

**REPORT ON THE COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF MINORITY GROUPS IN THE  
ECONOMICS PROFESSION (CSMGEP)  
December 2006**

The Committee on the Status of Minority Groups in the Economics Profession (CSMGEP) was established by the American Economic Association (AEA) in the early 1970s to oversee a “pipeline program” to increase the representation of minority groups in the economics profession and to monitor the racial and ethnic diversity of the profession. This report begins with recent data on the numbers and proportions of minorities studying economics at the undergraduate and graduate levels; it also reports results from a recent survey of minority faculty in economics departments. It then presents updated information on the two components of the Pipeline Program the CSMGEP oversees: the Summer Program and the Mentoring Program. Finally, it summarizes the Committee’s activities this past year.

**Data on Minority Economists and those in the Pipeline**

In this report we summarize data collected by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation’s *Survey of Earned Doctorates* (made available through the Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology) on the numbers of bachelor’s and doctoral degrees awarded in economics to U.S. citizens and permanent residents by race and ethnicity. In addition, we report on the annual survey data from the Universal Academic Questionnaire of the American Economic Association (UAQ) on the numbers of economics faculty, again by race and ethnicity in 2005.

As shown in Table 1, between 1995 and 2001 there were between 16,000 and 18,000 bachelor’s degrees in economics awarded to U.S. citizens and permanent residents annually (temporary residents comprise about 1,700 bachelor’s degrees each year). Throughout this six year period, the percentage of these degrees awarded to African Americans decreased slightly. While African Americans comprised 6.6% of degrees in 1995, they comprised 5.9% of degrees in 2001. The percentage of bachelor’s degrees awarded to Native Americans has remained fairly constant at about 0.4% (i.e., there were 73 bachelor’s degrees awarded to Native Americans in 1995 and 68 awarded in 2001). In contrast, the percentage of degrees awarded to Hispanics has slightly increased from 4.9% to 5.6%.

**Table 1. Percentage of Bachelor's Degrees in Economics Awarded to Minority Students, 1995-2001**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>African Americans (%)</b>	<b>Hispanics (%)</b>	<b>Native Americans (%)</b>
1995	17,393	6.6	4.9	0.4
1996	16,109	6.3	5.2	0.4
1997	15,877	5.8	5.2	0.4
1998	16,461	5.9	5.2	0.4
1999	NA	NA	NA	NA
2000	17,709	5.9	5.5	0.4
2001	18,553	5.9	5.6	0.4

Source: Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology. Data derived from the National Science Foundation, WebCASPAR Database System, based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Completions Surveys; only U.S. citizens and permanent residents are included.

The percentage of degrees awarded in economics to minorities, as a group, remained roughly constant at 11% between 1992 and 2002. In contrast, the percentage of degrees awarded to minorities increased when all fields are combined. For example, the percentage of degrees awarded to minorities in science and engineering increased from 13.5% in 1992 to 16.4% in 2002; the percentage of degrees awarded to minorities increased from 15% to 17.9% in all social sciences (which include economics).

**Table 2. Percentage of Bachelor's Degrees Awarded in All Fields to Minority Students, 1995-2001**

Year	Econ. (%)	All Fields (%)	Total Science & Eng. (%)	Math (%)	Psychology (%)	All Social Sciences (%)
1995	11.9	13.9	13.5	12.1	14.9	15.0
1996	12.0	14.7	14.1	12.8	15.8	15.9
1997	11.5	15.2	14.8	13.8	16.9	16.8
1998	11.5	15.7	15.3	14.6	17.6	17.2
1999	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2000	11.8	16.5	16.2	14.4	19.4	17.8
2001	11.8	16.9	16.4	13.8	19.6	17.9

Sources: the Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology (CPST). The data on the percentage of bachelor's degrees in economics awarded to minorities is derived from the National Science Foundation, WebCASPAR Database System, based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Completions Surveys; only U.S. citizens and permanent residents are included. Data for all other columns is derived from national Science Foundation, *Science and Engineering Degrees by Race/Ethnicity of Recipients: 1992-2001*; only U.S. citizens and permanent residents are included.

Table 3 shows the percentage of doctoral degrees awarded to minority students from 1993 to 2002. The total number of doctorates awarded in economics has declined slightly from 447 in 1993 to 381 in 2002. Unfortunately, the number of minorities who were awarded these degrees has decreased even faster – from 34 in 1993 to 27 in 2002. As a result, the percentage of doctoral degrees awarded to minorities in economics has decreased slightly from nearly 8% in 1993 (reaching a record 9% in 1999) to 7% today. However, this decrease was not evenly distributed across races and ethnicities. The percentage of African Americans receiving these degrees has decreased from about 4% in 1993 to 3% in 2002. In contrast, the percentage of degrees awarded to Hispanics has increased slightly from 3% in the early 1990 to about 4% in 2002. The percentage of degrees awarded to Native Americans ranges from 0 to 0.5% (or between 0 and 2 students).

**Table 3. Percentage of Doctoral Degrees in Economics Awarded to Minority Students, 1993-2002**

Year	Total	Total Minority	Minority (%)	African American (%)	Hispanics (%)	Native Americans (%)
1993	447	34	7.6	4.5	3.1	0
1994	483	32	6.6	3.9	2.7	0
1995	523	35	6.7	4.2	2.3	0.2
1996	518	37	7.2	3.7	3.5	0
1997	488	41	8.4	3.7	4.5	0.2
1998	480	40	8.4	3.8	4.6	0
1999	459	42	9.1	5.0	3.9	0.2
2000	440	35	8.0	4.1	3.9	0
2001	395	27	6.9	2.3	4.1	0.5
2002	381	27	7.0	3.1	3.9	0

Source: Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology. Data derived from the National Science Foundation, *Survey of Earned Doctorates* from 2002 and previous years and only includes U.S. citizens and permanent residents.

Table 4 shows how the percentage of doctoral degrees awarded to minorities (i.e., African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans combined) has changed between 1993 and 2002 in selected other fields. Whereas the percentage of doctorates awarded to minority students in economics has fallen slightly, the percentage in all fields has increased from 8.3% in 1993 to just under 12% in 2002. This increase is evident in all science and engineering fields, psychology, mathematics, and all social sciences combined (which include economics).

**Table 4. Percentage of Doctoral Degrees in Other Fields Awarded to Minority Students, 1993-2002**

Year	Econ. (%)	All Fields (%)	Total Science & Eng. (%)	Math (%)	Psychology (%)	All Social Sciences (%)
1993	7.6	8.3	6.4	4.2	8.4	10.0
1994	6.6	7.9	6.1	4.0	8.6	9.0
1995	6.7	8.3	6.3	2.9	9.7	9.5
1996	7.2	8.7	6.9	3.1	10.6	9.4
1997	8.4	9.1	7.3	4.5	10.9	9.6
1998	8.4	10.0	8.2	6.9	12.1	11.1
1999	9.1	10.9	8.8	4.6	12.8	12.0
2000	8.0	10.8	8.9	5.4	13.1	11.5
2001	6.9	10.9	8.9	6.9	12.1	12.1
2002	7.0	11.8	9.5	6.6	13.3	12.7

Source: Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology. Data derived from the National Science Foundation, *Survey of Earned Doctorates* from 2002 and previous years and only includes U.S. citizens and permanent residents.

Finally, we report the number of minority faculty in academic institutions; these figures are in Table 5. Overall, among the 231 departments that responded to the UAQ Survey, minorities represented 5.1% of the full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty. Minorities comprised a

greater share of the tenured and tenure-track faculty in the economics departments of PhD-granting institutions (5.5%) than in either the Master's degree-granting institutions (4.2%) or the bachelor's degree-granting institutions (4.8%).<sup>1</sup> Note, however, that the distribution by whether the individual is Black or Hispanic differs. For example, there were 70 full-time tenured or tenure-track Hispanics in PhD-granting institutions compared to only 23 African Americans. In contrast, there were approximately equal numbers of Blacks and Hispanics at the master's degree- and bachelor's degree-granting institutions.

Overall, approximately 54% of full-time tenured or tenure-track economists are at PhD-granting institutions and 31% at bachelor's degree-granting institutions. Blacks with such positions are, thus, under-represented at PhD-granting institutions (only 38% of full-time tenured or tenure-track Blacks are at such institutions) and over-represented at bachelor's-degree institutions. In contrast, 70% of full-time tenured or tenure-track Hispanic economists are at PhD-granting institutions compared to 21% at bachelor's degree-granting institutions.

The distribution across the ranks also differs by race and ethnicity. Overall, 51% of full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty are full professors, 23% are associate professors, and 25% are assistant professors. This compares to 37%, 30%, and 28% respectively for Blacks; and 30%, 14%, and 54% for Hispanics. While both Blacks and Hispanics are underrepresented among full professors, there are signs of progress in the pipeline, particularly among Hispanics.

There is a ratio of 13 full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members to 1 full-time non-tenure-track faculty member among all reporting departments. This ratio is 12 to 1 for Blacks and 25 to 1 for Hispanics. Similarly, while, overall, there is a ratio of 5.2 to 1 part-time (either tenured, tenure-track, or non-tenure-track) to full-time tenured or tenure-track economists, the ratio is 3.3 to 1 among Blacks and 5.5 to 1 among Hispanics. Thus, there is little evidence that minority economists are disproportionately relegated to these less prestigious positions.

While not shown on the table, there were also three full-time Native Americans in departments that responded to the survey; there were no Native Americans employed part-time.

We note that these figures, while suggestive, must be interpreted with caution. First, the response rate to the survey is quite low, at approximately 25%. As such, the data may not be representative, particularly if departments with greater, or fewer, numbers of minority faculty are more likely to respond. Second, we could not distinguish non-response from legitimate zeros. We chose to assume these were true zeros which would lead us to understate the extent of racial and ethnic diversity in economics departments.

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<sup>1</sup> PhD-granting institutions are those that award the PhD as the highest degree; master's degree-granting institutions award the master's as the highest degree; and bachelor's degree-granting institutions award the bachelor's as the highest degree.

**Table 5: Numbers and Distribution of Faculty by Type of Institution and Race/Ethnicity (2005-2006)**

	Number of Institutions in Sample	Full-time Tenured or tenure track					Full-time Non-tenure track	Part time	
		Full	Associate	Assistant	Other	Total		Tenured/Tenure track	Non-tenure track
Ph.D. institution	72								
<i>Total</i>		950	306	429	17	1,702	124	26	203
<i>Black</i>		9	5	8	1	23	2	1	3
<i>Hispanic</i>		22	7	40	1	70	1	0	5
M.A. institution	36								
<i>Total</i>		226	137	95	13	471	34	31	143
<i>Black</i>		4	5	2	0	11	1	1	4
<i>Hispanic</i>		5	3	1	0	9	1	4	8
B.A. institution	123								
<i>Total</i>		424	274	251	27	976	76	48	153
<i>Black</i>		9	8	7	2	26	2	4	5
<i>Hispanic</i>		3	4	13	1	21	2	1	0
All Institutions	231								
<i>Total</i>		1,600	717	775	57	3,149	234	105	499
<i>Black</i>		22	18	17	3	60	5	6	12
<i>Hispanic</i>		30	14	54	2	100	4	5	13

Notes: Racial and ethnic representation includes U.S. citizens and permanent residents only. Includes faculty on leave during 2005-06, but excludes visiting appointments. A person who is full-time at the institution but only part-time in the economics department is considered full time. Non-responses to racial and ethnic diversity could not be distinguished from blanks representing zeros; thus all blanks were treated as zeros. Therefore, racial and ethnic representation may be under-represented.

Source: Universal Academic Questionnaire

## Pipeline Program

Concerned about the underrepresentation of members of historically disadvantaged ethnic and racial groups, 30 years ago the AEA established a program to improve the “pipeline” of minority economists, the Summer Program. Recognizing that it is not only important to enroll students in graduate programs, but that they also complete them, nearly 10 years ago the Committee created a mentorship program, the Mentoring Program (formerly known as the “Pipeline Project”), for students accepted or enrolled in a PhD program in economics; recently eligibility for the program has been extended to new PhDs as well. The Committee refers to the two programs (and any others that might be developed) as the AEA’s Pipeline Program.

### *The Summer Program*

Duke University has been the host of the Summer Program since 2003, although the summer of 2007 will be its last year to host the program. The program currently has two levels — Foundations (advanced undergraduate/beginning master’s degree) and Advanced (master’s degree level). While the program is open to all U.S. citizens and permanent residents, individuals from racial or ethnic groups whose U.S. citizens have been historically disadvantaged are given preference for a scholarship. Further, there is a slight preference for students from non-research colleges and universities. Last summer, the program hosted 45 students with 36 of them receiving scholarships. As shown in Table 6, below, 24 (53%) of the 45 students were African American; 8 (18%) Hispanic, 1 was Native American, 3 were Indochinese American, and 9 (20%) were not minority. Although not shown here, 60% of students were male.

**Table 6**  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF AEA SUMMER PROGRAM STUDENTS, 2003-2006**

MINORITY	2006	2005	2004	2003
African-American	24	22	19	19
Hispanic	8	9	14	8
Native American	1	1	0	2
Indochinese – American	3	3	3	1
Filipino-American	0	1	0	0
Non-minority	9	3	0	0
TOTAL	45	39	36	30

To date there has been only one formal attempt to assess the success of the Summer Program at achieving its objective of increasing minority representation in doctoral programs in economics and related fields. In “The Causal Effects of Participation in the American Economic Association Summer Minority Program” (*Southern Economic Journal*, July 2005), Gregory Price finds that Summer Program alumni were more productive in academic terms than comparable non-alumni economists. A much larger effort to assess the program is now underway, involving CSMGEP Chair Cecilia Rouse (Princeton), NEA President Gregory Price (Jackson State), former AEASP

administrative assistant and alumna Sue Stockly, now on the faculty at Eastern New Mexico, and the Summer Program director Charles Becker (Duke).

In the meantime, we turn to student responses regarding their interest in economics before entering and after completing the program, as well as graduate school attendance rates to judge its effectiveness. Student responses (excluding one student who did not answer the “before” question, but indicated “very likely” on the “after” question) from 2006 indicate that the program increases interest in attaining a doctoral degree in economics. As shown in Table 7, before entering the program 49% of students thought they were “very likely” or “certain” to enter a PhD program in economics; after the summer that percentage had increased to 87%.

**Table 7**

*How would you describe the probability that you will enter a Ph.D. program in Economics? – 2006*

Of those in the category below BEFOREHAND:	Number in this category AFTERWARD:				
	Total	Unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely	Certain
		<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>
Unlikely	<b>5</b>	1	0	2	2
Somewhat likely	<b>15</b>	0	1	9	5
Very likely	<b>9</b>	1	2	3	3
Certain	<b>10</b>	0	0	0	10

As the previous table only reflects intent, we next look at actual progression to graduate programs among the 162 participants during the period 2001-06 (based on some but incomplete information about applications for the coming academic year). We have:

**Table 8**

**PROGRESSION TO DOCTORAL PROGRAMS, AEA MINORITY SCHOLARS, 2001-2006**

As of September 2006; including Fall 2006 entries

Total number of participants, AEASP 2001-2006		162
<i>Of whom:</i>	Entered PhD programs in Economics/related fields	64
	Still enrolled	52
	No longer enrolled	12
	Entered MA programs in Economics/related fields	38
	Eventual progression to PhD expected	12
	PhD progression possible but not certain	11
	Progression to PhD unlikely	15
	No graduate experience (undergraduate or BA complete)	37
	Eventual progression to PhD expected	25
	PhD progression possible but not certain	9
	Progression to PhD unlikely	3
	Progression to PhD program not expected	23
Eventual total progression to PhD (excluding those no longer enrolled and not planning to return)		
	(a) enrolled + expected	89 (55%)
	(b) enrolled + expected + possible but not certain	109 (67%)

Nearly 40% of the participants ever-enrolled in a PhD program in economics or a related field; over one-half have either enrolled or expect to enroll. While these figures do not include a counterfactual, it is important to keep in mind that there were only 27 doctoral degrees awarded to minorities in 2002 and that two-thirds of the Summer Program students have come from non-research institutions that typically do not send students to graduate school. Previous reports to the AEA that compare these figures to total minority enrollments in Economics suggest that the Summer Program's overall impact is to increase the long run supply of minority economists by about 25%, and possibly more, especially if attrition rates prove lower.

The cost of the Summer Program is approximately \$700,000 per year; the two major expenses are faculty and staff salaries and student scholarships. The major funding comes from Duke University (\$300,000), the National Science Foundation (NSF) (\$120,000), the AEA (\$105,000), Moodys Investor Services (\$15,000), and RAND (\$10,000). Longstanding contributions from the Citigroup Foundation (\$20,000) and the MacArthur Foundation (about \$46,000/year) have ended. A critical issue for the future of the program will be the level and structure of its funding.

### *The Mentoring Program*

Aimed at those starting or completing doctorate degrees in economics and new doctorates, the Mentoring Program matches African-American, Latino, and Native American economics PhD students with mentors in the field, and also facilitates networking between minority economists and students at all stages of the educational and professional pipeline. Participants must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

Currently there are 26 graduate student mentees in the program. They are enrolled in PhD programs at Cornell University, University of Michigan, University of California-Berkeley, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Georgia State University, Ohio State University, University of Texas-Austin, and University of North Carolina. Recent graduates of the program have earned their degrees at Brown University, Duke University, MIT, Pennsylvania State University, the University of California-Santa Barbara, and the University of Florida.

In addition, recognizing that new PhDs often need just as much mentoring as graduate students, there are also 14 assistant professors and 3 professional economists who are mentees. The Assistant Professors hold positions at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University, Denison University, Harvard University, Ohio State, Pomona College, Syracuse University, The New School, the University of Maryland, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Toledo, Weber State, Western New England College, and Yale University. The professional economists hold positions at Mathematica Policy Research, Center for Naval Analysis, and the National Urban League Institute for Opportunity and Equality.

We have 4 students that participated in the Summer Program, but are in the process of deciding whether to pursue a PhD.

Similarly the mentors represent a wide variety of institutions, including Cornell University, Florida State University, Georgia Tech, North Carolina A&T State University, Michigan State

University, Rutgers University, Stanford University, Swarthmore College, Tufts University, the University of Arizona, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Maryland, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University of Michigan, the University of Minnesota, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of South Florida.

During 2006, three mentees entered the profession. Larry Chavis (Stanford Graduate School of Business) is now an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC Chapel Hill); Leopoldo (Polo) Sota (UC Santa Barbara) took a position at the Center for Naval Analysis; and Valerie Rawlston Wilson (UNC Chapel Hill) is Senior Resident Scholar at the National Urban League Institution for Opportunity and Equality. In addition, two students are currently seeking employment on the academic job market.

The Pipeline Conference is the primary activity of the Mentoring Program. The Conference is held each summer during the Pipeline Program's Summer Program. This year, 8 newly-minted PhDs attended, as did 16 graduate students, and 26 mentors and friends of the program (in addition to all of the Summer Program students) bringing attendance to an all-time high. Participants presented papers and heard general sessions on the early years of a tenure-track position, nonacademic job opportunities, and on "Writing with Numbers" by Rutgers Professor Jane Miller who recently published a University of Chicago Press book on the subject. (The powerpoint presentations can be found on the CSMGEP website.) Overall participants rated the conference quite highly.

The Mentoring Program also provides funding for collaborative research projects between mentors and mentees. The awards range from \$750 to \$1,000 and can be used for research expenses such as travel (that allow the mentor and mentee to work together), data, or other research-related expenses.

While the Mentoring Program has not been formally evaluated (although discussions are underway with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct a formal evaluation), participants have been happy with the program. For example, according to his mentor, Peter Henry (Stanford Business School), Larry Chavis (who accepted a tenure-track position at UNC-Chapel Hill) believes that the mentoring program was critical to his success. Even though his mentor did not work directly in his field, Larry found it extremely helpful to have someone outside his committee to advise him on coursework, research, and the job market.

The cost of the Mentoring Program is about \$40,000 per year, the majority of which is used to fund the annual Pipeline Conference. This program is currently funded from a grant from the NSF which will expire next year. In addition, this past spring the family of Dr. Robert McGuckin, director of economic research at the Conference Board and former chief of the Center for Economic Studies at the U.S. Census Bureau, generously requested that in lieu of flowers that those who wished to honor his memory should make contributions to our Mentoring Program. They chose the CSMGEP Mentoring Program because of Dr. McGuckin's dedication to nurturing young economists. We are honored and deeply indebted to his family for this recognition.

### **The Committee's Recent and On-going Activities**

As next summer will be the last that the Summer Program will reside at Duke University, a major activity of the Committee this year was to solicit proposals from institutions interested in hosting the program and recommending a new host to the AEA Executive Committee. We began this process last spring and selected our choice in early November. The Chair is quite grateful to all of the members of the Committee as well as Charlie Becker, current Director of the Summer Program, for reading the preliminary and final proposals so carefully and for their time and effort in choosing our recommendation for the next host of the Summer Program.

Fundraising for the Pipeline Program is a top priority. In an effort to raise money, the CSMGEP organized a meeting at the NSF which was attended by representatives of the major government agencies that employ economists. The purpose of the meeting was to brief the representatives on the components of our Pipeline Program and to investigate the possibility that they could contribute to the programs either through in-kind or financial contributions. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Boston Federal Reserve Bank, the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Federal Reserve Bank Board of Governors, the Government Accounting Office (GAO), the Social Security Administration, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The effort yielded support from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and likely from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's ERS. The Chair is especially grateful to Richard Lempert, Dan Newlon and Kaye Husbands of the NSF for hosting the meeting.

In addition, with the help of Bo Honoré, the chair of the Princeton University economics department, we are also approaching the chairs of economics departments to ask for their support for the Pipeline Program. While we certainly hope to raise funds for the programs through this effort, we also hope to highlight the AEA's efforts in this area which may generate interest in more institutions hosting the Summer Program and create a valuable network of supporters for recruitment of mentors and for students for the Summer Program. We also believe that by demonstrating widespread support for the programs, it will make it easier to raise additional revenues. The Committee is extremely grateful to Bo for his unwavering support of the Pipeline Program and for his time and effort in this initiative.

This January, the CSMGEP is hosting a Dissertation Session at AEA meetings. The four participants will be: Carmen Carrion-Flores, University of Arizona – "What Makes You Go Back Home? Determinants of the Duration of Migration of Mexican Immigrants in the U.S."; Omar Galarraga, Johns Hopkins University – "The Employment Effect of Antidepressants for Women Living with HIV in the U.S.: Evidence from the Women's Interagency HIV Study (WIHS), 1994-2004"; Nicholas J. Hill, Jackson State University – "Is It Really Safe Sex? Analyzing the Causal Link between Contraceptive Use and Crime Rates"; and Adrian Price, Jackson State University – "The Macroeconomy and Health Insurance Coverage of Minorities." The Chair thanks Sue Stockly for organizing this session.

This year we also created a CSMGEP website. The site: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/AEA/CSMGEP/index.htm>, not only contains information about the Pipeline Program, but also has resources for students interested in pursuing careers in economics and for department chairs interested in increasing the representation of minorities among their

graduate students. In addition, we have started a series in which we profile graduates from the Pipeline Program. The first profile is of Dr. Lisa Cook, an assistant professor of economics at Michigan State and an alumnus of the Summer Program. We thank Susan Houston at the AEA as well as Antonio Barrera and Barbara Ray for their gracious assistance with these endeavors.

Finally, the Chair would like to thank John Siegfried and Edda Leitner for patiently answering many (many) questions this past year. She also thanks Susan Collins for help assembling the data on the representation of minorities in the economics profession. Sadly, the terms of two committee members end in December – those of Juliet Elu and Peter Henry. They have both been committed members of the Committee and provided much guidance and assistance on important matters.