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LEADERS OF TODAY MINORITIES TAKE TOP ROLES IN **SU** STUDENT GOVERNMENT

Jennifer Jacobs Staff writer

Throughout Syracuse University's history, the students elected president of the student body were almost always white.

Until recently. Seven of the past nine presidents have been students of color.

This year, a black student, Colin Seale, is president, and Shawn Hardie, who is also black, is vice president.

"What this says is there's a groundswell of interest and ability within the minority population and they've seen other examples that this is doable," said Barry L. Wells, senior vice president and dean of student affairs.

Franklin **Redd** took up the battle cry to change student government in 1987 and became the first black president of a 17-year-old assembly that advocated for all undergraduate students. It was called the Student Government Association at that time.

Before that, "black students were very concerned about their inability to have an **SGA** president," Wells said. They felt minority student organizations did not receive sufficient funding, "and there was obviously some felt racial overtones to that," he said.

Redd was "an exceptional young man" - a football player and member of the track team who taught literacy skills in the community.

"I was very impressed he could see beyond the boundaries of studies and sports," Wells said. "He was mature beyond his years."

Wells recalls advising **Redd** and other students to "learn and master the system, to be assertive and become very engaged." **Redd's** success had a snowball effect.

"Once you sort of break the mold and students say, 'Oh my goodness, we actually had an African American who led the student body,' they said, 'The rest of us can do that as well,'" said Wells, who has been with **SU** for 26 years.

About nine minority students have risen to **SU's** top student leadership position since 1970, the year the current model for the student assembly was created, Wells said. (There was one black president before that, John DeVeaux, but he led a men's-only student government in 1958.)

The burst of students of color rising to **SU's** top student leadership spot gives insight into the level of acceptance and appreciation of diversity on campus, said James Duah-Agyeman, director of **SU's** Office of Multicultural Affairs.

"If students are voting for their peers and the final vote happens to be a person of color then, to me, the students are voting across racial lines," Duah-Agyeman said.

LaToya Burton, president of **SU's** Student African American Society, believes the students elected president conveyed opinions during their campaigns that voting students agreed with.

"They stood for what students wanted," said Burton, a 21-year-old senior studying environmental design interiors.

Minorities at **SU**

Minority students elected president of the Syracuse University student body since 1970:

Franklin **Redd**, an African American, in 1987-1988

Ernest Smith, an African American, in 1989-1990

Seana LaPlace, the first female African-American president, in 1994-1995

Andrew C. Davidson, an African American, 1995-1996

Jesse Mejia, a Mexican American, 1996-1997

Jennifer E. Doherty, an Asian American, 1997-1998

Michael Julius "M.J." Idani, an African American, 1999

Jamal J. James, an African American who is openly gay, 2000

Colin Seale, a black student, 2002

Illustration: Gloria Wright/Staff photographer

COLIN SEALE (left) is president of the student body at Syracuse University and Shawn Hardie is vice president. They are at Schine Student Center.

GRAPHIC: **SU's** student population. The Post-Standard. Note: For text see microfilm.

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