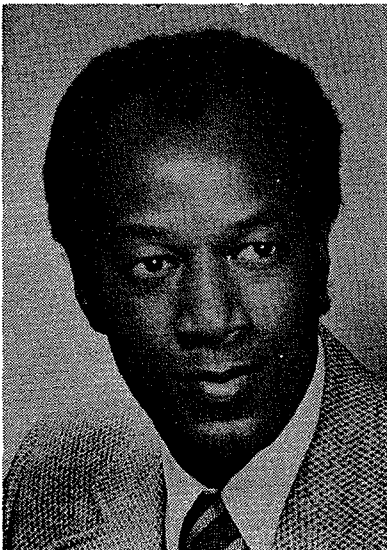


MINORITY ADMISSIONS AND SUPPORT

Robert L. Green

In the last few years we have seen universities address themselves with varying degrees of success to what Fred E. Crossland defined in a Ford Foundation study as the six barriers to minority access in higher education: 1) standardized tests; 2) poor preparation; 3) financial problems; 4) distance from institutions; 5) lack of innovation; and 6) racial obstacles (3).

In 1968, it was estimated that 50 percent of the higher education institutions in the United States had special programs for the economically and educationally disadvantaged but that most of these programs were little more than token efforts (15). In 1971, Crossland reported in his study that some three to four dozen public and private, predominantly white institutions in leadership positions had made commitments to substantially increasing minority enrollment. He defines substantial commitment as efforts to have a freshman class that includes 10 percent or more minority students (3).



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The desire to enroll more minority students, however, has not been easily accomplished. Within the university community, biased attitudes were hidden behind expressed concerns for maintaining academic standards. In reality the university was being asked neither to raise nor lower standards but instead to use a different set of standards which took into account motivational and attitudinal characteristics of individuals as well as the usual intellectual factors (6). Universities were forced to re-examine standardized test scores in light of recent research on the limitations of present test instruments for measurement, prediction and academic evaluation (3).

As a result of increased recruiting by predominantly white universities, the total black enrollment in such institutions increased 172 percent between 1964-70, an increase from 114,000 to 310,000 students. The number of blacks in higher education still remains well below 10 percent of the total black population and at least one third of these black students are at traditionally all-black institutions.

The rate of increase for whites engaged in higher education remains substantially higher than for blacks (11). It is believed by some that continued growth of white, lower-middle-class college and university enrollment will make it impossible for minority enrollment to reach the point at which the ratio of black students to total enrollment equals the ratio of blacks in the total population by 1980. This is true for other minorities also (3).

Black Enrollments "Reshuffled"

The picture at the graduate and professional school level is equally bleak. In 1970, it was reported that only 2.4 percent of the students enrolled in the 98 medical schools in the United States were black. There are 5,500 black doctors in the nation when there should be approximately 25,000 to equal the percentage of doctors in the white population. Similarly, there are only 4,500 black lawyers when there should be 27,000. In addition, less than 2 percent of American graduate school students are black (16). This fact has particular significance when we consider that graduate schools provide the great majority of our future college teachers.

Crossland concluded in his study that many of these early recruitment programs have had even less of an impact than the statistics reveal. He notes that many of these programs merely "reshuffled" black enrollments by attracting to leading white universities those blacks who normally would have gone to traditional black institutions or less prestigious white schools. He notes that many schools sent recruiters south or to the largest northern inner-city areas but failed to direct efforts into their own surrounding black communities (3). Little progress has been made in utilizing black students themselves as minority student recruiters and little interest has been shown within state university systems in forming cooperative recruiting mechanisms to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts and costs.

In order to address the problem of poor high school preparation for many minority students, many universities have instituted tutoring programs. At Michigan State University, for example, a tutoring program was started for minority students in the winter of 1969. A later evaluation of this program

showed that in a sample of 282 nontutored freshmen and 102 tutored freshmen, the grade point averages for nontutored freshmen rose on the average from 2.13 to 2.23 over a term period, while the grade point averages for tutored freshmen rose on the average from 1.82 to 2.24 in this same period (2). In spite of this kind of success, a later review of academic tutoring programs at Michigan State University concluded: "Present support tends to be sparse and devoid of creative attempts to reach the student who is educationally disadvantaged. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the use of experimental courses that are aimed at the inclusion of the experience and the life style of these students." (10)

The continued higher drop-out rate for black freshmen compared to white students indicates a need for more extensive academic tutorial programs.

In addition to academic tutoring, it has been found that special personal counseling must be an integral part of programs to increase minority participation in higher education. The inability to anticipate post-high school education has been a factor in low motivation among black high school students which in turn affects academic performance (16). At the college level, it has been observed that disadvantage may be more of an affective disability than an academic one. Educational psychologist Robert L. Williams writes: "Certainly many black students come to the university with a keen distrust of whites and a deep-seated resistance to authority. Frequently students are so preoccupied with personal and social problems that they have little time and energy to devote to purely academic pursuits. For Negro students the concept of black power and accepting assistance from whites will probably be in painful conflict." (15)

The minority counselor is an essential element in the successful adjustment of a large number of minority students to the white college campus. The counselor provides the necessary orientation to the community for the minority student in terms he can understand. He or she can play a vital role in advising students on selection of courses, the formulation of appropriate career goals, and coping with required new study habits. I have suggested that there should be minority counselors available to work with minority students on campus along with their white counterparts (7).

The greatest threat to increased minority enrollments lies in the proposed cutbacks in student financial aid programs. These are the heart of all recruitment programs and it seems evident that given the current income status of minority citizens, the number of minority college students will decline if such aid is withdrawn. Crossland concluded in his study: "All the evidence seemed to confirm the obvious: minority enrollments simply could not increase to the point of parity unless massive funds for student support were made available. The sums needed nationally clearly would exceed a billion dollars annually, and nothing short of a major change in federal funding practices for higher education could provide resources of such magnitude." (3)

Unlike most white students, the average black student cannot depend on a subsidy for his education from his parents. Furthermore, many black students receiving aid in the form of grants and scholarships have been known

to send part of their allotments home to help support their families. Also, many of these students already enter the university burdened with debts which must be met. Any move toward a greater reliance on loans would negatively affect the desire and ability of minority students to pursue higher education.

Standards Should Not Be Altered

Finally, black student protests have led to a major movement to promote curricular reform throughout the university in general, and for courses and programs reflecting the total black experience in particular. The admission of "high risk" or educationally disadvantaged students gave rise to the question in university communities of whether these "underqualified" students should go through the regular university program or whether a parallel program should be set up to meet their degree requirements. I believe emphatically that no college or university should alter its standards of performance within existing courses in order to insure the success of black students. Black students who demand such programs or demand special treatment within the regular course framework do themselves the greatest disservice. Michigan State University President Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., aptly noted: "One may espouse flexible entrance requirements to insure that those with the potential have the opportunity, but we must also maintain rigid exit requirements if the graduate is to meet the challenge of the outside world. We must insure that black students are ever mindful that the real value of the degree lies in the extent to which it accurately measures a corresponding level of achieved competence and mastery in a field of knowledge". (14)

In advocating major curricular reforms, black students and faculty have called into question the current role of the university in society. They have called on educational institutions to fulfill their responsibilities to train people who will act as social change agents within our new urbanized society. Turner observes that contemporary black students view themselves as an extension of the black community — a group of people responsible for acquiring the technical expertise needed to work effectively in the black community. "They hope to channel whatever dynamism they possess into the building of a viable and productive black community," he contends. "Increasingly, black students are seeking to promulgate a conceptual and theoretical framework within which constructive change may be channeled into the black community. They seek to build; thus, a relevant education becomes a necessity." (13)

Black students have confronted the current college curriculum, criticizing it for lack of relevance to social realities and to future trends; they have voiced the same complaints as white students about lazy instructors, overcrowded classrooms and impersonal student-teacher relationships. Because of this, their demands have received the greatest opposition from a group that is rapidly becoming one of the most conservative elements in the academic community — the faculty. Demands for relevance have been met with polemics on institutional neutrality and the objectivity of the researcher. Despite statements from such noted scholars and researchers as Max Weber and

Gunnar Myrdal on the non-existence of value-free research, white middle-class faculty members have consistently opposed major curriculum reforms proposed by both black and white students on the grounds that the university is not a social action agent.

The demand for new urban and ethnic studies programs, however, has fostered the greatest resistance from the faculty of predominantly white universities. Professor Andrew Billingsley observed: ". . . one of the unanticipated consequences of the demands for black studies has been to expose the bankruptcy of white liberal intellectual scholarships and action. This is due in no small measure to the fact that the demands for black studies go to the heart of the Anglo-conformity doctrine, which in turn is at the heart of the cultural basis of much of what has come to be described as western civilization, of which these white liberal intellectuals have been among the major definers and benefactors." (1)

In light of the seemingly universal concern verbally expressed for minority citizens and the urban problem within the academic community, resistance to the ethnic and urban studies programs must be attributed to bias on both the individual and institutional levels. Much of the hostility has centered on the primary requisite of most proposed ethnic and urban studies centers, that is, that they include blacks and other minorities in key decision-making positions, including black students, faculty, and administrators as planners and implementers of these new and innovative interdisciplinary efforts. Blacks in these capacities provide the vital perspective on the black experience needed to develop these programs and carry them out. In addition, they serve as important role models for black students within the predominantly white setting.

Escape Is Not Strategy for Change

Unfortunately, blacks in the academic community have in some cases added fuel to the fire of white racism through unreasoned demands for new black studies programs planned by blacks and for black students *only*. On both philosophical and pragmatic grounds, I oppose the institution of such black-only programs. Black-only academic programs fail to meet what Genovese has called their two legitimate functions: 1) to provide a setting within which black people can create an intellectual corps equipped to offer leadership on various levels of political action and 2) to help combat the racism of the white community (4). The exclusion of whites as students or teaching faculty subverts this second purpose and therefore defeats half the purpose of such programs.

Blacks who view such self-segregation as self-determination are deluding themselves; no form of racial segregation of this sort is healthy or productive for whites or blacks. Sterling Tucker, director of the Washington, D.C. Urban League, observes: "No perspective on black separatism is complete unless we acknowledge that some of its attraction for blacks springs from the urge to give up, to turn our backs on white America and the galling struggle we must daily face. While the strength of separatism springs from the fact that it answers this need for escape, therein also lies its weakness.

For escape is not a strategy for change." (12) Tucker goes on to state that blacks in America must not be fooled "into believing that we can build a separate society or settle for less than a full and free sharing in American life."

I have the acute knowledge that whites control the resources available to universities and ultimately decide how these resources will be used within universities. Without multiracial support, no program can expect to survive and grow for a sustained period of time within the predominantly white institution. It is true that some such programs have been born in the fires of racial confrontation and not in the light of reason. These programs cannot play a meaningful role in educating young people and in eradicating oppressive conditions in society at large. This can only be done through meaningful, multidisciplinary academic programs cutting across racial lines. While the political climate has helped turn the attention of colleges and universities to equal opportunity issues, academic programs which have experienced politically expedient births are destined to die politically expedient deaths. Our own experience at Michigan State University in developing the College of Urban Development has been to gain the support of the major decision-making bodies of the university through many months of meetings and discussions. The initial college proposal was developed by black and white students and faculty members and then presented for approval through the traditional decision-making channels. The College of Urban Development now rests on a solid academic foundation and is not subject to the cyclical political winds of the university, state and nation. In my opinion, this is the only kind of academic change we should accept.

Having said this, I want to repeat again that while I oppose black studies programs for blacks only, I also oppose black studies programs which are not developed with the very active participation of the total campus minority community. I hold a similar view with regard to minority recruitment, academic tutoring and special counseling programs. Furthermore, I recognize that in the area of certain student services, it is not inappropriate for minority students in the white university to request that the institution provide facilities such as black culture rooms where blacks can feel intimately that they "belong." For the black student in the white university, the issue is not one of adjustment alone, it is a question of surviving and maintaining one's identity as a black person (7). It is important that the white university attempting to assimilate greater numbers of black students take a good look at some of its policies to determine if they are promoting the self-segregation of black students. One such area, for example, is the university's official endorsement, and often financial support, of white sororities and fraternities which have in the past been guilty of *de jure* segregation and continue to be guilty of *de facto* segregation. In this regard, Harper aptly notes: "Black student unrest and stress will remain imminent until blacks can feel a part of the university and feel free to participate in every phase of its community life. Policies must be altered to eliminate vestiges of ethnocentrism in the bureaucratic structure and experiences must be planned in order to

modify the racist attitudes of white students and white university personnel." (9)

In summary, my active involvement in higher education during the past 13 years causes me to have grave concerns that the small but growing commitment of several predominantly white universities to equal opportunity programs will be extinguished in the political climate being created by the National Administration. I have tried to outline how this commitment has grown, the shapes it has taken and some of the problems which have arisen in terms of development and implementation. But it is my feeling that this commitment and the little progress we have made may be wiped out if the appropriate response is not forthcoming from the black and white academic communities.

Richard Nixon was re-elected in 1972 with massive support from the white community and only token, symbolic support from a few well known blacks. Thus, from a pragmatic standpoint, a coalition of blacks and concerned whites need to devise a strategy which will encourage the present Administration to alter its proposed course. The answer, in my view, involves recognition by the black academic community that it cannot go it alone. We need to recreate something of the political climate which we were able to create during the 1960s without resorting to violence. Harper observes that blacks on campus must define rational goals that will be beneficial to themselves and to white peers. He notes: "Black students can be impediments to their own success by trying to be 'too black,' i.e. impressing each other with their loyalty to the race and with their hatred of 'whitey.' Black students must keep their focus on their goals instead of putting on a show for the press or attempting to convince whites of how together they are as a pressure group. Black students cannot afford to reject and alienate the black students who might have white friends or who might not dress black or talk black (9).

The black power movement gave many whites an out in terms of their commitment to racial equality. This was, in my view, a tactical mistake. White students who previously provided manpower in the civil rights movement now were able to say, "We aren't doing anything because they don't want us." This attitude on the part of whites, however, is inappropriate in 1975. We must work to change this attitude through honest and open dialogue in classrooms and in residence halls. University administrators, including the presidents, deans, and department chairmen, must assume leadership roles in fostering these kinds of dialogues. Without the examples from the top, one can expect little from white students and faculty in terms of commitment and action. Whites must be encouraged to realize that the educational, and therefore economic, improvement of minority citizens is actually in the best interests of the total society and that the development of a corps of specially trained professionals seeking to apply advanced technical knowledge to urban problems will lead to a better world for all people.

America's commitment to higher education is unequalled by any other nation in terms of the quality and quantity of research and teaching activities, total student enrollment, and the diversity of its programs. However, unless

the United States continues a commitment to the full involvement of black people in higher education, we will have failed to carry out the basic aim of an educational system as defined by former HEW Secretary, John W. Gardner, who stated: "Ultimately, education serves all of our purposes — liberty, justice and all our other aims — but the one it serves most directly is equality of opportunity. We promise such equality, and education is the instrument by which we hope to make good the promise." (5)

Learning from the past and looking toward the future, blacks and whites must work to realize this promise.

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