



LETTER FROM THE

president

The Underrepresented Majority?

In 2005, the National Academies' report "Rising Above the Gathering Storm" was a call to action, concluding, "Unless the nation has the science and engineering experts and the resources to generate new ideas...we will not continue to prosper in an age of globalization."

That's a pretty big statement—one that is particularly weighty considering the forecasted growth and shifts of our population show tremendous increases for minorities, who in the past have been less likely to pursue degrees in science and engineering.

According to the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) and numbers reflected by the United States Census Bureau, although African Americans and Hispanics make up 25 percent of the U.S. population, only 11 percent of these underrepresented minorities earn bachelor's degrees in any field of study. The national averages are also reflected at IIT, with 11 percent of IIT's bachelor's degrees awarded to underrepresented minorities last academic year.

Even fewer underrepresented minorities obtain degrees in engineering and technology fields. ASEE's most recent figures, from 2006, indicate that African Americans received only 5 percent of the bachelor's degrees awarded in engineering that year. Just 6 percent of engineering bachelor's degrees were awarded to Hispanics. Last year 12 percent of IIT's engineering degrees were awarded to underrepresented minorities.

Inequalities exist among faculty and women as well. Underrepresented minorities currently make up only 5 percent of all engineering faculty in the United States. A quarter of the black engineering professors teach at just a handful of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. While women comprise the majority—56 percent—of all university undergraduates, only 19.3 percent received engineering bachelor's degrees in 2006, marking a steady eight-year decline. At IIT, one-fourth of our bachelor's degrees last year were awarded to women, who this year make up nearly a third of total undergraduate enrollment and 20 percent of engineering undergraduates.

By 2020, underrepresented minorities are expected to rise to nearly 35 percent of the population—Hispanics will comprise 18 percent, African Americans 14 percent, and the growing population of Native-American and other non-Asian races is projected to be 3.5 percent. By 2050, the combined African-American, Hispanic, and Native-American/other population will compose nearly 45 percent of our country. Clearly, today's underrepresented minorities stand to become tomorrow's underrepresented majority.

As former vice chair of the ASEE Engineering Deans' Council Executive Board, I know how great a challenge improving science and engineering education in this country, particularly for underrepresented minorities, can be. However, we cannot allow this challenge to become a missed opportunity for our young people or our country.

The National Academies' Committee on Prospering in the Global Economy of the 21st Century provides a variety of recommendations to improve engineering and science education: increasing interest in these disciplines among K–12 students, training more qualified teachers, improving masters in science education programs, and investing in math and science specialty schools, among other suggestions. In addressing minorities in these fields, the Building Engineering and Science Talent committee further notes the need for financial support for individuals, increased work experience, improved social networks, and campus-wide efforts to increase inclusiveness.

IIT is on the right track. From our new Collens Scholarship Program to our ongoing and strengthening ties with Chicago Public Schools and Bronzeville to improved recruitment and retention efforts, the university is taking important steps toward change. These and other initiatives are included in this issue's feature on African Americans at IIT [page 15]. However, much more effort is needed if IIT is to be a leader in educating today's minorities for tomorrow's opportunities in innovative technologies.

The acceptance of all people regardless of race or ethnicity is an important part of IIT's past and present [see Rewind, page 36]. We are a top research university with strengths in engineering, science, and professional studies. Through our location within Chicago, we are committed to educating increasingly more of today's minority population for future leadership in these fields and in society.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John L. Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John L. Anderson
President