

Presentation examines faculty diversity

Dr. Abbie Robinson-Armstrong offers benefits of diverse opinions

Published: Monday, February 27, 2006

Updated: Sunday, July 20, 2008

Last week's forum was led by Dr. Robinson-Armstrong, assistant to the president for intercultural affairs.

Faculty diversity was the topic of last Thursday's speech led by Dr. Abbie Robinson-Armstrong, assistant to the president for intercultural affairs. More than 40 students, faculty and staff gathered in the Lion's Den Living Room to hear research on the benefits of a diverse faculty as a part of LMU's celebration of Black History Month. The Office of Black Student Services and the Committee on the Status of Women sponsored the event.

Robinson-Armstrong's presentation asked the question, "What impact does a diverse faculty have on colleges and universities, campus climate, faculty learning and development, curriculum and student learning outcomes?" Her conclusion was that a diverse faculty benefits each area in a variety of ways, and significantly impacts student learning outcomes.

Some of her findings were that a diverse faculty "increases students' cognitive and critical thinking skills...helps students learn how to evaluate differing points of view...plays a significant role in the retention and success of students...and teaches all students that women and people of color can succeed in academic environments."

Joshua Johnson, a senior Spanish and humanities major, said that what he remembered most from the speech was that "Dr. Abbie pointed out that every single person here has a Ph.D. in something from a reputable institution, so there is no such thing as race-based hiring or number counting, but it's more of a question of quality."

During the question and answer session following the presentation, Robinson-Armstrong rejected the notion that "there are just no minorities and women out there to hire."

"Statistics show that the growth rate for Ph.D.s in higher education in America for European Americans is flat -- it has been flat for the past five years. The growth rate is in the area of women and minorities," she said. "The faculty are there. However, the method of recruiting them is very different... We have to look at more proactive ways of recruiting."

Sophomore psychology major NyKe said, "The most beneficial thing that I got from her speech was the fact that faculty diversity benefits the majority more than the minority. Before she said it, I couldn't see how that was possible."

Robinson-Armstrong explained that, according to her research, many majority students come from environments that are less diverse, so they aren't exposed to perspectives that are different from their own. "When they come into these environments, they gain more from the interaction than minority students," she said. "Remember, minority students don't have the liberty of staying away from majority environments. We have to go into those environments in order to live and breathe and do what we have to do."

Robinson-Armstrong wrapped up her presentation by emphasizing the idea that faculty diversity is not about counting numbers.

She said, "Diversity is a much bigger thing than about numbers. It's about ideology; it's about values; it's about culture; it's about all kinds of things. The bottom line is that it's about student learning and development...And if you don't have a diverse faculty, then there are some perspectives in society that you are not getting."

[Click here](#) to read Dr. Robinson-Armstrong's review of research pertaining to faculty diversity at the university level.

Her report is entitled "A Diverse Faculty: What Impact Does it Have on Colleges and Universities, Campus Climate, Faculty Learning and Development, Curriculum and Student Learning Outcomes?"