Students of color demand change

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Some 70 students attended the Campus Community Committee meeting yesterday to voice concerns about Colby’s treatment of minorities. They called for better funding for minority clubs, a more diverse curriculum, a financial aid office that responds to students’ needs, and a residence hall on campus for people of color.

Several students told the Echo that action is not taken on these issues they will consider discouraging prospective minority students from coming to Colby.

Students also criticized the process used in selecting a new Dean of Intercultural Affairs (Secretary on page 2). They said the College gave student input only lip service. President William Cotter responded that he would seek answers from the faculty and report back to the Committee. Several people present at the meeting expressed concern that these same issues have not been discussed for years.

"You cannot put people through this over and over again," said Josh Woodford ’96, addressing Cotter. "It’s disingenuous, I should not pay to go here and educate you. Don’t just patronize me, I expect the institution to take action."

Karlene Burrell ’94 said minorities needed their own residence hall, or at least a floor in a residence hall, so they can relax and be themselves, rather than constantly educating others.

"A lot of people would say this is separatist, but we deal with the white race every day," she said. "We want a place to go home to where we won’t be stared at." She argued it would not be a place that would make adjusting to Colby much harder. They cited examples of misinformation, miscommunication, rudeness by financial aid staff, inaccurate billing, and the consistent reduction of aid packages every year.

"One of the reasons why minorities come to Colby is because of the busing policy," said Kendra King ’94. "They pay most of your way the first year, then they downsize your package every year."

Tolbert said he believes that if students were educated about their financial aid situations before they came to Colby, many would not come.

The students demanded more diversity within mainstream departments, so that African-American Studies, for instance, could cover more advanced knowledge.

The students would like to see African-American Studies elevated from a program to a department, the institution of a Latino Studies program, and the diversification of the East Asian studies program to cover more than China and Japan, according to Burell.

"When we came to Colby, we entered a social contract," said Jonathan Thomas ’94. "They said that they were going to provide for us a diverse educational environment. I don’t feel that there is much diversity here."

"We have wonderful European, male, heterosexual departments here at Colby," said Katie Morrison ’94. "This is not asking you to build a program around us, this is asking for equality."

"We are all being cheated," said Thomas. "The world is a mosaic of cultures and the curriculum needs to reflect that."

The students in attendance were not pleased with Cotter’s response to the issues they raised.

"We came not only with problems, but with solutions," said Burell. "You don’t need committees to decide what to do on many of these issues. People are hearing without listening."

"I was pleased with the turnout and how the meeting went," said King. "But I felt President Cotter’s response was stagnant."

"He can take those committees and stick them where you know whom," said Michael Miller ’95. "Most of the issues could have been dealt with right there."

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"I think that some of the students will agree that some of these things need to be done in a collegial fashion," said Dean of the College Earl Smith. "There is no smoke screen, there is no thought that this will just go away. They are all people of good intention, and no one wants to cover up, hide or draw anything out."

Tolbert said that neither he nor other students of color will be participating on the committees.

"It is unnecessary for us to participate," said Tolbert. "It is time for them to do something and get back to us."

Members of SOAR and SOBHU plan to take further action if direct steps are not made to remedy issues of race and mistreatment on campus, according to Tolbert, King, Burell, Thomas and Miller.