

Faculty Statement on Diversity

Summary Statement

The faculty of Samford University is committed to the purposeful inclusion and accommodation of people of diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. The faculty is further committed to the free yet critical exchange of diverse ideas and perspectives. The faculty sees both of these components as vital to its success as an institution of Christian higher education.

Introduction

The lifeblood of an academic institution is the free yet critical exchange of ideas, information and perspectives. The vitality of an academic institution is therefore diminished to the extent that voices of diverse, significant intellectual and cultural views are absent from or are not valued by the academic community. Conversely, the purposeful inclusion and accommodation of such views enriches the life of an academic institution and advances its educational mission. For these reasons, the faculty of Samford University endorses this statement of diversity.

Diversity Defined

The Samford community values and pursues diversity as a goal. In this context diversity can be defined in terms of both people and ideas. We define diversity as the purposeful outreach to all people who can add to the richness of personal and cultural perspectives represented at Samford, and their full integration as members of the community in terms of both the social and intellectual life of the university. Furthermore, diversity refers to the thorough consideration of all ideas and theories based on merit and evidence; no belief is either peremptorily rejected or accepted without due consideration. Dogmatism and demagoguery are the enemies of constructive academic discourse.

Tolerance, the willingness to abide with people with different viewpoints and to treat everyone with respect and civility, is a basic value that is expected of all members of the Samford community. The goal of diversity goes beyond tolerance. Diversity refers to an openness to and curiosity about different cultures, histories, perspectives, theories, experiences and ideas for the purposes of critical debate and enrichment of the community.

We value the diversity that a person brings to Samford according to two criteria. First is the extent to which a person can make unique contributions to the intellectual and social life of the university through their cultural heritage or personal history. Second is the extent to which that person represents a group that has experienced a history of discrimination, exploitation, or victimization based solely on group identity. This criterion includes gender, race and ethnicity.

We equally value the diversity that ideas bring to Samford based on their fruitfulness for critical thinking and academic discourse. The goal of diversity does not mean that Samford will accept any idea or perspective solely because it is different. Any idea or perspective must prove itself through fair and open debate. Furthermore, as a university committed to Christian values, Samford maintains moral and ethical standards by which the worth of ideas is judged. The Samford community, however, recognizes the plurality of valid perspectives and standards within the Christian faith. Therefore, the norms and values of the Samford community should be under constant scrutiny and debate to separate critically constructed moral standards from mere moral conformity. The existence of and respect for diverse Christian as well as other religious and spiritual perspectives at Samford is seen as an advantage in promoting the development of a mature understanding of the Christian faith among members of the Samford community.

The Rationale for Pursuing Diversity

Samford University is devoted to the creation and discovery of new knowledge and ideas, the preparation of students for lives of value, providing a model for a better society, and serving both the local and global communities to which it belongs. The pursuit of diversity is critical to all of these goals. Therefore, diversity is critical for the success of the university both as an ideal and as a practical necessity.

The danger of too much homogeneity within an academic community is that ideas might be accepted or rejected based on the affirmation of the majority rather than through rigorous questioning and analysis. Beliefs and behavior may be accepted through conformity, consciously or unconsciously, rather than through critical thought. Diversity minimizes these dangers, and promotes intellectual and personal growth.

Samford's historic ties to the Christian tradition, and specifically to the Alabama Baptist State Convention, give it special cause to pursue diversity. As a part of its Christian heritage, Samford has specific historical and theological resources that contribute to the promotion of a diverse environment in all areas of campus life. Christians have traditionally placed a premium on the worth and dignity of the individual within the context of the community of faith. This belief is based on the principle that each person is created in the image of God, that God is committed to justice (especially for those whom society generally might oppress or marginalize), and that the gospel reaches across all socio-economic, national, and ethnic boundaries. Within the Christian tradition, Baptists have tended to emphasize that the strongest communities of faith are built by the gathering of diverse individuals drawn together by their voluntary commitment to God and to one another. This coming together does not erase differences, but recognizes and celebrates them as part of God's creative work in the church and the world.

Diversity Applied to Samford

The diversity among faculty, administration, students and staff should be a measure of success and vitality for Samford University. We assess diversity at Samford University according to the following dimensions:

1. Recruitment and Employment: Samford should strive to recruit a diverse student body, faculty, administration and staff.
2. Retention: Beyond recruitment, Samford should strive to create a supportive environment that encourages the retention of a diverse community.
3. Campus (social/interpersonal) climate: Samford should strive to build a campus culture that promotes equality and civility that respects the dignity of all members.
4. Academic climate: Samford should strive to create an intellectual climate that values and encourages the free and critical exchange of ideas.
5. Work climate: Samford strives to create a work climate of equality, civility and respect.
6. Curriculum: Samford should create a curriculum that prepares students to be well informed, responsible world citizens with an appreciation for and a capacity to relate to all people.