

Laney unveils plans to improve minority programs

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Before 150 students and administrators gathered in the Chemistry Building Sunday evening, President James T. Laney presented his response to recent calls for changes in the University. After reflecting upon conversations with the leaders of Students Against Racial Inequality (SARI) and a number of reports concerning the racial climate at Emory, Laney came forward to “share some of the things that I think we need to do not just tomorrow or this fall, but over the next couple of years.”

Laney focused his attention on four issues that he considered of primary importance to minorities on campus and proposed plans to “chart the direction of this University over the next decade.”

First, the president addressed the lack of “an adequate multi-cultural presence,” in particular African-American culture, at Emory. In order to augment ethnic diversity at the University, Laney proposed the formation of a “Center for Teaching and Curricular Enrichment,” which would encourage faculty to address important social issues, including black and feminist perspectives, in their classes. Laney pointed out that such a center would have a “profound effort on the courses, syllabi and content of education” at Emory.

Laney has proposed the establishment of a “Multi-cultural Resource and Learning center” to provide mentoring and support programs for minority students, as well as outreach programs on racial awareness for the entire community. Under the direction of Dean Vera Rorie, director of Minority Student Programs, the new center would be housed in Woodruff Residence Hall.

Answering calls for expansion of the African-American studies department, Laney announced the establishment of the Benjamin Mays fellowship program to attract “outstanding leaders of the black community in Atlanta and the nation.” The new fellows would come to campus, much like the former President Jimmy Carter, to teach classes and meet informally with students.

Laney outlined a number of plans to increase the ranks of black faculty at Emory. Primarily, he announced the establishment of two new “special opportunity appointments of minority faculty” through the provost’s office. Laney also said he would request that all deans assess their divisions by December, 1990 and develop a means of augmenting their black faculty.

“One of the most important things that we will do at this University in the 1990s is make it a truly multicultural University,” concluded Laney.

The second problem the president addressed was the failure of the University to adequately “educate all of our students, faculty and staff about matters of racial sensitivity.” Calling for the university to do “far more than interpret” Emory's groundbreaking discriminatory harassment policy, Laney proposed that the freshman seminar program be devoted to the issue of “difference.” Rorie, Vice President and Dean for Campus Life William Fox and Renee Baird of Campus Life will be responsible for developing a multicultural program for each freshman residence hall, to be implemented along with the seminar program in the fall. Similar programs will be presented in fraternity and sorority lodges and upperclass residence halls as well, said Laney.

In addition, Laney stressed his plan to implement a “series of sensitivity sessions for all personnel, both staff and students, who perform gatekeeper functions that bring them into regular contact with students.”

Thirdly, Laney addressed the issue of financial aid. “All of our students
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say that the cost of an Emory education is high, and many of you need more help," said Laney. Pointing to Emory's commitment to meet every students' demonstrated financial need, Laney indicated that "this fall, for the first time, the financial package for entering minority freshmen will include no loans."

He went on to reiterate his commitment to the Martin Luther King scholarships for minority students from Atlanta, 13 of which have already been offered this year. In addition to undergraduate awards, Laney pledged to offer six additional stipends to graduate students in each of the next four years.

Finally, Laney proposed to make himself more accessible to the student body, and minority students in particular, by increasing his contact with Rorie and Robert Ethridge, director of Equal Opportunity Programs.

The changes that Laney outlined Sunday evening resulted mainly from a dozen demands issued by SARI last Tuesday during a rally in front of the Administration Building. The group has since identified its leaders as Kendall Wood, Lisa Green, Erika Jefferson, Elijah Gardner, Leonard Scriven, Eric Croone, Marvin Coleman, Charles Clopton and Jill Edmonson.

Most leaders of the group refused to comment after Laney's presentation, but Croone indicated that SARI will meet soon and present a unified reaction. Wood applauded Laney's effort but pointed out that the president did not firmly address all the demands of his group. "I felt that he brought up some good reforms, but I also felt that he left a lot out," said Wood afterward.