October 4, 2002

TO: Illinois Board of Higher Education
FR: Dr. Michael J. Gonzales, Professor of History and Director, Center for Latino and Latin American Studies, Northern Illinois University
RE: Minority Faculty Study

As suggested in the Board’s New’s Release of 12 September 2002, I shall organize my comments according to the inter-related themes of (1) the availability of qualified minority candidates for positions in higher education, (2) the hiring process, and (3) the problem of retaining minority faculty.

**Availability of Minority Faculty**

There is a limited pool of qualified minority faculty, and the process of increasing the number of candidates presents a major challenge. One major obstacle has been the limited financial resources traditionally available to minority graduate students. The IBHE has addressed this issue effectively through its support of the ICEOP-IMIG program, and I believe that it is imperative that the state continues to fund this initiative. As an ICEOP board member, I have been impressed with the quality of applicants for these awards and I am always disappointed that we cannot fund more people. The ICEOP-IMIG program is life blood for public universities such as Northern Illinois University because resources from endowments, in comparison with private institutions and the University of Illinois, are limited.

A measure of any institution’s commitment to diversity is the amount of funds earmarked from general revenue sources to support minority graduate students. At Northern Illinois University, the central administration has funded the Rhoten-Smith Graduate Assistantship program for some twenty years. This program, which I chair, sets aside funding to provide graduate assistantships, on a matching basis with departments, for qualified minority graduate students. The program was funded at approximately $125,000 per year for ten years, and has been funded at approximately $250,000 per year for the last ten years. Over 600 students have been supported through the Rhoten-Smith program, and 85 per cent have graduated. This makes it one of NIU’s most successful graduate-level programs.

In addition to the Rhoten-Smith initiative, I chair the Carter G. Woodson Scholars Program and the Jeffrey Lunsford Fellowship Program. Funds for these programs also come from general revenue sources. The Woodson Fellowship was established in 1984, and it provides two eleven-month scholarships that include a stipend of $14,300 and full tuition waivers. The scholarship
also provides fellows with optional research and teaching experiences. The Lunsford Fellowship was initiated by the Graduate School in 1990. This program funds four fellows per year at $6,000, for a total commitment of $24,000. Since its inception, the Lunsford Fellowship has supported over forty graduate students.

Finally, the Graduate School provides departments with tuition waivers for qualified minority graduate students. The number of tuition waivers earmarked for this purpose has increased from four in 1990-1 to seventy-five in 2000-1.

**Hiring of Minority Faculty**

Effective recruitment of minority faculty requires the cooperation of university leaders from the president down to members of faculty search committees. The overall tone for the institution should be set by the president. The presidents of all colleges and universities in the state, all of whom depend on public funds (including private institutions), should publicly declare that the hiring of minority faculty is a major priority. In doing so, they would be following Dr. Lee Bollinger, who bravely defended the University of Michigan’s affirmative action programs in court. Dr. Bollinger, who was recently appointed president of Columbia University, reiterated his commitment to affirmative action in his inaugural address. A similar commitment from university and college presidents in Illinois would send a clear message to the public, university administrators, the faculty, and minority students.

Across the nation, various universities have attempted minority incentive hiring programs, including target of opportunity hires. At Northern Illinois University, for several years the provost’s office rewarded departments by adding several thousand dollars to their base budget each time they hired a minority faculty member. The program, however, faced stiff opposition from many department chairs, deans, and faculty who referred to it as the “bounty” and argued that the money could be better spent elsewhere. In the end, the minority incentive program was phased out by the central administration. It has not been replaced by an equivalent program.

The central administration can monitor the hiring process through an examination of paperwork, but departmental faculty and chairs effectively determine who gets the job. Faculty and chairs who are successful scholars and teachers may still lack a commitment to hiring minority faculty. Therefore, it is essential that department chairs and search committee members are carefully screened to ascertain their commitment to affirmative action hiring.

**Retention of Minority Faculty**

University administrators frequently complain that it is difficult to retain minority faculty, particularly those who publish well-received books and articles and develop scholarly reputations. The same problem is, of course, faced when non-minority faculty have professional success. It is important that university administrators try as hard to retain their minority faculty as they do their non-minority faculty.

All junior faculty, as a rule, benefit from some type of mentoring. In addition to its by-laws and
formal requirements, each department has its own culture ranging from hierarchical and conservative to democratic and liberal, and there are understood rules and patterns of behavior that are traditionally observed and are not necessarily explained during an interview. Mentors can provide new faculty with insights into departmental culture. They can also provide them with advise on how to organize their time in order to fulfill their obligations as scholar-teachers.

Departments can also facilitate retention by providing minority faculty with research opportunities. At NIU, some departments that received incentive funds set aside money for new minority hires to use for their research. These types of research monies, obviously, increase the likelihood that new faculty will complete their research projects in a timely fashion and receive tenure. Some argue that minority faculty should not be considered “special cases” and provided with research funds. However, this ignores the historic obstacles that minorities have faced in gaining access to higher education and to university positions. In addition, non-minority faculty receive special consideration on a regular basis and this is not questioned because it has become part of the academic tradition.

Universities can also create a positive campus environment for minority faculty by supporting academic centers that focus on Third World and minority scholarship and teaching. Many minority faculty, even if they do not specialize in these fields, have an active interest in their historical and cultural heritage. Moreover, many scholars who study Africa and African-American Studies are black, and many scholars who study Latin America and Latino Studies are Latino. By supporting Centers for Black Studies and Latino and Latin American Studies, university administrations help to create a diverse campus environment in which everyone can find their niche. Moreover, such centers are open to the entire campus community and they provide opportunities for the dissemination of information and interaction among all faculty and students. At Northern Illinois University, we have both a Center for Black Studies and a Center for Latino and Latin American Studies.

Finally, university administrators can improve the campus climate to everyone’s benefit by facilitating the revision of the curriculum to reflect the historic importance of minorities. At Northern Illinois University, for the past eight years the provost’s office has supported the Multi-Cultural Curriculum Transformation Institute. This eight to ten day institute is designed to help interested faculty design new courses or revise existing courses to make them more inclusive. The institute also provides instruction on teaching methods that help faculty communicate more effectively with students of color and with women. To date, over 100 faculty have participated in the institute and over 100 courses have been transformed. I am a founding member of the Multi-Cultural Institute and a permanent member of the Multi-Cultural Task Force.