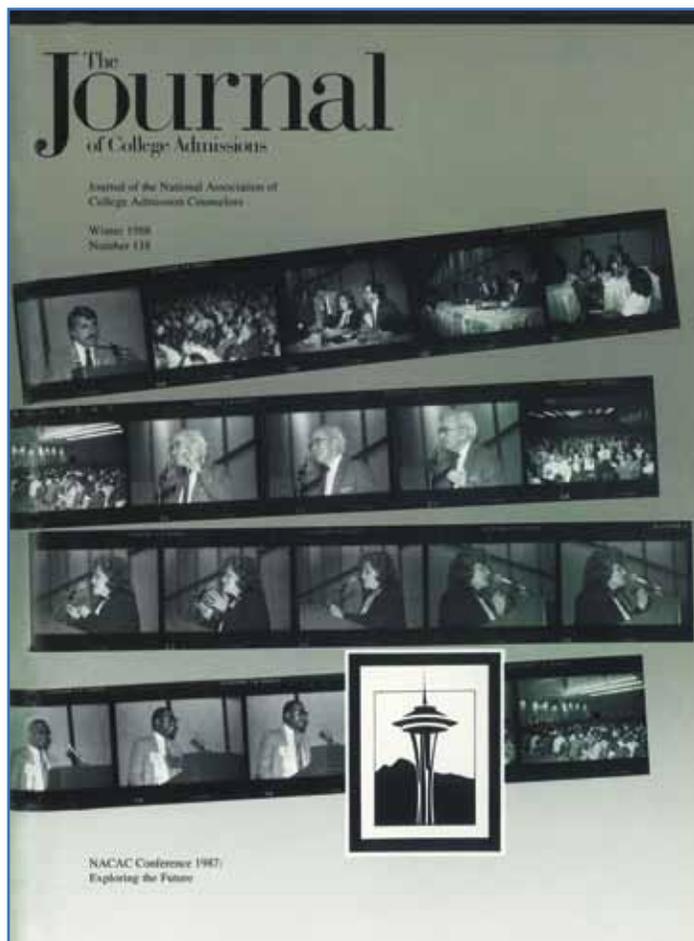


Winter 1988

Minority Access to Higher Education

Response: "Higher Education for the Public Good" by Angel B. Pérez on page 63



Born in the poverty and hostility of southern 'reconstruction,' none of the black colleges in the relatively short span of their existence has been able to amass endowments or to develop the graduate and research facilities of the long-established white institutions. Yet these black colleges have produced a more than creditable number of scholars, scientists, statesmen, and clergymen, whose contributions to America and the world are eloquent argument for their respectability...



From 1988: NATHANIEL JACKSON

In the universe of higher education, there has always been a mission carried out by unique institutions that draw on the talents of extraordinary individuals. These institutions have devoted themselves to the special needs of their students and the communities in which they serve, and their missions reflect concern for providing quality education, fostering the development of new knowledge, and developing a sense of social commitment in their students. To truly understand their contributions, one must appreciate the distinct character of the students, faculty, and staff that provide the vitality and drive of these institutions. The students tend to be first generation college students, many of whom have educational and socioeconomic disadvantages and few clear notions about college. Yet they possess a desire to achieve, and they come to these institutions in search of the American dream.

Access and the Black College

The institutions at which these students seek their dreams are America's historically black colleges and universities. In his recent book *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma*, the noted black sociologist C. Eric Lincoln provided a telling and eloquent description of the historic and contemporary role of the black college:

Born in the poverty and hostility of southern 'reconstruction,' none of the black colleges in the relatively short span of their existence has been able to amass endowments or to develop the graduate and research facilities of the long-established white institutions. Yet these black colleges have produced a more than creditable number of scholars, scientists, statesmen, and clergymen, whose contributions to America and the world are eloquent argument for their respectability...

Of greatest significance has been the success of the black youth in confounding the incredible racial myths and taboos designed to stifle black genius before it is born, and to fix and fortify the parameters of development and achievement before they are tested. More than any other institution, the black college has provided a solid affirmation for black identity, freeing the battered black ego from the nagging doubts which are the inevitable effects of a total life experience washed in prejudice and constraint. (Lincoln, 1984, p. 106)

The capacity of the black college to operate successfully in the often hostile environment in America is testimony to the dedication, intellect, and loyalty of the men and women who provide the leadership and constitute the faculty and staff of the institutions. Since 1865, black colleges have been vibrant and vital members of the college community. In their quest for

educational excellence, the faculty and staff of black colleges have provided the quality of teaching, attention to administrative detail, and, perhaps most importantly, the nurturing that helps to make black colleges unique within the universe of higher education.

As significant as the accomplishments of black colleges have been, however, all colleges and universities are now called upon to educate minority youth. Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian Americans are entitled to equal access to all institutions of higher education. Although black colleges have valuable lessons to share about the education of minority and disadvantaged youth with other institutions, they have neither the resources nor the inclination to be the sole source of higher education for blacks and other minority college students.

Accepting the Broader Challenge

All institutions must be willing to accept the responsibility and meet the challenges associated with educating greater numbers of minority students, who in disproportionate numbers are also disadvantaged. Providing a college education to growing numbers of minority students is difficult for reasons that are historical, racial, and peculiar to institutions of higher learning.

Often, problems exist because society lacks the knowledge to solve them. More often, however, they exist because society lacks the will to solve them. The nation's failure to increase the number of minority students receiving a college education reflects an absence of volition rather than a deficit in knowledge.

Some members of NACAC, many of whom are very knowledgeable of this subject, may doubt that there is a problem. Doubt, however, is an important ingredient in the search for truth, to paraphrase Descartes. And as Voltaire, an other French philosopher said, "Doubt is not a pleasant mental state, but certainty is a ridiculous one."

Two approaches are useful in clarifying the problem of minority access to higher education. One is moral, the other empirical. When the term "higher education" is used in reference to all post secondary institutions, the problem of minority access is less severe than many observers have claimed. As we all know, there has been a substantial increase in the number of minority students attending proprietary schools. Students attending accredited proprietary schools are included in data collected by the Center for Education Statistics. Therefore, these students are included in the figures cited.

On the other hand, some observers claim that many minority students remain unaccounted for because they attend unaccredited proprietary schools not covered by the Center for Education

Statistics' data. Solomon Arbieter, in a recent issue of *Change* magazine, cited figures from Pennsylvania which validate claims regarding minority enrollment in unaccredited proprietary schools. In Pennsylvania, where enrollment data on all proprietary schools is kept, the data show sizeable increases in minority enrollments. For example, the proportion of blacks attending proprietary institutions in that state increased from 7 percent in 1976 to 18.8 percent in 1984 (Arbieter, 1987).

The fact that proprietary institutions, many unaccredited, admit students who are eligible for financial aid has resulted in both increased minority enrollments and a distorted view of the access issue. The better proprietary schools provide access to education and the hope of employment. But in the worst instances, they epitomize the thoughts of Robert Maynard Hutchins who said, "It sometimes seems as though we were trying to combine the ideal of no schools at all with the democratic ideal of schools for everybody by having schools without education" (Peter, 1979, p. 159).

Excluding the substantial increases attributable to unaccredited proprietary institutions not included in the data from the Center for Education Statistics, we get a different view of minority access and participation in higher education.

Changing Enrollment Patterns

The view of higher education that emerges from the data indicates that the proportion of minority college students rose between 1976 and 1984. In 1976, 15.4 percent of college students were minorities, compared to 17.0 percent in 1984. Much of the change can

be attributed to sharply rising numbers of Asian students; however, the proportion of black students fell from 9.4 percent in 1976 to 8.8 percent in 1984. The decline in the proportion of black students reflects the declining enrollment of black men. The Hispanic enrollment, although increasing, reflects a 7.2 percent increase among women and a corresponding decrease among men (U.S. Department of Education, 1987).

To the extent that minorities participate in higher education, they tend to be disproportionately concentrated in 2-year institutions. In 1984, 47.5 percent of all minority students were enrolled in 2-year colleges, compared to 35.8 percent of white students. More specifically, the percentages were 42.7 for blacks, 43.2 for Asians, 49.8 for Native Americans, and 54.3 for Hispanics (U.S. Department of Education, 1987).

These data show that black enrollment has declined as Hispanic enrollment has increased. Yet blacks come closest to whites in the proportion of students attending 4-year colleges. The single most important factor accounting for the level of black enrollment in 4-year colleges is the existence of historically black institutions.

Michael Olivas, of the University of Houston, related the exceedingly disproportionate concentration of Hispanics in 2-year colleges to the dearth of historically Hispanic colleges and universities.

Hispanics are concentrated in the less prestigious and less well-funded institutions, and in deed, in very few four-year institutions. This uneven distribution of Hispanics within the system indicates

Throwback: 1988

44th NACAC National Conference is held in Milwaukee, WI.
R. Russell Shunk (Dickinson College, PA) is NACAC president.

Stephen Hawking publishes *A Brief History of Time*.

US stamps are 24 cents.

The number of GRE takers in the US surpasses 300,000.

An independent State of Palestine is proclaimed at the Palestinian National Council.

Photo credit: Gabriella Fabbri

that a large cadre of Hispanic students seeking a full-time, traditional learning experience are doing so in institutions established for part-time commuter students. While 2-year institutions have increased Hispanic access, Hispanic students do not even enjoy full access into open-door institutions. In 1978, a mere twenty-one colleges on the mainland United States enrolled 24 percent of all mainland Hispanic students. When the thirty-four Puerto Rican institutions were included, these fifty-five colleges enrolled 43 percent of all U.S. Hispanic students. Additionally, unlike other minority students who benefit from historically black or tribal colleges, Hispanic students do not have access to a network of traditionally Hispanic colleges. (Olivas, 1983, pp. 115-116).

Olivas' comments and the data presented here provide a silhouette of minority participation in higher education. To complete the picture, we need briefly to examine the transition of minorities from high school to college. Ethnic group enrollments in college as a percentage of high school graduates between 1976 and 1985 were the following: For whites, the figures were 33 percent in 1976 and 34.4 percent in 1985; for Hispanics, 35.8 percent in 1976 and 26.9 percent in 1985; and for blacks, 33.5 percent in 1976 and 26.1 percent by 1985 (U.S. Department of Education, 1987).

The decline in the proportion of minority high school graduates enrolled in college occurred despite an increase in both the number and quality of minority high school graduates. The academic performance of minority students improved considerably between the school years 1974-75 and 1983-84. The proportion of black 17-year-old students able to read at the adept level was 7.1 percent in 1974-75 and 15.5 in 1983-84. Among Hispanics, the percentage was 12.9 in 1974-75 and 19.9 in 1983-84 (U.S. Department of Education, 1987).

During the period 1974 to 1984, the improvement among blacks in the less vigorous intermediate reading level was even more dramatic, reflecting a 20 percent improvement. What accounts for the decline in the proportion of minority high school graduates enrolled in college?

Minorities and the Achievement Gap

Despite the improvement in the academic performance of minorities, there remains a substantial gap between the academic preparation of white and minority students. Moreover, financial aid issues, demands for greater accountability in higher education, and racism are contributing factors.

The achievement gap between minority and white students and the resulting disparity in college participation rates has been

explained in various ways. Some approaches cite specific variables such as poverty, low socioeconomic status, the home environment, and even genetics. Other approaches, perhaps less well known, are more grand in scope and view education not only as an institutional process or its product—an educated individual—but address its role in maintaining the status quo.

Education, according to this school of thought, facilitates the maintenance of privilege among dominant groups and subordination among others. Two of the leading proponents of this view are John Ogbu of the University of California at Berkeley, and Acre, the Hispanic social theorist. Acre's view is derived from a theory he calls academic colonialism, which is defined by:

the monopolizing of the resources for academic enterprise (colleges, universities, foundation and government funding agency review boards, journals, and other publishing outlets) by the dominant group and the provision of only limited and controlled access to these resources to the subordinate minority. (Olivas, 1983, p. 130).

Ogbu's views emanate from a cross cultural study of the education of minorities or subordinate caste groups in five societies. These data reveal similarities in the negative myths about and the inferior educational opportunities provided disadvantaged groups. In Ogbu's words, "The study strongly suggests that the academic retardation of these minority groups is caused by historical

Affiliate Achiever

**Thomas Butler, Executive Director at
Project GRAD Philadelphia
Pennsylvania ACAC**

Who is your role model and why?

I have many role models across my 20+ years in the field. Three particular men come to mind. One is Congressman Chaka Fattah (PA-2) who has done so much in recent history toward the advancement of postsecondary access and success. Among his many accomplishments is the authoring of the GEAR UP legislation. Another is Dr. Warren Simmons who as executive director of the Philadelphia Education Fund saw the potential in me and put me on a leadership track. And I have continued to admire and call on the advice of Dr. Arnold Mitchem, who heads up the Council on Opportunity in Education who is a man of vision and bold and dynamic leadership.

and structural conditions similar to those in the United States which affect black education” (Ogbu, 1978, p. 370). Whether one agrees or disagrees with the views of Acre and Ogbu, they illuminate and call attention to the influence of racism in retarding the academic achievement of minorities and their participation in higher education.

Ensuring greater access and participation by minorities in higher education is one of the most practical ways of moving America closer to the ideal of equal opportunity, which is the actualization of the American dream. As one of my favorite presidents, Lyndon Johnson said, “Until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men’s skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact” (Peter, 1979, p. 48). American higher education can play a more active role in making this ideal a reality.

Demographics and Equal Access

Now is the time for all institutions of higher learning to prepare, implement, and improve plans to more effectively educate, and not simply school, increasing numbers of minority students. The demographics of education indicate clearly that as we move toward the year 2000, a greater proportion of students at all levels of education will be minority students.

The data indicate that most large states already have very high percentages of minority students enrolled in public schools, including 32 percent in New York state; 43 percent in California; 46 percent in Texas; 33 percent in Florida and Maryland; 28 percent in New Jersey, Illinois, and Delaware. Regardless of attrition, according to Harold Hodgkinson (1983), any surge of new enrollments during the next two decades in higher education will be led by minorities.

The colleges and universities most adversely affected by these demographic changes will be those that have failed to adequately recruit, retain, and graduate minority students. It is safe to predict that the most vulnerable institutions will be the liberal arts colleges and small universities that have relied on attracting white middle-class suburban students and have engaged in the annual chase for the 10,000 to 12,000 elite black and Hispanic students. There will simply not be enough of these students to go around. Increasing supplies of minority and educationally disadvantaged students will form the markets for institutions of higher education.

Yet, as higher education prepares for more minority students, it better job of educating all students, including minorities. The chancellor of the California Community Colleges invoked higher

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education to heed this call: “If we want equity, we cannot divorce it from excellence. We must provide more than access; our students deserve to be given the tools to turn access into success” (Smith, 1987, p. 23).

The demand for greater accountability has been loudly sounded in the most recent wave of educational reform. National reports on higher education have called for better educated students across the educational continuum. Colleges have been told that the teachers they produce are unprepared, that lawyers and stock-brokers are unethical, and that education is overpriced. The public is telling higher education to improve the quality of students and stop producing those like the new graduate, who rushed out of his college on graduation day and shouted, “Here I am, world. I have my A.B!”

The world answered, “Sit down, young man, and I’ll teach you the rest of the alphabet.”

In the near future, American higher education will resemble a train station with two trains barreling down the tracks headed for the station. One train will be the public’s demand for account ability; the other will be the minority demand for greater access and better education. Will American higher education prevent a collision by throwing the switching device and diverting one train from the station? Or will we have a plan that allows us to bring both trains into the station in an orderly manner? Can we, as a community, accommodate the demands for greater accountability and more effective minority participation in higher education?

I submit to you that we can.

As the gatekeepers of American higher education, the members of NACAC are ideally positioned to help meet the challenge related to achieving equity with excellence. As individuals, NACAC members control recruitment and exercise influence on retention and

graduation of minority students. Both individually and collectively, members can strengthen their roles in these areas by establishing and supporting strategies that have proven to be effective and to enhance academic quality for minority students.

Objectives for Meeting the Challenge

To meet this challenge, four objectives must be reached. First, it is essential that college admission counselors improve their lines of communication with high school students, parents, counselors, and teachers. Each of these groups needs more accurate information regarding courses, grades, and test scores required for admission to college. Around the country, high schools and colleges have forged effective collaborations to better prepare all students, especially minorities, for college study.

The need for such programs is well documented. In a study at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, researchers examined factors associated with minority students' decisions to pursue higher education and found such programs useful: 55 percent of the black students and nearly one-third of the Hispanic students who planned to pursue postsecondary education had attended programs encouraging them to go to college. Among students with no plans to attend college, 76 percent of the blacks and 90 percent of the Hispanics had not attended such programs (Farrell, 1987, p. 31).

On the other hand, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), which monitors education in the south, reported that although more than one-half of high school students may be considering college, barely one-third follow a curriculum that focuses on essential academic preparation for college (SREB, 1986, p. 4). Additionally, 2-year and 4-year colleges should work on more clearly articulating standards for transfers between the two types of institutions. Two-year college students are one of the richest sources for prospective minority college graduates.

A second objective that must be met if institutions are to produce more minority college graduates is that admission standards must be broadened. The NACAC should sponsor a national effort to make admission criteria more inclusive. Admission criteria should include cognitive factors known to be valid predictors of minority performance in college. Many admission models that rely heavily on test scores can create false positive rates for minority groups that are higher than the rates for whites. Because false positive rates deny admission to persons who would have succeeded, the use of models that create the disparities should be reexamined.

The organization of State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) encouraged colleges and universities to reexamine

Affiliate Achiever

Elyan Paz, Director of Admissions
College of Visual Arts, Saint Paul, MN
Minnesota ACAC

Why are you in this profession?

I'm passionate about the arts and feel fortunate to work at a college surrounded by talented young artists and faculty. It's fun to see student portfolios, as part of the admission process, and then their senior show at graduation and their achievements as alumni.

In addition to my role within CVA admission, I enjoy advising teachers, counselors and families on strategies for high school students interested in the visual arts.

admission criteria in its July 1987 report titled, "A Difference of Degrees: State Initiatives to Improve Minority Student Achievement." The study recommended that institutions of higher education, when assessing minority and disadvantaged students, find ways to incorporate noncognitive factors into the student evaluation process. Factors such as motivation and resourcefulness, according to SHEEO, should be coupled with standardized test scores and high school grades to more accurately predict minority and disadvantaged students' performance in college.

The third objective that must be met to improve minority participation in higher education relates to testing. Because higher education's response to the call for greater accountability has been increased admission standards and more standardized testing, it is imperative that these tests are employed to help and not hinder minority students. The members of NACAC should sponsor an initiative to ensure that tests are used in a diagnostic and prescriptive fashion to improve minority student performance.

Finally, the minority communities must accept responsibility for ensuring that more students are taught the discipline and self-sacrifice that is instrumental in achieving personal success. Young minority people must be taught that to conquer oneself is the first and noblest victory. It is incumbent upon us to teach our young that America is a land of opportunity, not guarantees. To take advantage of opportunity, one must be prepared.

In conclusion, I return to the moral argument for addressing this issue that I mentioned but did not explain earlier. I leave you with the words of the SHEEO, who make their point clearly and forcefully.

The country can no longer countenance significant shortfalls in minority student achievement, nor can it tolerate anything less than whole-hearted commitment to their removal. Some of the most fundamental principles of our society are at stake in this effort, and the consequences of failure are sobering, especially in view of the steady proportional increase in our minority population. The threat to our national character and well-being posed by these achievement gaps (and the larger socioeconomic disparities they reflect) has never been greater; fortunately, however, neither has the opportunity to achieve a major social transformation through education ever been more promising. The country's shrinking pool of young adults combined with the economy's growing appetite for (and dependency on) entry-level workers with higher-order skills means that college-educated minorities have substantial potential for rapid economic advancement. Educators, however, first must ensure that sufficient numbers of minority students receive the preparation—and college degrees—that they need to succeed. (SHEEO, 1987, p. iv)

I am confident that as we look back on minority access to higher education 10 to 15 years from now, it will be evident that the NACAC played a major role in improving the current situation. The members of NACAC can be, and I am sure they will be, leaders in

ensuring that sufficient numbers of minority students receive the preparation and college degrees they need to succeed. The challenge and the opportunity are ours.

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Affiliate Achiever

Tina Garland, Director of Admission
Wilmington College, Wilmington, OH
Ohio ACAC

Why are you in this profession?

I actually fell into this profession beginning as a study worker in the admission office my freshmen year of college. The more I learned, the more I enjoyed the work. A counselor position opened up as I graduated from college, and from there my career began. I've stayed in the profession over 25 years because of the "psychological salary" we receive in working with prospective students and their families. Now that I am in a management position as director of admission, I am rewarded on a regular basis from the work I do with my staff and student workers. When they are successful and proud of their work, it makes me proud. I feel like I make a difference in the lives of our prospective families as well as the staff I work with here in the office. I've often heard from counselors or student workers after they have left Wilmington, thanking me for what they learned when they worked in the office and how what they learned has helped them in their careers. That makes me feel good and confident that I am doing what God intended for me to do.

Who is your role model and why?

I have several. My mother first comes to mind. She taught me my work ethic. She taught me to be responsible and humble. She taught me how to say "I'm sorry" or "It's my mistake" and how to take ownership for the things I do. I try to teach these things to my student staff as well. I think much of this has made me the person and professional I am today.