

Events of 11 September and Graduate Education in Oceanography

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"Simply put, all of our lives have changed, and there will be an impact on our science." That sentence from Rick Spinrad's Quarterdeck column in the last issue of *Oceanography* stuck with me, in part because I believe Rick is right. I also believe Rick's comment is related to Dean McManus's recent *Oceanography* article in 14(3): "What do statistics on graduate education in oceanography tell us?" Let me briefly explain why.

Foreign students comprise about 26% of all oceanography graduate students at U.S. institutions. Trends over the past few years (see CORE web page: <http://www.COREocean.org/>) show foreign applications are down and offers are up. These trends indicate that foreign students are important to our graduate programs, and that they are becoming harder to recruit. The latter is inevitable as improving economic conditions in Asia and other parts of the world lead to better education and employment opportunities in home countries. The events of September 11 could further complicate our recruiting of foreign student for two reasons. Potential students may believe (erroneously, I hope) that the U.S. will suffer more serious terrorist attacks in the future and thus shy away from attending a U.S. institution based on personal safety considerations. In addition, potential foreign students may also find (or perceive) that it is more difficult to obtain student visas, are subject to an increasing paperwork burden from our Immigration and Naturalization Service and fear that they will be targeted for much closer oversight and tracking once legitimately within the U.S. Such perceptions, based on fact or simply imagined, might accelerate adverse recruitment trends already in progress owing to economic and other factors. Oceanographic institutions, as well as other U.S. graduate departments, may need to become much more proactive to recruit new foreign students and to assist and reassure those currently attending U.S. graduate programs.

Dean's analyses of the graduate education statistics highlight other issues that have been discussed for many years by oceanography educators. In general, oceanographic institutions do not do a good job of recruiting minorities to graduate programs in oceanography and into the field of oceanography. Dean's analyses also point out that the increase in the percentage of women in our graduate programs over the past few years is primarily caused by a drop in total enrollment; not by an increase in the number of women attracted to oceanography. We are also making slow

progress recruiting women to oceanographic faculties. As late as 1997 (the last year of reliable statistics that I have seen), women accounted for about 50% of oceanography graduate students, 27% of postdocs and only 15% of oceanographic faculty. The latter percentage increased only slightly in the past two decades. Clearly, we need to do a better job of recruiting graduate students from underrepresented groups into our oceanography programs and of increasing ethnic and gender diversity on our faculties. This has always been the right thing to do. With our new sense of community and of national purpose following the events of 11 September, and with the possibility of a much greater need to do so, we should accelerate these recruitment efforts to sustain the health of our discipline. ☐

(The views expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the National Science Foundation.)



Comments & Suggestions

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