[DATE]

Open letter requesting measures to be taken to diversify portraits lining [UNIVERSITY X] walls

We ask for institutional and financial support to diversify the portraits lining [UNIVERSITY X] hallways, classrooms, and meeting spaces. Many spaces at [UNIVERSITY X] reflect its history but do not reflect our core values of diversity and inclusion0, nor do they accurately reflect the student, staff, and faculty bodies that comprise the [UNIVERSITY X] of today, or those we envision to comprise the [UNIVERSITY X] of tomorrow. The rationale behind our request for support is detailed below. We recognize that there have been many independent efforts but we believe we need a coordinated process. The specific actions we seek are:

1. A university level commission to oversee the project and ensure its timely completion as well as coordination that covers the entire university
2. Funds to cover the costs of decommissioning works and replacing with more appropriate choices.

*Statement of the Problem***.** Institutional portraiture, paintings, and other visual art affect students, staff, and faculty’s sense of belonging1. Portraits and paintings are visual demonstrations of an institution’s values. When portraits lack diversity, they convey that the institution values whiteness, elitism, maleness, and power. Indeed, student at other universities have identified places where all white men adorn the walls and describe it as disheartening2. Moreover, faculty from one university have called out other universities publicly for the lack of diversity in our portraiture, along the dimensions of gender, race, and ethnicity3. Although there has been progress in individual departments or buildings4, it is slow and far from universal. Current events have only increased the sense of urgency in addressing this disparity.

*Science Behind the Problem*. Non-diverse institutional portraiture can be a marker of institutionalized sexism and racism from the institution’s history to the present day. Such portraiture creates an environment conducive to stereotype threat, where minority students, staff, and faculty may feel pressured to conform to negative stereotypes of their social group5. By reinforcing the stereotype that scientists and other scholars are white cisgender men6,7,8, environments of this kind threaten the academic performance, future aspirations, self-knowledge, and sense of belonging in minority genders, races, and ethnicities9,10,11. Moreover, descriptive information (such as visual information) about current leaders can drive peoples’ implicit expectations about who should and should not be a leader12,13. Exposure to diverse role models can combat these negative influences14,15,16,17, and help to offset the pervasive bias against minority students displayed by faculty and others18,19,20,21. In addition to portraying diverse scholarly role models, images that celebrate [UNIVERSITY X]’S community at every level -- from groundskeepers to presidents -- can convey a positive vision of an inclusive culture.

*Societal Ramifications.* Diverse portraiture can affect the way in which non-minority people view minorities, and behave with and towards them in the future22. The problem of non-diverse institutional portraiture, paintings, and other visual content does not only impact how students, staff, and faculty perceive their place and future while within [UNIVERSITY X]’s buildings. The problem does not onlyimpact their performance within these walls. The problem has the potential to markedly impact the values held by non-minority students, staff, and faculty as well as their cultural perceptions, and their subsequent actions towards gender and racial minorities within our broader [NAME OF UNIVERSITY X’s TOWN] community and beyond.

[UNIVERSITY X] leadership can take action to diversify the portraits and related visual art lining [UNIVERSITY X] hallways, classrooms, and meeting spaces. In doing so, they will be following the lead of other institutions23,24,25 that seek to recognize the achievements of diverse role models and convey that professional possibilities and places of work are open to persons of any sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity.

Sincerely,

[UNIVERSITY X] *faculty, staff, and students*: [ORIGINAL GROUP LEADING INITIATIVE]

*& signatories below*

**Evolving List of Locations:**

1. X
2. Y
3. Z

Marked gender and racial disparities exist in the academic disciplines pursued in these [UNIVERSITY X] spaces26, including geoscience27,28, astronomy29,30, neuroscience31,32, physics33,34,35,36, engineering, biology18,33, chemistry, medicine, business, among others, making these efforts particularly critical.

**Signatories:**

1. X
2. Y
3. Z

**References**:

[0] [UNIVERSITY X’s WRITTEN STANCE ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION]

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[2] <https://cen.acs.org/careers/diversity/Chemists-grapple-lack-diversity-displayed/97/i37>

[3] Dr. Mark Peifer, the Michael Hooker Distinguished Professor at the University of North Carolina, and an Elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. <https://twitter.com/peiferlabunc/status/1216121311107436544>

[4] [MENTION EXISTING INITIATIVES WITHIN SPECIFIC DEPARTMENTS OR CENTERS ON UNIVERSITY X’s CAMPUS TO ACKNOWLEDGE ANY PREVIOUS EFFORT.]

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