



BROWN

May 5, 2020

Dear President Paxson and Provost Locke:

As you know, the Diversity and Inclusion Oversight Board (DIOB) is composed of a mix of faculty, staff, and students, and is meant to represent the interests of the larger campus community in the successful implementation of the Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan.

Our charge takes on added meaning right now.

As the university retrofits the original DIAP for “Phase II,” we found ourselves wrestling with many familiar concerns, among them undergraduate admissions, faculty recruitment and retention, the need for diversity within all ranks of staff, and the uneven successes of both diversification and inclusion across all departments and units. We also found ourselves increasingly focused on what has been the singular existential question of this group since it was created in the spring of 2016: what is the nature of accountability?

We were mindful that this memo was being drafted in the midst of an unprecedented global public health emergency, and that beyond the human toll of this moment, there are financial consequences for this institution. Recognizing the many challenges of the moment, we would like to encourage Brown to consider diversity and inclusion as essential in the present and foundational for the future. Too often, we know, this work is considered extraneous to the core functions of the modern university. That is what has made your leadership at Brown - and the implementation of the DIAP - different. You have insisted that the opposite is true: not only do diversity and excellence go hand-in-glove, but they are, in fact, one in the same. While much has changed in the world and our future is uncertain, we know you will not lose sight of this truth. In a moment of crisis, people grasp for what is most dear to them. It has never been more important for the university to cling to the moral purpose of this “action plan.” We recognize that historically marginalized faculty, students, and staff usually find their viewpoints discounted in

moments where crisis demands a rapid response - even when that crisis disproportionately impacts those very same communities. We would not want that to happen here. We know, finally, that Brown will have difficult decisions in the months and years ahead as we work our way back from COVID-19. We stand with you, in strongest support of your commitment to build a newer, more diverse, and more inclusive Brown in this unprecedented time.

Before COVID-19, we were already at an inflection point. The annual report shows impressive diversification of faculty hiring last year - with 35% of those hired last year identifying as HUG - and the steady but incremental growth of the faculty overall - from 9.5% in 2016 to 11.1% in 2019. There was similar progress on the diversification of the graduate student and staff populations since 2016, including positive trends in the diversification of grades 13 and above. Diversification has proceeded much more slowly at the Medical School, with only minimal gains, while the percentage of HUG students in the undergraduate population remains at 21%, where it was when the DIAP launched. And so, beyond faculty and staff hiring, beyond the campus climate surveys and the major investments in centers and institutes focusing on race, much more work needs to be done.

Last year, among other things, our memo focused on data collection, visualization and undergraduate admissions. This year, to follow up on those areas of interest and others, we met monthly with Shontay Delaloe, the Vice President of the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity, to review and discuss drafts of the Annual Report. We met with Logan Powell, the Dean of Admission, with Eric Estes, the Vice President for Campus Life, with Amanda Bailey, Vice President for Human Resources, and with yourself, President Paxson. Several meetings - including those with Jack Elias, Dean of the School of Medicine, Rashid Zia, Dean of the College, and Larry Larson, Dean of the School of Engineering, were cancelled or postponed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Until February, we also met separately on a monthly basis to consider our own recommendations and to frame our own questions about the progress made on the DIAP. We continued our work on Zoom once the campus moved to implement social distancing policies, and drafted this memo from our shared notes and collaborated on its articulation.

Many of our meetings with the administration were clarifying. Meeting with Eric Estes, we were pleased to see that CAPS had been reimagined following the difficult fall of 2015. We appreciated his candor about the successes and challenges of the DIAP, and his nuanced understanding of how and why diversity and inclusion had materialized differently in certain units within Campus Life. And we were intrigued by the concept of a DIAP for each fraternity and sorority on campus, an idea that might compel meaningful change at the very face-to-face point of interactional diversity. We were also impressed with the work that President Paxson has done to further the concerns of diversification and inclusion within her office. We discussed her diversification of the Corporation, her ongoing education of the Corporation on DIAP related matters, her support for

the Presidential postdoctoral fellowship program, her sponsorship of the campus climate survey, her comprehensive focus on inclusivity within organizational culture, her conception of a leadership institute for mid and upper level administrators, her push for a staff salary equity analysis, in preparation for equity in promotion planned. We note that she has been meeting with groups of faculty she has identified as a personal priority, especially women in the physical sciences and engineering.¹ We look forward to an update on those meetings.

We continued to inquire about the mechanisms used by Admissions to foster a diverse undergraduate student population that represents the present and future of the nation and the world. We note that recent trends - declines in Native American and Asian Pacific Islander applications - are worrisome, and that most other HUG categories have shown little growth (even in the offers made this year for admission). In last year's memo, we encouraged you to think broadly about this issue, pointing to the comparatively minimal impact of the DIAP on the composition of the undergraduate student population. We were concerned about the lack of clarity around the gap between, or overlap of, historically underrepresented groups and socioeconomically marginalized populations. We were worried about what seemed, to us, to be the lack of a plan to increase the matriculation of admitted HUG students. We carried our concerns into this academic year, and in our meeting this fall with Dean Powell, we asked him to define his plan for the future. We asked four questions: How do we increase the pool of potential HUG students at Brown? Beyond growing the pool, how do we increase the yield of HUG students? Do we have tangible diversity goals for the undergraduate student population? Do we have the resources we need in place to achieve our goals?

Powell suggested, as a partial answer, that "diversification is tied to Early Decision, because it is binding." He further explained that because HUG students apply in disproportionately large numbers through Early Decision, and because students who apply to Brown through ED are admitted in significantly higher percentages than in the regular admissions process (roughly 20% versus 6%), and are then bound to come to Brown, to increase the diversity of the undergraduate cohort one might simply admit more students through ED. This seems like a promising idea, especially given the static percentages of HUG students admitted since 2016. We are hopeful that Dean Powell follows through on the expansion of Early Decision to allow for greater success in the diversification of incoming cohorts.

¹ In this meeting, we also asked President Paxson for a slight modification of our charge. Specifically, we asked President Paxson for the right to submit a confidential memo that goes beyond this public facing document. She agreed such a practice could be useful in those moments where discretion was required. Internally, we agreed that in any year where such a thing was submitted, we should note it in the public facing memo. And so, here, we acknowledge that we have submitted such a memo this year.

We encourage him to think broadly about the ramifications of this moment on our ambitions for diversification in the undergraduate student body. The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic will have consequences for years to come, and it is especially important to keep those in mind for undergraduate admissions in the next couple of years. Similar to Brown, high schools are deciding whether to make their students' classes pass/fail. As these students apply to Brown in the future, it is crucial to develop an equitable and just admissions policy on how to evaluate the grades (and application as a whole) of students from various backgrounds and who come from high schools with a low and high level of resources to support their students. This is a moment of opportunity to ensure that our admissions criteria are in line with the spirit of the DIAP. This will be critical in ensuring that Brown continues to serve as a leader with regards to diversity and inclusion in higher education.

As we said last year, Brown requires comprehensive data if the DIAP is to be successful. Efforts to visualize and sift through data should be centralized and the response time quickened. It might be helpful to mandate more regular, standardized, and detailed reporting to OIED so that the office can assemble and share the sorts of visualizations - waterfall plots for concentrations, heat blooms for diversity in concentrations, in department faculty, in graduate student populations. Without this information, the DIOB cannot provide useful or meaningful oversight and most importantly, foment campus conversations about progress and problem areas.

We end where we began: with an acknowledgement that much has been gained since the spring of 2016, and that much of that gain is a reflection of the hard work of the administration, of faculty, of staff, and of students. If these gains seemed precarious to us a few months ago, they seem doubly so now. American history, we know, doesn't repeat - it rhymes. There is a long record of heroic reformism, bursting onto the scene, led by the well-intentioned, and that leaves nothing beyond an evanescent trace on the stony structures of everyday life. Reconstruction gave way to rapprochement between North and South, and to Jim Crow. The gains of the Civil Rights movement were drained of impact by the war in Vietnam and the expansion of structural racism. Obama was followed by Trump. That is the rhyme we mentioned, the routine of reformism followed closely by a new nadir. We have a chance to stick with something right now - in a moment when everything seems upended - and if we do, it has the potential to completely redefine who we are as a university. That redefinition is not only morally just; it is also strategically and intellectually right. It requires courage.

We thank you for your dedication to this work, and applaud you for your willingness to undertake the foundational transformation of a predominantly white institution into something else - into some better reflection of our present and our future. The success of this plan depends on your attention to the little things and your commitment to pursue the larger, long-term goals no matter how challenging the headwinds might be. We are where we are because of many things that you

and members of your administration have done that typically go unseen by the campus community. We urge you, right now, to continue to cling to this work and its transformative possibilities with determined ferocity.

Signed,

Katie Duarte

Matthew Guterl (Co-Chair)

Richard Kimberly Heck

Mai Hunt

Carleia Lighty

Marc Peters

Radhika Rajan

Christopher Rose

Brenda Rubenstein

Meredith Scarlata

Ray Windsor

(in alphabetical order)