

Virginia Tech Conductor

A GUIDE FOR OUR JOURNEY TOWARD EXCELLENCE, EQUITY AND EFFECTIVENESS

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Each of us is a minority of one

by Daniel Schneck, professor emeritus, engineering science and mechanics



Have you heard the latest? Scientists have read the 3.3 billionth chemical "letter" (base pair) in human DNA. We now know the *alphabet* — the letters, in sequence, of the "language" that defines the entire human genome (the human genome actually contains twice that many letters — a duplicate set, 6.6×10^9 base pairs —

because each human cell is *diploid*, containing two sets of chromosomes). Although we are still a long way off from using this alphabet to construct words, phrases, sentences (syntax), and full paragraphs (i.e., we are not even close to developing a *dictionary* for the human genome), the first major step in that direction has now been completed.

So ... recently, I got to thinking about the astronomical numbers involved here, and decided to do a little brain storming with one of my classes.

I asked the students the following question: "What do you think the total population of the earth is today?" They seemed to agree that around six billion was a pretty good estimate. Then I asked them, "OK, how many people do you think have inhabited the earth, cumulatively to date, since the first Genus Homo (which was to become the human race as we know it today) was identified some two million years ago?"

... Following some further deliberation, we came up with the following estimate: taking a "generation" to be the period of time spanning about 20 years, and assuming the human body is about 2 million years old in its current homo sapiens form, some 100,000 generations have preceded ours. Moreover, since some two-thirds of all of the people who have ever reached the age of 65 are *still alive* today, let's be generous in assuming that every generation that has preceded ours had

See 'Minority of one' on page 4

2002 Diversity Summit

Participants grade campus climate

by Barbara Pendergrass, Dean of Students

The Fifth Annual Diversity Summit was held Monday afternoon, January 21, in Squires Commonwealth Ballroom.

As a way for the 170+ participants to meet and learn about each other without exchanging words, Ann Kilkelly, faculty member in the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, led a sociometric exercise. She posed a number of dichotomous questions pertaining to group members' experiences, background, and identity with diversity. All participants were asked to respond to the questions by moving to the side of the room that represented their response. Demographic characteristics amplified through this exercise were gender, university status, and racial and ethnic identities. Through a series of questions on discrimination, participants learned the unique and common experiences of each other. These questions revealed that virtually all of the participants had experienced at least one form of discrimination.

As in previous years, Benjamin Dixon, vice president for multicultural affairs, provided a progress report on steps taken over the past year to become a more diverse community. During his presentation, he highlighted the proposed new commission on diversity and equity. He indicated that if this commission is approved, it will place diversity and equity on the same status as other important university issues.

As in previous summits, a snap shot of the campus climate was taken. The Virginia Tech Report Card, developed last year from the results of the first three summits, was the instrument used for the snap shot. Using the grading scale of A-F, participants were asked to grade the university in five categories, defined as potential hindrances to diversity. In addition, the participants had the opportunity to grade themselves on the same five categories.

This year's results are similar to those obtained last year. They represent the voice of those who have elected to attend the summit. Readers of the *Conductor* are invited to collect

their own data by requesting others to respond to the report card questions. This could be an informative class or departmental exercise. It is an easy way to learn about who we are as a collective whole. Individuals may request a hard copy of the report card by calling the Dean of Students Office at 231-3787.

How participants assigned grades to the university and themselves

Community

University: Are people comfortable being themselves? C+
 Participants: I provide a supportive community for others. B

Perspective on Diversity

University: Is diversity limited to race and gender concerns? C
 Participants: I have a broad perspective of diversity. B+

Traditions and Practices

University: Are new ideas and traditions met with resistance? C
 Participants: I am inclusive in my practices and traditions. B

Assume Responsibility for diversity

University: Do individuals take responsibility for diversity? C
 Participants: I assume responsibility for promoting diversity. B

Accountability for adverse behavior

University: Are individuals who engage in adverse behavior held accountable for how they impact the climate? C-
 Participants: I speak up when I see behavior that is adverse to diversity. B-

The summit closed with discussion of case studies representing incidents that have occurred on this or similar campuses. Although individual groups had lively discussions,

See 'Diversity summit' on 3

Diversity commitment now a part of job evaluation

by Martin Daniel, human resources manager, Personnel Services

During the summer of 2001, the university adopted a new performance management methodology for classified employees as part of the second phase of pay plan reform. The program consists of a job description that outlines core responsibilities and a series of performance dimensions that are important for successful performance of the job. Employees will be rated against these performance dimensions for the first time in September and October 2002.

While most of the performance plan can be customized to individual employees, three performance dimensions apply to all employees -- teamwork, safety, and diversity commitment.

The teamwork performance dimension describes how employees are expected to work cooperatively and respectfully with their co-workers, contribute to the overall success of their work units and departments, and serve as responsible and committed members of the university community.

Maintaining a safe and secure work environment describes the performance indicators necessary for supervisors and employees to comply with the university's safety policy. "At Virginia Tech, safety is everyone's responsibility. All members of the university community are expected to be thoroughly familiar with their safety responsibilities, strive to

follow safety practices at all times, act proactively to prevent accidents and injuries, communicate hazards to supervisors, and be prepared for emergencies that may occur in the workplace."

The diversity commitment dimension builds on the university's strategic diversity plan, which President Steger described as "our guide to assuring that issues of equity, diversity, and multiculturalism are ongoing considerations as we implement our important academic, research, and outreach goals and initiatives."

The need to evaluate each employee's diversity commitment recognizes the

important role that diversity plays in Virginia Tech's success. The university is receiving increasing recognition in national and international communities for its research and the delivery of nontraditional distance education. According to the Office of Multicultural Affairs: "To assume the responsibilities of leadership, one must be able to understand the concerns of a global workforce—one consisting of many different races and of even more cultures and religions, a workforce that must effectively include both men and women in productive activities and decision making."

The globalization of Virginia Tech presents the opportunity to recognize, embrace, and build upon the differences

See 'Performance dimensions' on page 3

Three performance dimensions apply to all employees -- teamwork, safety, and diversity commitment.

Making a Difference

Teens 'Act Out' to address difficult issues

by Martha L. Mullen, Multicultural Fellow and foreign national tax specialist

My nieces in Harrisonburg take part in Acting Out Teen Theatre twice a year. The Acting Out program provides a forum for teens to address issues of racism and inequality; peace and social justice; religion and spirituality. They keep a journal, discuss, and improvise to create the semester's play.

Acting Out performed a total of 10 times during the past year, including performances at the International Festival at James Madison University (JMU) and the annual conference of the Virginia Association for Multicultural Education.

The founder and director of Acting Out Teen Theatre is Marilyn Osborne Wakefield. She joined the JMU Social Work faculty in 1997 after practicing Social Work for more than 15 years. Wakefield serves on the steering committee for the Virginia Association of Multicultural Education and is an active member of the National Association for Multicultural Education.

Why do I teach what I teach?

This is an excerpt from a presentation at the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education Conference in San Jose. The Conductor welcomes articles from faculty and staff throughout the commonwealth who are making contributions to the areas of diversity and multiculturalism.

by Marilyn Osborne Wakefield

A student once asked me about my background. I told her about my work experience and my education and thought I was adequately answering her question. After reading many books, attending diversity workshops, and focusing on multiculturalism in my doctoral program, I no longer believe my answer was adequate. Awareness of my own biases and prejudices has direct impact on how I see the world, what I determine is most important and what I teach my students about diversity.

Teaching provides an opportunity to influence students' belief systems, career choices, and level of self-awareness. This power of influence is available to each teacher. How do we decide what is most important to tell our students about ourselves and what is most important for them to learn?

My family experience is probably the single largest influence in how I view the world. I grew up with prejudices and beliefs that, when practiced, allow me to disregard many peoples' life experiences and ignore the injustice that is present in our world. Is that appropriate to share with my students? How will my sharing or not sharing influence my students? When I make statements about policies, groups of people, individuals, or organizations, I believe that my students need to know what belief system I am operating out of and what biases and prejudices help to form my belief system.

Raising my level of awareness, multicultural competency, and social action is a work in process. I started this journey many years ago but arrived at a place where I was comfortable and became complacent. Moving from this comfortable place has meant journeying into white privilege and owning the many ways that I have benefited from these privileges. White privilege is both a complex theory and a very basic belief. I grew up never acknowledging that I had privileges given to me simply because of the color of my skin. This is an assigned privilege, not something that I have earned. I also have read, reflected, and talked with others about male privilege and how this affects me as a female.

I believed that injustice existed in the world and I supported equal rights for all. But, I did not recognize that I continued to perpetuate the system that keeps white privilege in place. Every time that I do not speak up when someone tells a joke, uses a derogatory term, or only hires white employees, I perpetuate the system. I share this part of my journey because it embodies the essence of who I am and how I teach others about diversity.

I can't teach what I don't know. If I remain unwilling to examine my biases and prejudices, I am also encouraging my students to do the same. If I am complacent about injustices, I am modeling this complacency for my students.

As I engage in these five key arenas, I incorporate a variety of activities with my students in the social gerontology class. This course is a requirement for gerontology minors and health administration majors. In addition, this course serves as an elective for a variety of disciplines, including social work, sociology, psychology, and audiology. This course is offered every semester and has a maximum of 60 students enrolled (generally there is a waiting list at the beginning of the semester).

As I have become more multiculturally competent, I have radically changed my approach to teaching. I begin each semester with classroom activities designed to help us create a community of respect. This involves learning each other's names, about each other's cultural backgrounds, and how we define respect. In each class that I teach, I share my own biases and prejudices and how these affect the theories and beliefs that I embrace. I also share how I am working at my own multicultural compe-



These teens participate in Acting Out to address issues of racism and inequality; peace and social justice; religion and spirituality. Recent scenes addressed teen pregnancy and date rape, coming out, stereotypes and cliques, and reactions to September 11.

tency and provide opportunities for students to develop their own level of competency, including developing their social action skills. These opportunities include feedback on their reflective journal entries; bringing current news issues into class and discussing the policy, community, and individual impact; providing the students with contact

information for their (elected) representatives and encouraging the students to write letters expressing their opinions on policy issues.

Here is what I do to continue to develop my own multicultural competency:

- Regularly read books written by people who have different life experiences and differing perspectives;
- Record thoughts in a journal several times each month, both to process my prejudices and my beliefs and to document my journey;
- Actively seek relationships with people who are different from me; and,
- Engage in social action when I become aware of injustice.

We can't teach what we don't know. The way that I know to develop my level of competency in understanding cultural diversity is to engage in discussions such as this, to read, to reflect, and then reenter the conversation with you. I encourage us, together, to continue on the journey that embraces diversity and confronts prejudice and discrimination. In this spirit, I offer my contact information if you would like to continue the discussion with me:

Marilyn Osborne Wakefield, James Madison University MSC 4303, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, wakefimo@jmu.edu, 540-568-2924, www.socwork.jmu.edu/actingout

About 'The Conductor'

The Conductor is produced twice during the fall and twice during the spring semesters by the Multicultural Fellows and is published by the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

All members of the university community are invited to contribute. Please submit articles to the editorial board at multicultural@vt.edu.

Editorial Board

Kimberly S. Brown, 231-8440, ksbrown@vt.edu

Richard Conners, 231-6896, rconners@vt.edu

Benjamin Dixon, 231-1820, bdixon@vt.edu

Mahmood A. Khan, 703-538-8398, mahmood@vt.edu

Editorial Co-Chairs

Martha L. Mullen, 231-3754, mlaster@vt.edu

Charlotte Waggoner, 231-5864, ren@vt.edu

Back issues are online at www.multicultural.vt.edu/conductor.html.

The deadline for the next issue is September 2.

Performance dimension ...

Continued from page 1

among people by blending divergent ideas into new and creative solutions to the problems that face the world. Diversity is not just about issues of race and gender, but also about the enrichment that comes with diverse ideas, perspectives, backgrounds, and opinions.

The diversity commitment dimension of the employee evaluation includes four performance indicators to help employees understand what is expected:

- Shows respect and sensitivity for people without regard to race, color, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, religion, or political affiliation.
- Supports a nondiscriminatory and harassment-free work environment which contributes to a welcoming and inclusive university.
- Works effectively and willingly with diverse co-workers, students, and customers.
- Demonstrates awareness and sensitivity toward multicultural issues.

Each of these indicators will mean different things in different work environments. Here are some examples of what people might do.

- A receptionist demonstrates patience when trying to help a new graduate student who doesn't speak very good English. Realizing that there are a number of non-English speaking students in the department, the receptionist asks another student to translate departmental handouts that help orient new students.
- An office manager works with department staff to redesign holiday celebrations so that they are inclusive of non-Christian traditions, resulting in more members of the department participating in celebrations.
- A housekeeping worker in the residence halls asks fellow workers to stop making derogatory statements and jokes about people from another locality.
- When a new staff member from India joins a group, a fiscal technician takes proactive steps to mentor the new person.
- The lead worker in an area makes a special effort to inform all staff of the women's week programs and works with both men and women to encourage participation by arranging for coverage.

The diversity commitment dimension challenges each employee to take responsibility for welcoming all members of the university community, listening to their voices, and promoting personal and intellectual growth. Excellence on these dimensions of employee performance—teamwork, safety, and diversity—can do much to assure a high quality living, learning, and working experience for all of us.

Diversity summit ...

Continued from page 1

time did not permit an in depth discussion among all participants. The most profound comment that was shared by a participant was, "This is hard. I now can empathize with administrators who have to respond to these types of situations."

Individuals may request a copy of the case studies by calling the Dean of Students Office at 231-3787. Please feel free to use them for class or departmental discussions. Our only request is that you take time to share your results with us.

Thanks to Denise Collins, Alicia Cohen, Linda Woodard, Susan Anderson, Ray Plaza, Virginia Fowler, David Barzilai, and the Dean of Students staff for planning the 2002 Summit. Susan Anderson, Ray Plaza, Virginia Fowler, Denise Collins, and Barbara Pendergrass drafted the case studies.

There will be a link from the online *Conductor* to the full report at www.multicultural.vt.edu/docs/conductorApril2002.pdf

What impact does the diversity component of the performance evaluation process have on the way you perform your job?



Being a person of faith in Christ, I strive daily to "love my neighbor." I can't afford to make judgments or exceptions. I pray that this unconditional love is woven into the fabric of my life and displayed daily. To be a committed and responsible team member at Virginia Tech, I must consider the whole and not part.

The make up of the university is inclusive of every student, faculty member, and staff member. If I am to be respected and valued, then I must treat others as I wish to be treated.

Alice Turner
Military Affairs

Commitment to diversity has always been an expectation/practice of my position because University Studies has a very diverse student/staff population.

Cindy Crawford
office manager
University Academic
Advising Center



It has not affected the way I do my job in any way. I consider what I do as customer service. As a customer service oriented person, my commitment is to people, not to a label such as diversity. A commitment to diversity is just a part of true customer service.

However, I am concerned about the evaluation process. If a person makes a few minor mistakes on the job, the mistakes can be generally overlooked or the person is evaluated at least as a "Contributor." How many mistakes in the commitment to diversity component does one have to make before the rating is considered "Below Contributor?" Can even one error in this dimension be tolerated?

Sam Van Curen
facilities scheduler
Recreational Sports

Compiled by Kim Brown, Multicultural Fellow and director of University Academic Advising Center/ University Studies. Contact her at ksbrown@vt.edu if you would like to comment on how Virginia Tech can be a more welcoming community.

What do you think?

Farewell to a friend

by Richard Connors, Multicultural Fellow and professor of electrical and computer engineering

In January, Bob Bates left Virginia Tech to become the provost at Washington State University, his alma mater. While the move was clearly a good one for Bates, getting both a promotion as well as being able to move back to his family roots, I was very sorry to see him go. He was a one of the champions of diversity on this campus at a time when there was not much incentive for being one.

Bates created one of the first college diversity committees, the Arts and Sciences (A&S) Cultural Diversity Committee,

in 1995. This committee was given a charge to think through diversity issues in

A&S and some funds to support its own efforts, to help sponsor departmental efforts, and to support graduate level research. This committee was made up of faculty, staff and students.

Bates was very interested in the internationalization of the college and created study abroad programs in such countries as Senegal and Gambia.

However, in my mind, the thing that distinguishes Bates's leadership was the creation of the new A&S hiring practices. For years, many colleges on this campus have made little or no progress in diversifying their faculty, even when there were reasonable numbers of Ph.D. candidates from underrepresented populations available in at least some fields. This meant to many, including myself, that something had to be done about the way we go about hiring people.

Bates decided three years ago that it was time for A&S to make a change. He undertook overhauling the A&S hiring practices in the same year that he was to be reviewed as dean. It was a controversial move, but he did it — and took a good deal of heat for doing so.

Was his fighting for new hiring practices worth it?

... something had to be done about the way we go about hiring people.

The outcomes certainly suggest that it was. During the first year the new hiring practices were in effect, approximately two-thirds of the people hired were women or people of color. Last year, the number went down slightly to approximately 58 percent, but is still a marked improvement over what had been occurring prior to the new hiring procedures. This year, the college is on track with 60 percent of hires being women and people of color. Impressive? I think so — especially when one realizes that all of the new hires in the college are known to be very supportive of diversity on campus.

Before he left, Bates told me that he grew up in a very racially and ethnically homogeneous community. His experience as a researcher was the first

time he had the opportunity to deal with people from a wide variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. His research experiences showed him that diverse people could accomplish surprising things if they were just given the chance to do so. Based on his experience, he made giving diverse people a chance one of his core beliefs.

Currently, Virginia Tech has two dean position openings. I hope we can find people like Bates, who share this same core belief, to fill these positions. I believe that doing so is as important to this university as coping with the size of our current budget shortfall.

Well, that is what I think. What do you think? Contact me via e-mail at rconnors@vt.edu or by phone at 231-6896. I will keep all respondents' names confidential.

In the next issue of *Conductor*, I plan to relate the success of the Pamplin College of Business in diversifying its faculty. New approaches to hiring can work! The college celebrated its successes on March 19.

Native American 'shines' as student and citizen

by Lynn M. Davis, public relations coordinator,
College of Natural Resources

"Our College of Natural Resources has had a strong interest in attracting more Native Americans to our program," says Dean Greg Brown. Thus, one Lisa Schabenberger's missions as enrollment and diversity coordinator for the college has been to market the natural resources program to those populations. She and the college are thrilled to find strong students such as John "Randy" Robinson III, who is from the Upper Mattaponi Tribe in King and Queen County, Virginia.

Although quiet in personality, Robinson has accomplished much for himself and brought accolades to the college. He was one of only 12 students in America awarded a diversity scholarship to attend last year's Society of American Foresters (SAF) convention in Denver.

"I have been interested in the field of forestry my entire life," Robinson wrote in his application for this honor. His outstanding academic record, volunteerism in student organization activities, glowing recommendations, and commitment to help his community earned him the convention scholarship, which covers transportation, accommodations, registration, and selected activities.

He was also awarded one of five \$23,000 USDA Multicultural Scholarships given to freshmen in 2000 at Virginia Tech for a four-year period. In addition, he earned one of the College of Natural Resources' most prestigious scholarships, the \$15,000 Stuermann Scholarship in 2001



Randy Robinson III

participates in all activities sponsored by the Minority Academic Opportunities Program (MAOP) at Tech.

The model student was an invited participant at the Virginian Indian Nations Summit on Higher Education hosted at Virginia Tech last spring. His strong work ethic has him working each summer, holiday, and during the school year to help pay his way through college.

His close-knit family is proud of him, and his mother says her friends tell her that Randy is not just her son, but her "sun." She replies, "Yes, and my daughter is my moon and stars."

Robinson notes that his goal is to learn all he can in the field of industrial forestry so that he can take his knowledge back to help his tribe, which is heavily involved in the forestry industry. "My father has been logging for more than 25 years," he adds. "With his guidance, I began to learn about logging and forests. I live in a small, rural

community, where the primary source of income for many families is logging.

"When I found out I was going to college," he continues, "I knew the only field I wanted to get a degree in was forestry. I want to help preserve the forest in my community and make the logging industry more profitable and efficient for my people."

He credits MAOP, MANRRS, and SAF's National Committee on Cultural Diversity with giving him the chance to obtain a college education and become a more productive member of society. Larry Moore, co-director of MAOP, says, "Randy is among the top 5 percent of the thousands of students I have taught or advised. He is well on his way towards his B.S. in industrial forest operations and continuing into graduate school. He is a serious, hard-working, and mature young man with a bright future."

Edmond Adams, former chief of his tribe, says, "I feel that Randy is a young man who will give back to his community all that he has received and more because of his strong values his family has instilled in him."

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'The Color Line Revisited: Is Racism Dead?'

by Melanie Hayden, assistant director for academic support, Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence

I was elated to hear that Johnnetta Cole would be the keynote speaker for Black History Month 2002 at Virginia Tech. The BHM steering committee has always sponsored riveting speakers, from Judge Joe Brown to former Black Panther Angela Davis, but having Cole on our campus would truly be a delight. I have noticed her name countless times in *Black Issues in Higher Education*, and it was an honor to witness her powerful stage presence. A noted author, professor, business woman, and past president of Spelman College, Cole shared a wealth of knowledge with us that evening.

Cole's topic was "The Color Line Revisited: Is Racism Dead?" — the national Black History Month theme. In her opinion, racism is not dead, nor is it just a "black and white paradigm." Racism exists among individuals of various races, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. To change this culture, Cole said that we must first understand the origin of racism. Racism is a learned behavior; therefore, it can be unlearned, she said. We can be agents of change by not teaching our children this type of behavior. Realizing that this can be a daunting task for some, Cole mentioned that there are other ways in which we can confront this issue.

First, she reminded the audience that "change is possible." If we believe that a cause is worth fighting for, then we can experience change. Secondly, we can seek change in our school systems by teaching children more about the history that is not taught in elementary and secondary schools. Cole stated that history classes are full of information that is "Western, white, and woman-less."

Finally, we must consider our behaviors toward our fellow man. Cole mentioned the situations that occurred after September 11 — specifically, the racial profiling of Middle Eastern students on college campuses. We were guilty of violating these students' fundamental rights as citizens. This is true for all students of color here in the United States, and we must end this type of racism.

With these ideas in mind, we can continue to work toward a non-racist society. Cole challenged us to be agents of change and to participate in actions that bring about social justice, such as voting and lobbying for causes that we believe will bring about change in our society.

Cole left us with a quotation from anthropologist Margaret Mead. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Minority of one ...

Continued from page 1

an average population of 500 million. That being the case, up to today's generation, about 50,006 trillion people have inhabited planet earth — and this estimate is probably high, on purpose!

AFTER A LITTLE MORE DELIBERATING AND ESTIMATING INTO THE FUTURE, WE EVENTUALLY CONCLUDED THAT UNTIL THE INEVITABLE DEMISE OF THIS PLANET, IT WILL HAVE BEEN OCCUPIED BY SOME 10 QUADRILLION PEOPLE.

... So, what was the point of this exercise?

In order to make my point, I now asked the class to shift gears and consider something else. "Suppose," I said, "somebody gave you a set of 400 beads, containing 20 each of 20 different colors. Suppose further that you were told to use each color as often as you liked, and sequence the colors at your discretion in stringing the beads together to form a chain-necklace. Finally, you were constrained to use only 20 beads total in creating each chain. Question: How many possible *different* combinations could you string together from this pool of beads? That is to say, if you were to make *one* chain-necklace using 20 beads from this pool of 400, how many choices do you have in terms of what this necklace might look like?"

Being mostly engineering students, the class was proud to declare that the strict mathematical answer to this question of permutations and combinations is 20 raised to the 20th power, or, written out, 20²⁰ = about 104,857,599,992,000,000,000,000,000 different possibilities for any given necklace chain! NOW, RECOGNIZING, OF COURSE, THAT MANY OF THESE COMBINATIONS AND PERMUTATIONS ARE ACTUALLY DUPLICATES OF ONE ANOTHER, AND A GOOD NUMBER OF THE REMAINING POSSIBILITIES WON'T "WORK" FOR WHATEVER REASONS, WE DECIDED TO REDUCE THIS NUMBER BY 99.9 PERCENT, LEAVING US WITH ABOUT 100 MILLION QUADRILLION VIABLE POSSIBILITIES.

... So, again, the students ask, "What's the point?"

... So here's the *real* point: given the simplest, most statistically generous scenario of a grand total of 10

quadrillion people, among which are distributed as few as 100 million quadrillion possible combinations of THE 20 BASIC AMINO ACIDS THAT ARE THE "BUILDING BLOCKS" OF HUMAN proteins, what is the probability that any two of these people share the *same* combination, i.e., have *exactly* the same characteristic anatomical features and physiologic function? Even if one concedes further (as the genome scientists have claimed) that we share in common as much as 99.9 percent of the total base pair sequence in DNA, I submit to you that the chances of any two individuals winding up with *exactly* the same genetic code (nature), much less *exactly* the same expression of this code (nurture), is probably well below one in a million, less than 0.0001 percent! In other words, not too likely — and that's based on as liberal an estimate as one can imagine. *The probability that anybody ever has, or ever will, be exactly like you is essentially zero; because there are so many more potential possibilities than there are humans that will ever inhabit this planet!*

So what is all of this talk about ethnicity, and color, and race, and minorities (such as "African" American, "Asian" American, or "Hispanic"), and religious preference, and creed, and so on? The fact of the matter is that *each and every one of us is a minority of one!* When they made you, they threw out the mold. In many ways, you are an improvement over older models; and newer models yet to come may include still further refinements in design.

So isn't it about time we stopped trying to generalize, systematize, and categorize our humanness ... in favor of appreciating, cultivating, and acclaiming its diversity without being threatened by it? Each one of us has such wonderfully unique anatomical traits and physiologic capabilities. Let's enjoy them! Exploit them! Cherish them! And then maybe, just *maybe*, we can start learning to get along with one another without judging on the basis of ill-defined, arbitrary, meaningless criteria. If nothing else, maybe the genome project will have accomplished that!

[The full version of this article appeared in *American Laboratory*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 6-8, January 2001.]