Last September, the School of Arts and Sciences welcomed 20 new members of the standing faculty, ranging from a specialist in African-American art to a researcher in nanoscale materials. They have already made their mark on teaching and research in the School. Hardly pausing to take a breath, this year we have launched searches for 45 new faculty members, an ambitious undertaking that marks the first stage of our effort to increase the size of the faculty by 10 percent in five years. This growth will significantly enhance the quality of our teaching, making for smaller classes and more individual contact between students and faculty. It will also allow us to make investments in the multidisciplinary initiatives our plan outlines while sustaining our strengths in the traditional academic disciplines.

If the School’s mission is to advance the frontiers of knowledge and educate the next generation, then the faculty – working with staff and students – is the heart and soul of what we do. Our faculty is committed to groundbreaking research and to inspirational teaching, deeply versed in the disciplines and adroit at moving across new fields of knowledge and ways of thinking. In the searches now underway, we are looking for multidimensional faculty members who reflect the spirit of the School in its commitment to integrated knowledge.

We want to bring to the University scholars and educators with a multiplicity of perspectives, experiences and disciplinary approaches – a diversity of ideas, a diversity of methodologies and also a diversity of people, since a scholar’s ideas and perspectives are informed by life experience as well as academic training. Debate – the free-flowing exchange of ideas and points of view – makes knowledge and learning strong. A diverse faculty is key to building a vigorous and well-rounded academic community that can engage in the many-sided discussions that feed the search for truth. It is at the very heart of what it means to be a great university – a microcosm of a democratic society.

We know it will be a challenge to increase faculty size, because we must compete with our peers by offering comparable salaries, funding, research time and state-of-the-art research and teaching facilities. High-quality laboratories, libraries and classrooms are not luxuries; they are spaces that nourish and support intellectual community and effective teaching. We must provide all faculty members with the support they need to live up to the School’s high expectations.

Another crucial tool for building a great faculty is endowed chairs. Named chairs, along with the research stipends that accompany them, are one of the most important ways to entice top scholars to come to our campus and to retain our own accomplished, high-profile scholars who become targets of recruitment by other universities in a highly competitive market.

All of these interlocking facets for building a great faculty are integral parts of the School’s strategic plan. Every great research university depends upon the rich, broad and thriving intellectual perspectives of the arts and sciences. A faculty of unquestioned distinction and of sufficient size is the cornerstone for achieving everything we want to accomplish in the School of Arts and Sciences. It is the foundation upon which eminence is built. ■