-wage workers, the disabled, children, prisoners, the mentally ill, indigent defendants in criminal cases, victims of discrimination, and nonprofit groups. In every case the students' clients are disadvantaged compared to the middle-class majority. Often the problem of difference — of race, gender, age, wealth, health, religion, sexual orientation, etc. — lies at the core of the legal claim or defense raised. But even when it does not, the students always must confront the problem of systemic difference — how laws and legal institutions treat people who are outside the majority.

Over the fifteen years that I have been teaching, the composition of the Law School has changed. The number of women and minorities has steadily increased. Gays and lesbians, religious students, students with disabilities, as well as women and minority groups, are more numerous, better organized and more vocal than they were in the past. More older students are returning to law school for a second career.

In the clinic seminar, the change is palpable. In the past we struggled to get students to notice issues of race or gender, let alone to talk about them. Although we always tried to pay attention to questions of difference, the typical reaction of middle-class white students was wide-eyed wonder. They had not been exposed to the margins of American life, and they often were shocked by it. Nowadays, with almost half of the class women, with a significant number of students of color, and with other minority perspectives better represented, the class is transformed. The students of color, women, gays, etc., don't have to imagine the "difference" of their clients; they can share their own experiences. The complexity of the real world is brought into the classroom, making real what used to be artificial and externalized. The students' own interactions now mirror their interactions with their clients (and their clients' experience of the world). These connections allow us to better train the students for the complex role they will play as future lawyers.

Along the way these students demolish our own prejudices. The straightest-looking man reveals that he is gay. Of the black students in the class, one is a medical doctor who has come back to school for a second graduate degree, and another speaks four languages fluently. An athletic young man wears a yarmulke. An unprepossessing student with a ponytail and a ring in his ear turns out to be the editor of the law review. A preppie-looking Ivy-leaguer talks about his youth, growing up poor in a single-parent home, and being discriminated against because he is of mixed race. A woman from Wyoming has worked with illegal immigrants, on a ranch.

In a newsletter I once reported that we recently had held a series of mock jury trials in which none of the visiting judges — who conduct and critique the trials — was a white male. My comment offended an alumnus, who wrote back chiding me for the statement, from which he inferred that the School discriminated against white males in selecting mock trial judges. I answered as follows:

The Law School has no policy of discriminating against white males. What it does have, like the rest of the culture, is a history of white male exclusivity. As the composition of the School's student body has changed (to become a lot less male and a little less white), the School has come under increasing criticism by its new members....

Issues of race and gender affect our students in ways that they did not when the Michigan Law School was largely white and male. In student hiring, in the [law firm] partnership track, and in the whole legal culture, our new students face obstacles that our graduates did not face in earlier years. Inevitably these issues arise in our clinical practice. A judge may make a remark that is sexist; a white client may object to a black student attorney; a male/female or black/white law student team may find that opposing counsel directs most of his (or her) remarks to the white/male.

The clinical programs try to make students address these issues directly as part of the planned curriculum of the course. At the same time, because most of our clinical teachers, all of our local adjuncts, and until recently, all of the county judges were white males, we make a special effort to bring in people who can serve as role models for the many women and minority students in the course. The presence of a female or minority judge also challenges the students' implicit assumption that the mock trial judge will be a white man.

Given the relatively low numbers of women and minorities who have at this point made it to the top of the profession, finding seven people who are willing to give us half a day for free, and who are adept not just as litigators or judges but also as teachers, is no easy task. When, for one term, the clinical teachers are able to bring in all women and minority judges for the seven mock trials, in my opinion, there is cause for celebration.

Students in the clinical law program work daily and closely with clients who could not be more different from past generations of law students. But as the composition of the Law School has changed, the way that the class regards the clients subtly has altered. The diversity within the School makes the diversity outside it seem more natural. The "we-they" distinction begins to blur when a classmate reports an incident of discrimination, or a disadvantage rooted in a characteristic, preference, or status. The students are changed for it, and over time the legal profession will change with them.

Diversity of Experience

by David S. Haiman

Graduate Student in the Schools of Social Work and Public Policy

In my mind, relationships are the key to learning, the key to understanding. It is through relationships with students that teachers effectively are able to communicate material. It is through relationships that one begins to challenge one's own perspective as the only way to view the world. It is through relationships that ideas are exchanged, examined, and accepted. It is only through relationships that diversity can be explored and experienced.

Growing up in a predominantly white, upper middle-class suburb and attending a small, private liberal arts college, my opportunities to develop relationships with people different from me had been somewhat limited. True, I had sought experiences and opportunities to expand my horizons, but on a daily basis the people I confided in and cared for were mostly like me.

This reality changed when I reached the University of Michigan. Coming from my background, the school initially seemed a multicultural mecca. The staff that I worked with in the residence hall, my fellow classmates at the schools of Public Policy and Social Work, and (later) students in the classes I taught, represented a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences.

I developed close relationships with some of these people; in the context of these friendships, I learned much and caught glimpses of the experiences of students of color at the University of Michigan. These glimpses have caused me to alter my initial, idyllic version of the university as a diverse, accepting environment. Beyond what I could glean from a book or hear in a lecture, I began to see the university through eyes other than my own. What's more, ideas that I "knew" in the abstract took on meaning. They began to affect the lives of people that I cared about. They became personal.

Possibly the most important lesson that I learned involves trust. I consider this one of the most important because trust is essential for the development of any kind of meaningful relationship. And once established, trust paves the way for other learning to take place. But trust is not easily developed. In many of my relationships at the University, specifically with African-American women, I assumed that a level of understanding and comfort had been developed long before it actually had. And it was not until I was accepted and trusted that I was able to realize my mistakes and critically look at other relationships to see where I was creating meaning where little existed. In my casual encounters, I often had mistaken friendliness and cordiality for trust. Being at little risk, I assumed that I could trust these acquaintances and that they felt the same. It was this naive outlook that allowed me to develop my initial view of the University as a haven for diversity.

Hearing Impairment, Teaching, and Power Relations between Teacher and Students

by Maren Linett

Graduate Student in the Department of English Language and Literature, LS&A

As my relationships developed and caused me to challenge this naivete, I learned that casual friendships have different meaning for different people. Just because I had conversations with people of color after class, they were not necessarily comfortable enough with me to ask for help and risk reinforcing stereotypes held about minority students. Our shared occupancy of a classroom did not mean that all students felt an equal amount of comfort in and ownership of that classroom. These lessons mandated that I re-evaluate my own role as a GSI, my own place in the classroom. They were lessons that could not be learned from casual relationships.

This is not to say that casual friendships are of trivial importance. They are essential building blocks without which I could not have developed some of the relationships that inspired this essay. But they do not mandate trust. They are, to use an economic metaphor, necessary, but not sufficient, conditions. Without further effort, time, and exposure, trusting relationships will not develop. Without these trusting relationships, learning is stunted, both within the classroom and without, as students continue to see the world through the same lenses they always have worn.

Consequently, an atmosphere that fosters relationships across differences should be one of the top priorities of the University of Michigan. And while representation is an important first step, simply having a diverse student body does not mean that students will develop relationships of trust that promote learning. Even worse, by attending a school that offers a certain amount of diversity in numbers, many students may continue with the same assumption that I started with — that simple co-existence is the same thing as acceptance and understanding. Instead, representation merely provides an opportunity for exploration, struggle, discomfort, challenge, and reward, an opportunity that too few students take and the University does not require.

My fervent wish is to understand how these opportunities can be galvanized so that I could spell out a formula by which this University could establish an atmosphere of diversity and trust. But I cannot do that; the process is too complex. All I can do is realize the importance of these relationships on my own learning and development: the importance of listening to stories, of accepting different ideas as truth, of understanding that my view does not extend beyond me. Numbers, without relationships, cast only an illusion of diversity.

I can do what is in my power to try and continue these relationships, in my classroom and my life. I can continue to challenge myself to learn from those around me. I can advocate for the inclusion of activities which develop relationships (such as inter-group dialogues and service learning) in the mandatory curriculum of this school. And I can talk and write about my own experiences and thoughts in the hopes that others will add their voices and explore ways that the University can capitalize on its resources to create a true, diverse learning environment.

I am a hard-of-hearing Graduate Student in the English department. English is a good field for one who can't hear well, since reading and writing, which Lennard Davis has dubbed "deafened moments," are the largest part of what we do. But there is an aspect of English study that is almost completely aural: teaching. Since our classes are rarely lectures, teaching can be difficult for one who wants to lead an animated discussion.

First of all, I need my students to raise their hands, which both slows down discussion and creates an atmosphere where it might seem that the teacher gives students permission to speak, rather than a community that has an open and democratic discussion. But if students begin speaking without raising their hands, it often takes me a moment to gauge where the sound is coming from, and who is speaking. Since I need to see the student's lips to understand every word, by the time I realize who is speaking, I have missed the first several words the student has said. So I cannot be the kind of teacher I would prefer to be; rather, I must be a teacher who conducts a fairly structured discussion. I try to compensate for that by being especially accepting of all student comments, to lessen the effect of control that I fear my hearing indirectly creates.

At the beginning of every course, I explain to my students that I am hard-of-hearing, and ask them to speak loudly and clearly and not to cover their mouths when they talk. But talking is not something we do consciously, and so it is hard for people, even with the best intentions, to monitor or change the way they talk. Mumlbers often remain mumlbers. Shy students cover their mouths. I understand this and do not mind asking them to repeat, explaining again how I need them to talk. But one problem has bothered me for a long time: when I ask students to repeat, they often hesitate, and then repeat even more softly than they had spoken at first! Sometimes this would become very frustrating for me. I'd think, "The students know about my hearing — if they forget in general, why won't they speak up at least when I ask them to?"

I finally realized that I had to take into account the power relations between teacher and students. In spite of their knowledge of the situation, the students were becoming intimidated when asked to repeat. It was as if they felt questioned, confronted. It felt to them as if I were objecting to their comments! I learned that the words I use to ask the students to repeat are crucial. I have to choose comments that emphasize the fact that I did not HEAR. For example, if a student says, "Antoinette worries that she'll mumble mumble," and I repeat part of the phrase as a way to show I was following but lost her

at the end [“Antoinette worries about what?”], the student might well feel that I disagree with what she has said.

But the society tells me, tells people who don’t hear well, tells people with any disability, NOT to emphasize it, to play it down, not to make others uncomfortable by calling attention to the disability. So it was only after a few years of teaching that I realized that in this case the students would actually respond better if I said, “I didn’t hear that, can you repeat it?” At first, this made me less comfortable, but I began to see that students generally feel themselves to be in a one-down power relation. Any questioning I do can feel threatening to the more timid students. Using a phrase that pointed specifically to my hearing was, surprisingly enough, making them feel MORE comfortable. And in the end, I was more comfortable too.

My experience teaching is part of what has made me realize the most important lesson I have ever learned about my disability: feeling comfortable and accepted and accepting myself will come only from NOT acting as though I can teach the same way another GSI can teach. It will come only when I am so comfortable with my disability that I can transfer that comfort to my students — not by disregarding the issue, but by confronting it.

A View from the Other Side

by Jens Zorn

Professor in the Department of Physics, LS&A

Dear Eric,

As I mentioned to you last month, I’m taking an art history seminar this term. It concentrates on the visual culture during the early years of the 20th century in ways that fit well with my interests. We are led by a young assistant professor, and the students include nine young women who are doing Ph.D.s in various humanities departments, a young man finishing a dissertation in architecture, and me, an older man. We meet each Monday evening from four until seven p.m., taking a twenty-minute break in the middle.

The assignments are demanding and are made with the assumption that students have a strong background in art history and cultural theory (as I do not), so in spite of doing quite a bit of ancillary reading, I am not always able to fully engage the topics that go around the table. But I’m learning quite a bit from listening to the best of the students as they synthesize ideas in creative ways during our discussions.

I speak up with a frequency that is about average but, feeling a bit outside the student mainstream, I don’t often give myself permission to express my ideas at any length. I find myself trying too hard not to waste other people’s time, and as a result, I often have the feeling that my utterances are brief, perhaps even cryptic, to the point of being telegraphic. This can escalate to a point where I feel awkward, so for self-assurance, I remind myself that in this company, I am the practicing artist (most of the others seem entirely focused on theory) and I also am anchored in age, being the only one in the room old enough actually to have experienced any of the times being discussed.

I do feel able to contribute to the intellectual work of the seminar, but I am discouraged to a surprising extent by my feelings of social isolation. Over the years I always have experienced seminars as leading to creative exchanges among the members, not only during formal discussions but also in social moments. But this seminar is not like that, even though it would seem to offer many opportunities.

Our meetings are in a small room adjacent to the work area of the Art History Library, so we often see one another for a few minutes before and after class. Moreover we have that long break as a regular feature. So it is discouraging that (excepting two instances with the architect) none of the students ever talk with me in anything but a brief and perfunctory way. I am never invited to join groups as they go to coffee or as they arrange to watch the assigned films. In contrast to the professor who is enthusiastically responsive, the graduate students remain polite but distant, giving uniformly pleasant

but obviously terminal responses to all my attempts at conversation.

I don't blame the students of our seminar for their initial diffidence. My age (67) and size (6'5", 225 lbs.) set me apart. The contrast is stronger from the mention, in passing, that I work in physics (nothing has yet been said about my being a tenured professor). In addition, one understands that young women are understandably cautious about the unexpected presence of older males. Nonetheless, I had hopes that these obstacles to communication might be overcome early in term, but this has not yet come to pass.

For as long as I remember, I have been able to engage almost anyone in conversation whenever circumstances made it seem natural. But now this ease of interaction, an essential element of my persona, is blocked by my physical characteristics and my life history. I am different, and the group reacts to me as a stranger.

Again, I don't blame the seminar students. They certainly recognize my presence, but they seem to have the typical

reaction to the different other in which the group members congratulate one another that the outsider probably wants to be left alone anyway. And I don't feel able to express my feelings about the situation with any candor. So they will remain completely unaware of my isolation and we will continue this polite dance until semester's end.

I am fortunate in having access to instant relief for any anxieties that the seminar might create — I quickly and easily retreat to the Physics Department and the University where, as a professor, group leader, and former associate dean, I am given every privilege and every possible support for my sense of self.

The University is thus continuing my education by giving me this taste, albeit a small taste, of being an outsider in the academic world. I am learning a bit of what it might mean to be a woman scientist in a physics department full of men, a bit of how it might feel to be the only black in an otherwise white classroom.

Dad

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