

Charge that 'bigotry is in fashion' wrongs U-M

Frye rebuts 'biased' Free Press article

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University efforts to improve black student enrollment and retention have been dealt a severe blow by what Vice President B. E. Frye describes as an "inexcusably biased" article that appeared in the March 31 *Detroit Free Press*. The article, he said, attempted to depict the U-M as permeated by racial bias against blacks.

Headlined "Being Black at U-M Students find role isolated, campus racist," the article appeared with no warning to U-M officials of its highly critical nature, Frye said, nor time for them to comment.

The newspaper story skipped over the University's minority recruitment efforts, its academic support programs, its counseling and outreach efforts, its collaborative projects with the Detroit Public Schools and its efforts to improve the quality of campus life for minority

students. University officers noted. Instead, it focused on complaints about campus atmosphere and even gave these a more one-sided emphasis than did some of the students themselves.

"The negative tenor of the article as a whole is our major objection," Frye said. "The article was written as if it wanted to not merely raise the question of why the University is perceived to be inhospitable by some blacks, but to make the point that it is — without examining that there is a contrary viewpoint anywhere."

Claiming "bigotry is in fashion" on the U-M campus, the *Free Press* story cited "racist taunts" toward blacks, graffiti, "stereotyped attitudes toward black culture," and an incident in Mark Ley residence hall in which a watermelon was smeared on a black artist's mural. The article, picked up and condensed to its negative components by United Press International wire service, ap

peared in other newspapers. In the *Flinn Journal*, the headline read "U-M at Ann Arbor blasted for racism, paper reports."

"The strong, negative bias of the article was very disturbing to us," Frye noted. "Particularly at a time when we are trying every avenue of communication to get the word out to qualified black students that they are welcome at The University of Michigan, that we want them to apply and will help them stay in college, once admitted."

"We believe our demonstrated commitment to minority enrollment is not being matched anywhere in the state," Frye added.

These efforts, Frye noted, include the creation of the associate vice president for academic affairs position held by Nlara Sudarkasa, one of whose major responsibilities is advising the University on improving minority student recruitment and retention, a program which

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has received substantial amounts of new money from the University

The U-M currently is administering and allocating \$6 million annually — \$2.7 million from its General Fund and \$3.3 million from state and federal sources — for minority student aid programs. This is 20 percent of the University's total student aid budget of \$30 million.

The *Free Press* article also failed to put into perspective the modest but significant turnaround of black enrollment decline at the U-M, officials noted. This was achieved despite the continuing decline of black enrollment nationally at other comparable universities, particularly those of the Big 10. In its graduate and professional schools, the U-M has the best minority enrollment by far in the Big 10.

"There was no mention of the success of our black students after graduation or the extraordinarily effective programs at the Law and Medical schools," Frye noted. "The U-M graduation rate for blacks in undergraduate programs also is climbing, with 55 percent getting diplomas by the sixth year."

While heralding the minority and black enrollments at Wayne State and Michigan State universities, the *Free Press* omitted the U-M's 11.3 percent minority enrollment while emphasizing MSU's 8.73 percent minority total.

Frye said he also had strong objections to the article's implication that he and Sudarkasa had refused to talk to the *Free Press* reporter or to provide him with minority enrollment financial data. "This simply is not true," he declared. "This man, after being told no time was available on one day, gave up

on an interview, left written questions and then went ahead with the article before the reply could be mailed back to him. There was no input from us."

Sudarkasa said she believed the article's obsession with the University's reputed image among black students raised some real concerns of some students but overlooked more concrete obstacles to a higher education.

"No doubt, The University of Michigan, as a selective, expensive public institution, seems to 'scare off' some black students who perceive it as too costly, too inhospitable and too academically demanding," Sudarkasa said.

"It is my judgment, however, that the 'image' factor is far less a deterrent to increasing enrollment than economic factors. If the University could provide the financial wherewithal to enroll a criti-

cal mass of black students, there would be fewer complaints of alienation and dissatisfaction, and, given a supportive environment, these students would begin to feel more at home here," she added.

"In our criticism of the newspaper article, we don't want to leave the impression that we are unconcerned about expressions of racism by students or anyone else in the University. It spurs us to increase our efforts to foster tolerance and understanding among the entire University community," Vice President Frye stated.

"But to equate the negative expressions of a few students to a total atmosphere of racism, leaving out the many positive aspects of the U-M experience is, to us, highly irresponsible for a major metropolitan newspaper."

GEO outlines details of contract

Members of the Graduate Employee's Organization (GEO), representing approximately 1,700 teaching and staff assistants at U-M, have voted to hold a ballot ratification election on the tentative agreement reached with the U-M on Mar. 22. The voting period will end Apr. 19, with results announced on Apr. 22.

If ratified, the proposed agreement will give teaching and staff assistants a 5 percent salary increase for the 1985-86 academic year, according to Jane Holzka, GEO chief negotiator. In addition, employees will receive a tuition waiver reducing their obligation to 50 percent of the tuition rate for in-state graduate students. This represents a reduction of tuition obligation of 5 to 10

percent for GEO members, Holzka explained.

Employees will also receive an improved benefits package which maintains eligibility for dental coverage for teaching and staff assistants who take a two-semester leave of absence. Additional contract provisions, Holzka noted, include a revised Special Conference procedure which will enable teaching and staff assistants within individual departments to review policy changes which affect their working conditions.

Once ratified, the contract will run until March 15, 1986. GEO members are working under an extension of their current contract.