

# VIRGINIA TECH CONDUCTOR

A GUIDE FOR OUR JOURNEY TOWARD EXCELLENCE, EQUITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

## It's been said...

*I describe Tech as 'friendly'. I do so because it has always seemed that way to me...*

Paul E. Torgersen, university president  
Campus Climate Survey cover letter

*The [Black Culture and Multicultural] Centers were developed because students said... 'We need comfort zones' ... A new Black student can spend a day in orientation and a night in a residential hall, and not talk to another Black student.*

Barbara Pendergrass, dean of students  
Multicultural Programs planning meeting

*There is no single climate; there is the climate as it is experienced by various groups.*

Pat Hyer, associate provost for  
academic administration  
Roanoke Times, June 4, 1999

*Some critics said [Occidental] College's academic standards would be jeopardized if diversity increased. The median total SAT score of incoming freshmen has decreased from 1260 in 1988 to 1170 in 1998. But people who praise the changes say the caliber of Occidental's students has improved ... After 30 years without a Rhodes Scholar, the college has won three during [John] Slaughter's tenure. Occidental students also have won 15 (NSF) fellowships, among other awards.*

Julianne Basinger, "John Slaughter Retires From Occidental Having Achieved Ambitious Diversity Goals," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 2, 1999, A33

*Following Dartmouth College's controversial announcement in February that it would make fraternities and sororities coeducational, the institution experienced a surge in applications from minorities. This fall's freshman class will be Dartmouth's most diverse ever, with the number of Black students increasing by 21 percent over last year, the number of Hispanic students increasing by 78 percent, and the number of American Indian students increasing by 61 percent. Dartmouth officials also say the entering class is the most academically talented ever.*

Karl Furstenberg, Dartmouth's dean of admissions and financial aid, told *The Boston Globe* (June 1, 1999) that he believes the "prospect of change" made Dartmouth more appealing to minorities. Council for Advancement and Support of Education, Flash Points, Vol 4, No. 11.

## Good news, good news: Riches on campus

*By Multicultural Fellows Danny Axson, associate professor of psychology, and Josiah Tlou, associate professor of education*

Virginia Tech as it exists today would be scarcely recognizable to those present at its inception in 1872. It has evolved into a large, comprehensive, research-oriented university, where participation in the Corps is no longer required and where students — including women and people of color — come from every state and many countries.

These changes were not always easy or, frankly, welcomed. But they were necessary if Tech were to serve the larger and more diverse society. The net result is a university better able to prepare students to be contributing members of their communities, able to fulfill the longstanding goal reflected in the university's motto: *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve).

As a regular feature of the *Conductor*, we hope to spotlight some of the ways the university is succeeding in making the campus a more welcoming community for all who live and work here. Here are some recent signs:

- \* The Office of Multicultural Affairs was established and now, under the leadership of Ben Dixon, is helping to focus the university's efforts at inclusion.
- \* The Black Cultural Center, Cranwell International Center, Multicultural Center, and Women's Center all provide programs and support services that enrich campus life.
- \* Academic programs in Appalachian Studies, Black Studies, International Studies, Judaic Studies, and Women's Studies allow students and faculty members to address topics and points of view that have been historically underrepresented.
- \* From the Celebration of Diversity in September to Gay Pride

Month and International Week in April, the academic year is filled with events that enhance our appreciation of diversity.

- \* A webpage ([www.diversity.vt.edu](http://www.diversity.vt.edu)) presents diversity-related activities and organizations and offers an on-line forum.
- \* The annual Diversity Summit allows us to exchange ideas about difficult issues relating to diversity.
- \* Nikki Giovanni was named University Distinguished Professor. The internationally renowned poet became the first woman of color to receive this recognition.
- \* College initiatives range from cultural diversity committees to peer advising programs (see [www.diversity.vt.edu](http://www.diversity.vt.edu)).
- \* The president sponsors the Conferences on Campus Climate.
- \* We court talented minority scholars from around the country with the All-But-Dissertation Fellows Program.
- \* Our partnership with 11 Historically Black Colleges and Universities allows an exchange of expertise and opportunities.
- \* First-year retention rate for Black students improved to the point that, for freshmen entering in 1995, it equaled that of white students. Women have higher retention and graduation rates than men. (Source: *Provost's Report on Women and Minorities*)

Of course, there is room for improvement. The same *Provost's Report* indicated that Black undergraduate enrollment decreased to only 4.4 percent. Tech ranked 24th in percentage of minority faculty and 23rd in percentage of women faculty among our 25 benchmark institutions.

To adapt to a changing world, Virginia Tech must continue to evolve, as it has throughout its history. Stay tuned as we report our efforts to make Virginia Tech a welcoming community.

## OMA Completes First Year

*By Benjamin Dixon, vice president for multicultural affairs*

"It's not easy being green," said Kermit the frog. And, it's not easy starting up a new office within a complex organization, especially when the role and function of that office is intended to evolve, rather than be invented over night.

Evolving as the needs require is one way to describe the first year of the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA). One of our first customers admitted he was as curious about what the OMA did, as he was about having someone respond to his complaint about a faculty member. So, the office has served as a clearing house and referral agent.

Another way to view 1998-99 for the OMA is to call it the year of conversation and sizing up. Over 180 (and still climbing) faculty and staff members were interviewed one-on-one about their perceptions of campus climate and the status of women, people of color, and other underrepresented groups. These "getting to know you" sessions are proving to be invaluable sources of information. For example, we've been able to share information gathered in one corner of the campus with individuals who, unknowingly, were working on the same diversity issue in another part of the university.

The assessment of diversity and multicultural activities at Virginia Tech is an enormous task; so much so, we've already decided it will have to be a continuous, rather than a time limited process. This and other information are being used to fulfill two aspects of the charge given the office by President Torgersen -- advising and planning. Our ability to advise the president and senior administrators on diversity matters is greatly enhanced by accurate and up-to-date information. In addition, information pertaining to the status and perceptions of underrepresented groups within the campus community will be used to guide much of the direction and goals-setting for the diversity strategic plan.

By sponsoring several diversity forums and other meetings, both on and off the campus, we believe Tech can position itself to be seen as a university openly engaged in a public dialogue about diversity. The conversation needs to be both broad and specific. This effort will continue for the coming year, with a focus on how the university can be more successful in recognizing, valuing and effectively managing differences.

No, it's not easy being green. But, Kermit might be pleased to know that Virginia Tech is moving toward being a more welcoming and nurturing community for all who seek to learn -- even frogs. (Besides, we have a great duck pond and extra Lily pads right on campus.)

(For a full report of the Office of Multicultural Affairs' first year, call 231-1820 or e-mail [muticultural@vt.edu](mailto:muticultural@vt.edu).)

## About 'The Conductor'

The *Virginia Tech Conductor* is a guide to the resources at the university that can help you

- learn more about diversity,
- share in multicultural experiences, and
- benefit professionally and personally.

Regular features in this twice per semester publication will include quotes and facts, lists of resources and events, good news, dialog on a current issues, and explorations of the assumptions we make about one another.

To learn more and participate in discussions, visit the Office of Multicultural Affairs Web site: [www.multicultural.vt.edu](http://www.multicultural.vt.edu). You are invited to participate electronically. You are also definitely welcome to jump aboard this publication. Call 1-1820.

## Resources

Prepared by Alicia P. Cohen, assistant to the vice president for multicultural affairs

### Web Sites

Virginia Tech diversity programs  
[www.diversity.vt.edu](http://www.diversity.vt.edu)

American Council on Education (ACE)  
[www.acenet.edu/](http://www.acenet.edu/)

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)  
[www.aclu.org/](http://www.aclu.org/)

American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU)  
[www.aacu-edu.org/](http://www.aacu-edu.org/)

Creative Diversity Communications:  
<http://php.indiana.edu/~ycooperb/>

S.K. Morgan and Associates Diversity Awareness Workshops  
[www.skmainc.com/](http://www.skmainc.com/)

Diversity Database  
[www.inform.umd.edu/Diversity](http://www.inform.umd.edu/Diversity)

Diversity Web  
[www.inform.umd.edu/Diversityweb](http://www.inform.umd.edu/Diversityweb)

Multicultural Pavilion  
<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/multicultural/>

One America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The President's Initiative on Race  
[www.whitehouse.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica/america.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica/america.html)

American Institute of Diversity Management (AIMD)  
[www.aimd.org](http://www.aimd.org)

### Books

Adams, Maurianne; Bell, Lee Anne; Griffin, Pat (eds.). (1997). *Teaching for diversity and social justice: A sourcebook*. New York: Routledge. (extensive reference list and video resource list)

Ayers, William; Hunt, Jean Ann; Quinn, Therese (eds.). (1998). *Teaching for social justice*. New York: The New Press.

Coontz, Stephanie; Parson, Maya; Raley, Gabrielle (eds.). (1999). *American families: A multicultural reader*. New York: Routledge.

Derman-Sparks, Louise and Phillips, Carol Brunson. (1997). *Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism*. Columbia University: Teachers College Press.

Fu, Victoria and Stremmel, Andrew (eds.). (1999). *Affirming diversity through democratic conversations*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.

## Perspective

# Does diversity threaten quality?

*Some people express—and some people believe but do not express – a concern that recruitment of students, faculty members, and staff to deliberately increase the racial, ethnic, cultural and gender mix will reduce the quality of the student body, faculty and staff performance, as well as the quality of the curriculum and program offerings. Let's look at this concern.* — Benjamin Dixon, vice president for multicultural affairs

### Access to Quality Public Higher Education

Access to public higher education for underrepresented groups, given the rapidly changing racial/ethnic demographics, is hardly a topic requiring rigorous debate, especially when viewed in the context of a 20-30 year forecast of our population make-up. Model public education institutions have been developing mission statements that celebrate diversity as one component of the quality needed to be viable and effective organizations in the 21st century. Even at Virginia Tech, where the Black student participation rate is 15 points lower than their statewide population percentage, there is recognition that diversity, broadly defined, is a critical characteristic of a quality institution. In 1995, a university-wide consensus was developed around five Core Values: common bond, diversity, education of the whole person, excellence, and service.

Almost every public university or college is experiencing increasing scrutiny by a skeptical public with respect to the economic and qualitative value received for its investment of public funds. More and more of the increasingly diverse public will demand not only access to higher education, but access to institutions that demonstrate a capacity to meet the needs of different racial/ethnic groups, women, people with disabilities, and others. When viewed in this context, quality or effectiveness takes on a new meaning.

There is growing research evidence that universities with the most effective diversity programs, recruitment and reten-

tion practices, and strategies for managing differences are performing at least as well as, if not better, than institutions without such strategies. Traditional measures for evaluating institutional effectiveness include data on a variety of student and faculty (teaching) performance indicators, many of which can be positively or negatively influenced by a number of environmental conditions.

For example, the literature reveals that increasing the racial/ethnic diversity on campus, but failing to pay attention to climate issues, is a disservice to both the underrepresented groups and the majority. Studies indicate that students exposed to a diverse learning environment show improved intercultural competencies and increased ability to engage in complex thinking about problems — that is, they consider and use multiple perspectives to solve problems. Finally, positive campus climates minimize racial and other conflicts and, in turn, enhance the learning and teaching environment.

So, rather than threatening quality, the use of diversity principles, programs, and practices may well be an important distinguishing factor between premier public higher education institutions of the future and the “also rans.” The question for universities such as Virginia Tech is whether “also ran” is good enough for long-term survival as an institution of quality learning, research, and service.

### The University/Business Connection

*“Companies that pursue diversity outperformed the S&P 500 over the past three and five years.” - Fortune Magazine 7/99*

“How can that be? If true, why aren't all companies embracing diversity principles as a good business practice?”

First, it is true; and, more and more corporations are recognizing and responding to this reality. To them, diversity does not diminish quality, but enhances it. Second, some businesses, like many other institutions, including universities, approach diversity and multicultural issues with a “this too shall pass” attitude. This stance, along with institutional inertia, unsophisticated marketing practices, and general management shortsightedness, are some of the causes for institutional blindness to the changing labor-force and marketplace.

However, more progressive and, apparently, successful companies see cultural diversity, globalization, and equal opportunity not only as the “right things to do,” but the right business things to do. Carnevale and Stone, in *The American Mosaic*, report, “In a world where diversity is inevitable, institutions that respond effectively will enjoy a measure of competitive advantage, and those that do not will suffer inevitable costs.”

Currently, many companies are bundling or integrating diversity principles and concepts with some of the more effective management strategies, such as quality assessment and planning for continuous improvement, high performance teams, reengineering, and customer service. The reason is simple. Despite the increasing availability of sophisticated technology and automated systems, human beings who are both technically capable and competent in interpersonal relations and human resource management are seen as critical to an effective, efficient, result-oriented operation.

Since universities are the primary source for their future leaders and managers, it is understandable that corporations will seek out campuses where they have a good chance of recruiting a diverse and multiculturally competent group of entry-level employees. Corporate research shows that the benefits of diversity fall into three important categories: workforce quality, market sensitivity, and organizational agility. Therefore, universities need to gear up to supply graduates who can respond effectively, and relatively early in their employment, to the values and skills implied by these categories.

Ironically, organizations such as universities are facing the same inevitable changes in the workforce and the “market place” as are seen so clearly by alert corporations. Diversity management and multicultural education can be the common ground upon which both types of organizations can stand, join hands, and work successfully together to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

## The Virginia Tech Conductor

**Publisher** Office of Multicultural Affairs

**Staff** Multicultural Fellows  
and anyone who is interested

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Blacksburg, VA 24061-0176  
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# What might Virginia Tech do to make the campus a more welcoming community for all?



Creating a more welcoming community environment for everyone will, first, require the individuals of the university society to make some difficult choices. We may be required to discard our race/culture/gender stereotypes and prejudices in order to discover *people*. We might have to take responsibility for our societal ills and strive to correct them — rather than to blithely declare that “all is well here, and our work is done.” We might choose to work at dismantling “by any means necessary” the all-too-real barriers that have benefited the ensconced majority, while denigrating the ideals and the peoples of our communities and our nation. When we are willing to make these difficult choices, we will be able to honestly welcome everyone to Virginia Tech.

*Donald E. Conner Jr.*  
University Chemical Hygiene Officer  
Environmental Health and Safety  
Services



Making Virginia Tech a more welcoming community for all involves letting down our guard. All who are connected to this university — students, staff, faculty, and administrators — may want to consider celebrating diversity instead of fearing what is unfamiliar to them. Without diversity, we limit ourselves and our experiences.

*Sandra Griffith*, Assistant Director  
Office of Minority Engineering Programs



When considering what can be done to make ours a more welcoming community, I tend to remember the university’s motto — *UT PROSIM* — that I might serve.

Striving to serve the needs of others in our everyday duties is one of the best ways that we extend hospitality on our campus.

*John Beach*  
Director of Building Services  
Physical Plant Department



First impressions are always very important. In order to make this campus a more welcoming environment, all of us within the university community must strive to guarantee, when we are the first contact an individual makes with Tech, that our response is helpful, respectful and courteous — a great start!

*Kay Castagnoli*  
Senior Research Associate  
Harvey W. Peters Center

*(Prepared by Charlotte M. Waggoner, safety engineer and Multicultural Fellow)*



Stop creating boundaries by placing labels. Don’t let impressions be made or decisions swayed by whether someone is or is not a minority. We should not be in the business of meeting minimums and quotas, but rather we should recruit the most promising students and hire the most qualified candidates.

*Denise Dodd*  
Program Support Technician  
Department of Entomology



Virginia Tech is all of us: students, administrators, faculty, and staff. Increasing our diversity through continued recruitment efforts would show that we value differences in people and realize they are a source of enrichment. Through campus wide employee training initiatives and individual desire, communication and comfort level can be improved.

*Brenda Hendricks*  
Training Coordinator  
University Libraries and Instructional  
Services

## Didjknow?

*Prepared by Alicia P. Cohen, assistant to the vice president of multicultural affairs*

Virginia Tech has about 150,000 alumni from every state and 100 countries.

Virginia Tech offers more career options than any other Virginia university.

Companies that pursue diversity outperform the S&P 500 (July 19, 1999 *Fortune Magazine*).

Campus diversity initiatives have positive effects on both minority and majority students.

Diversity improves a company’s talent pool because the outreach required to find diverse job candidates improves the hiring process.

From 1993-1996 the percentage of Latinos awarded BA degrees grew from 6.6 percent to 12 percent for men  
6.1 percent to 13.4 percent for women

For African Americans the increase was from  
6 percent to 15.6 percent for men  
8.4 percent to 19.8 percent for women

## College athletes victims of hazing

Nearly 80 percent of U.S. college athletes are subjected to hazing, according to a study released by Alfred University in upstate New York.

More than 10,000 athletes, 3,000 coaches, and 1,000 athletic officials participated in the study, which is believed to be the first national look at hazing and college athletics, reports the *Orlando Sentinel*.

The study defined hazing as “an action that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers, regardless of a person’s willingness to participate.”

The results show that both male and female athletes are routinely hazed, such as by being expected to consume alcohol, participate in criminal activity, or humiliate a first-year teammate. Men are more at risk of hazing than women, the study found, especially if they compete in swimming, diving, lacrosse, football, or hockey.

The report recommends that institutions implement written policies on hazing, educate coaches and administrators about hazing, and demand immediate responses from coaches and officials who witness incidents of hazing.

Source: *Orlando Sentinel*, 8/31/99 (www.orlandosentinel.com) via the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, *Flash Points* (Vol. 4, No. 16)

**Something to add? Join the discussion online.  
A different issue on your mind? Raise it online.  
[www.multicultural.vt.edu](http://www.multicultural.vt.edu)**

## Calendar

Compiled by David R. Winston,  
extension dairy scientist and  
Multicultural Fellow  
dwinston@vt.edu

### Upcoming Cultural Celebrations

#### National Hispanic Heritage Month - September 15 to October 15

Hispanic Heritage Month at Virginia Tech recognizes the contributions of Hispanic people and promotes cultural awareness in the university community. A number of events have already taken place, but entertainment, dancing, food, discussion events and a fiesta are scheduled for October. See the Sept. 17 *Spectrum* or contact the Dean of Students Office, 1-3787 or TDD 1-8718 for information.

#### Native American Heritage Month — November

Last year there were concerts, film series, guest speakers and discussions.

Contact for more information or to participate: Shane Johnson and Donna Abel: [shjohns2@vt.edu](mailto:shjohns2@vt.edu) and [abel@vt.edu](mailto:abel@vt.edu).

Abel is also YMCA Native American Program leader. Established in 1993, this student-run organization celebrates Native American cultures by organizing guest speakers, off-campus trips to Indian events, such as powwows, Alternative Spring Break (living/working in an Indian community for one week), films, and discussions of contemporary Indian issues. Call Donna "White Otter Woman" Abel // "Apeew Cuttack Askween" at 231-3967.

#### Asian American Awareness Week — November

Past years have featured fashions, dance, food, and plays. Member organizations include the Chinese American Society, Filipino American Student Association, Korean Student Association, Society of Indian Americans, and Vietnamese Student Association

Contact: K.O. Philpott, Asian American Student Association advisor, [philpott@vt.edu](mailto:philpott@vt.edu)

#### Celebration: Holidays Around the World — November 11

Contact: K.O. Philpott, interim assistant dean of students, [philpott@vt.edu](mailto:philpott@vt.edu)

#### Schedules online:

Many organizations that are linked from the Diversity site -- [www.diversity.vt.edu/](http://www.diversity.vt.edu/) -- post events, although some pages are not up-to-date.

Reminder: make sure your pages are current and send events to the [webmaster@vt.edu](mailto:webmaster@vt.edu) for the Tech homepage.

## Unpack your assumptions

# Separate, unequal education continues

Prepared by Richard Shingles, professor of political science  
Are whites falling behind American minorities? Most whites incorrectly think so.

A 1995 survey conducted by the *Washington Post* found that a majority of whites have "fundamental misconceptions" about their life chances relative to Black Americans. For example, 56 percent of white respondents agreed with the statement that "the average African-American is as well or better off than the average white person in terms of education."

Many Americans rightfully believe that since the Supreme Court declared that state-imposed segregated schools are "inherently unequal" and unconstitutional (in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*), blacks and other minorities should have access to the same education as whites. However, this is not the case. Largely because of continuing residential segregation, government efforts to enforce *Brown* have been ineffective in the North and only partially successful in the South.

Moreover, during the 1990s, the Supreme Court has reversed itself (in *Dowell, Pitts, and Jenkins*), permitting a lawful return to separate and unequal public education by releasing school districts from their obligation to maintain integrated schools.

Segregated, inferior education remains the norm for Black and Latino children. The proportion of Black children attending intensely segregated schools (with 90 percent to 100 percent

Black enrollment) decreased for a time during the 1970s, largely as a result of government efforts to enforce *Brown*. However, research conducted by the Harvard Project on School Desegregation indicates that the segregation of Black students began to increase again in the 1980s. Since there has never been an equivalent effort to desegregate Latino schools, the isolation of Latino children continued unabated. Nationally, two-thirds of Black students and three-quarters of Latino students are enrolled in

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**Nationally, two-thirds of Black students and three-quarters of Latino students are enrolled in schools that are predominantly minority.**

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schools that are predominantly minority. One third of both Black and Latino students attend schools that are 90 percent or more minority.

Separate and unequal education based on race continues to be the norm in America, leading to highly disparate life chances for white and minority children. To a large degree, the persistence of this problem reflects the continuing residential segregation of Americans, local funding of public education, and a huge gap in the income and tax base of white and minorities communities. Segregated inner city schools cannot afford the same quality of education provided by predominantly white suburban school systems.

As long as racial minorities are confined by class and race to impoverished, inner city neighborhoods, they will receive education that is substantially inferior to that provided to white youth.

## What would you do?

# Theme housing for minority students?

Prepared by Richard Connors, associate professor of electrical and computer engineering and Multicultural Fellow  
My hope in writing this column is that it will foster some campus wide dialog about issues of diversity in higher education. Hopefully, the problems posed will trigger responses that will represent a broad spectrum of views. To respond, go to the diversity forum web page, ([www.diversity.vt.edu/forum.html](http://www.diversity.vt.edu/forum.html)), and click on "Join the discussion now." Then click on the title of this column. I will provide excerpts from the online submissions in the next issue of *The Conductor*. Finding good topics is critical to this column's success. If you have suggestions please send them to [multicultural@vt.edu](mailto:multicultural@vt.edu).

For the inaugural issue of this column, we will consider a relatively non-controversial problem. In later issues we will consider some more interesting topics.

Suppose you are the director of residential programs. Some African American students approach you about what they consider to be a problem for them. The problem revolves around the fact that there are very few minority students on the Virginia Tech campus. Because of this, they point out, it is not uncommon for each of them to be the only African American student on a residential hall floor. They would like the university to provide a way for interested African American students to all be on the same floor of a residential hall. They argue that they need to have a place where they can easily interact with others who share their

identity. They say that this would free them from the pressures of always having to interact with people as a member of a minority group.

The first decision that needs to be made is whether this request is reasonable, or whether it is actually a step towards the re-segregation of America. If one agrees that it is a reasonable request, the next question involves how such an arrangement can be made.

The most straightforward approach — perhaps the only approach for implementing such an arrangement — would be

to create a theme housing option in a university residence hall. The university already has a number of theme housing options for students. These include the W.E.L.L., or Wellness Environment for Living and Learning, which promotes a substance free community, and the WORLD, which

allows both domestic and international students to live in a cross-cultural setting.

However, by federal statute, any theme housing option must be open to anyone regardless of their race, color, creed, or national origin.

Given these circumstances, what would your response be to these students? Is this whole idea a step backward, to the re-segregation of America? Should they get some type of theme housing? If so, what type of theme do you think would be the most appropriate?

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**Special interest groups have special housing.  
Should a minority group have the same privilege?  
Would 'theme housing' for minority students be a  
legitimate comfort zone? Or is segregation by any  
other name still segregation?**

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