

MEMORANDUM

To: UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health

From: Barbara K. Rimer, DrPH
Dean and Alumni Distinguished Professor

Subject: Volunteers needed for an important role in the School

Date: June 23, 2010

A critical element of academic excellence for a 21st century educational institution is the cultivation of a diverse and inclusive community. The scope of diversity is broad and includes, but is not limited to, personal experiences and perspectives of students, staff and faculty as they relate to race, gender, age, class, sexual identity, culture, nationality, economic status, disability, religion and region.

from the [UNC Diversity Plan Progress Report 2008-2009](#)

The University engages in teaching, research, and service to expand and discover knowledge, promote educational enlightenment, inculcate intellectual rigor, and improve understanding, with the ultimate end of uplifting humankind. Education takes place most productively among persons with differing social backgrounds, economic circumstances, personal characteristics, philosophical outlooks, life experiences, perspectives, beliefs, expectations, and aspirations, to mention some salient factors. The University works to assure that we have a complement of students, faculty, and staff that broadly reflects the ways in which people differ.

We speak of these differences as representing "diversity."

from the [Report of the Chancellor's Task Force on Diversity \(April 2005\)](#)

The purpose of this communication is to describe a vital new activity to increase diversity and inclusion at UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health and to seek volunteers. **Please consider volunteering as a member of the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force.** To do so, please e-mail your contact information to SPH-Diversity@unc.edu. If you have additional questions or concerns about Task Force membership, please send them to the same address.

Why enhance diversity and inclusion? Diversity and inclusion are essential components of academic excellence. They empower us to participate in a global community and model our institutional commitment to social justice, human dignity and peace. Becoming more diverse and inclusive is consistent with UNC-Chapel Hill's commitment and will enable us to be even better teachers, researchers, leaders, colleagues, practitioners and citizens as we promote health and overcome

health-related disparities in North Carolina and around the world. Chancellor Holden Thorp addressed the audience at the 16th Annual Summer Public Health Research Videoconference on Minority Health, saying that health disparities are one of the great problems facing our nation and world. Health disparities and diversity are related.

At UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, we are committed to promote, foster and support a culture of inclusion and engagement. Diversity and inclusion matter. To address diversity issues in a meaningful and significant manner, we as a School must also address issues of inclusion. Inclusion is an organizational climate issue. It is about a sense of belonging, affiliation, making a contribution to the greater purpose and knowing that one is truly wanted, because one matters rather than just being tolerated. We must consider diversity and inclusion together.

We have an impressive track record. The UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health has a well-deserved, strong track record in health disparities research. We have been leaders for a long time. Recent activities include the following.

- ◆ Our student-run annual [Minority Health Conference](#) is in its 32nd year (see the [webcast](#)), and we just completed the 16th Annual Summer Public Health [Videoconference on Minority Health](#) (see the [webcast](#)).
- ◆ Some of our alumni lead major offices for diversity and health disparities research.
- ◆ A town hall last spring, led by the School's Minority Student Caucus and Student Government, was an important opportunity to raise issues and concerns about diversity and inclusion at the School.
- ◆ We have formed a committee that includes some of our most illustrious alumni to focus on diversity recruitment and retention.
- ◆ In summer 2010, we launched the inaugural class of [Public Health Fellows](#), part of a new effort to enhance diversity in public health and at our School.
- ◆ We have a multi-million-dollar grants portfolio in health disparities research.
- ◆ Some of our departments have done groundbreaking work to enhance diversity and inclusion.

We can do better! We have taken many other actions over the last several years to address diversity and inclusion among our faculty, staff and students. As we look ahead, we must do even more to mirror the social diversity characteristics of our increasingly interdependent world. While some schools would be satisfied with the level of diversity we have achieved, we want to be even more diverse and inclusive. As one of our recent alumni observed, "The School is exceptional. We should be exceptional in diversity."

(See the current [UNC Diversity Report](#) for data on our School and summary of recent activities.)

Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. To do even better, we are forming a Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, under the leadership of Robert Millikan, PhD, Barbara Sorenson Hulka Distinguished Professor in the Department of Epidemiology. A member of the UNC public health faculty for 17 years, Dr. Millikan works closely with community advocates to conduct research on racial disparities in cancer, including the [Carolina Breast Cancer Study](#).

The Task Force will examine where we are with regard to diversity and inclusion. It will look at the School as a whole as well as its components. It will identify and assess barriers and facilitators to change and recommend methods and actions that will take us to a new level of diversity among faculty, students and staff. In the process, we must acknowledge challenges and biases that are roadblocks to diversity and inclusion. We believe this is one of the most important challenges we will face in the next few years. We are fully committed to the effort.

Outcomes. This effort is a fundamental part of a larger planning process we are undertaking. It will be a roadmap and statement of commitment to enhanced diversity at the School. The strategy document from this initiative will contribute to the School's diversity plan, to be submitted in early 2011 to the UNC Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs. Recommendations from the Task Force will guide our efforts and investments over the next five years. Metrics suggested by the Task Force will be used to evaluate our progress.

Special Consultant to the Task Force. [G. Rumay Alexander, EdD, RN](#), clinical professor in the UNC School of Nursing, will assist the group as a special consultant. She has served as the School of Nursing's director of multicultural affairs. Dr. Alexander's nursing career spans more than 20 years in public policy, advocacy, teaching and health careers development, with an emphasis on cultural diversity and inclusion. She frequently speaks to groups across the country on the issues of the healthcare workforce, diversity, inclusion and strategic planning. She recently received the American Organization of Nurse Executives' 2010 Prism Award for her work. She served on that organization's diversity committee and was instrumental in crafting their initial diversity policy statement. Over the seven years in that position, Dr. Alexander's efforts have contributed to aligning the school's demographics with those of the state—moving from 10 percent to 28 percent for ethnic minority representation.

We Need Volunteers! We seek representatives of faculty, staff, students, alumni and members of our advisory boards to serve as members of the Task Force. Task Force members should represent the full spectrum of diversity reflected in the UNC-Chapel Hill statement about diversity as well as a broad spectrum of roles, ranks, experiences, opinions and perspectives. Volunteer commitment to the Task Force will last between six to seven months, beginning late July or early August 2010. The group likely will meet at the beginning, mid-point and conclusion of this process. The first meeting will inform questions and issues that should be addressed. The second will review preliminary findings, and the last meeting will review and guide the final strategy document. We also will ask you to review various documents along the way and occasionally react to materials and suggestions.

We will select members from among those who volunteer. In selecting members, we will balance characteristics noted in the previous paragraph.

This is your opportunity to leave a lasting, positive imprint on the School. Your participation *will* make a difference.

Workgroup Team. We will select a smaller Workgroup Team from the full Task Force membership to examine deliberations of the Task force, conduct necessary research and articulate the strategy document. Limiting Workgroup Team's size will

enhance group dynamics and a faster response. Nevertheless, the Workgroup Team will have the option to draw on individuals from the larger group as resources.

Please Volunteer! We seek your enthusiastic support and willingness to participate in a new School Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. The plan will enrich the quality of research, teaching, practice and life of our School by expanding ideas, approaches and perspectives. Ultimately, it must lead to enhanced diversity and inclusion.

Thank you for considering investment of your time, commitment and participation in this important initiative. Again, to volunteer or to raise additional questions or concerns, please contact SPH-Diversity@unc.edu.

We look forward to working with you all to address diversity in a transparent, honest way that will shape the School for years to come.

BKR/smb