

ALMOST NO BLACK FACULTY AT CALTECH

❑ Almost No Black Faculty at CalTech

Twenty percent of the curriculum required of CalTech students is in the social sciences and humanities, fields in which there are significant numbers of highly qualified black academics. Therefore, the fact that CalTech concentrates in the hard sciences provides only a flimsy excuse for the fact that the university has a faculty that is less than one percent black.



The California Institute of Technology is one of the world's great institutions of higher education, often ranked at the very top of universities in the United States. As is expected of an institution of great distinction, CalTech requires all students to undergo an extensive curriculum in the humanities and the social sciences.

CalTech's famed "Geeks Steeped in the Greeks" program is designed to graduate scientists who are well-rounded in all disciplines. It is a core belief at CalTech that scientists versed in the humanities and the social sciences will be better prepared to become leaders of society, to prepare strong grant proposals, to explain the complexities of their work to nonscientists, and to navigate the political and social minefields that often lie in the path of scientific research.

CalTech students are required to complete about 20 percent of all coursework in the humanities and social sciences. But make no mistake, science is still king at CalTech. At the current time, only 40 students at the university are majoring in the social sciences and only three students are majoring in the humanities.

CalTech's concentration on a science curriculum has been a major barrier in attracting black students, many of whom shy away from science and in many cases have been steered away from the sciences while in high school.

"Only two, or less than one percent, of CalTech's faculty members are black."

Today, less than 2 percent of CalTech's approximately 950 undergraduate students are black. Twice over the past 10 years in which JBHE has been collecting data CalTech admitted a first-year class without any black students. This current academic year there are three black freshmen at CalTech.

While the absence of a core of black students at CalTech may be partly explained by the institution's concentration on a science curriculum, we must note that at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a university with a similar emphasis and curriculum, blacks make up more than 6 percent of the undergraduate student body.

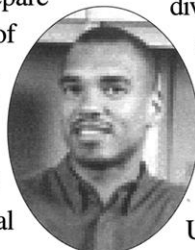
Black Faculty at CalTech

Now, what about faculty? Today, two CalTech faculty members are black. This is less than one percent of CalTech's 276 faculty members. At MIT, in comparison, 3 percent of the faculty is black.

Certainly the fact that science dominates the curriculum at CalTech works against efforts to produce a racially diverse faculty at the university. But, as stated earlier, CalTech students must take 20 percent of their courses in the social sciences and humanities. There are 42 faculty members in the division of humanities and social sciences at CalTech. Not one of these professors is black.

One would expect that a sincere effort to produce a racially diversified faculty would produce at least one black professor in the fields of art, music, literature, history, or political science. But this is not the case. Both black faculty members at CalTech are in fact scientists.

Stephen Leon Mayo is an associate professor of biology and chemistry. A graduate of Pennsylvania State University, Mayo earned his Ph.D. in chemical engineering at CalTech in 1987. He also teaches at the University of Southern California medical school.



Stephen L. Mayo

Professor Mayo concentrates on investigating protein structure and stability. Mayo expects to use this research to design, build, and test proteins with novel biochemical properties. His research has numerous applications in medical and industrial biotechnology.

Sossina M. Haile is an associate professor of materials science at CalTech. A graduate of MIT, Haile earned her master's degree at Berkeley before returning to MIT for her doctorate. She came to CalTech in 1996 after teaching for one year at the University of Washington.



Sossina M. Haile

Professor Haile's research involves proton-conducting solid acid compounds. The practical applications of this research involve fuel cell technology and other processes for converting heat into electricity.