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Educational Opportunity Programs for Students of Color in Graduate and Professional Schools

by Sheila Gregory and Harold Horton



Sheila Gregory



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The significant underrepresentation of people of color in all occupational fields is clearly indicative of the exceptionally low percent of people of color in graduate and professional schools in America. Unless drastic actions are taken by universities across the nation to identify and recruit a significant number of students of color in undergraduate colleges it is unlikely that significant numbers of people of color will be available in the near future for potential employment.

To provide opportunities for students of color, who were previously denied access to universities based on race, to matriculate in graduate and professional programs in all academic and occupational fields is not “reverse discrimination.” People of African descent in America suffered from forced, legal segregation for nearly three-hundred years. Thus, for graduate and professional schools to establish educational opportunity programs offering access to universities and colleges for students of color is one method to use toward preparing more of these students for entry into the professions.

Special access to graduate and professional schools does not mean lowering academic standards. Students of color who have been admitted to graduate or professional schools must take the same courses and fulfill the same academic requirements as other students in order to receive degrees in dentistry, medicine, business, law, engineering, or any other field. Educational opportunity programs merely ensure that students of color will no longer be denied access to graduate or professional schools based on race, ethnicity, culture, or gender.

In an effort to correct past injustices and to ensure that a significant number of people of color are prepared for various professions, numerous programs have been launched over the past two decades around the country designed specifically for students of color. Although there is still much work to be done, several inroads have been made to support these young potential scholars and future leaders. Initiatives that have proven to be the most successful in enhancing and retaining the pool of talented young scholars have typically possessed six common organizational attributes: 1) commitment from the highest administrative levels; 2) strong faculty alliances; 3) clear accountability; 4) timely and accurate follow-through; 5) measurable, comprehensive goals; and 6) sufficient

funding throughout the duration of the program.

This article highlights and describes a number of educational programs that reflect these attributes and which are available to encourage and support graduate and professional students and junior faculty of color. These educational opportunity programs are designed to better equip young scholars of color to take their rightful place among the leadership ranks in the academy. They provide support in areas that have traditionally not been accessible to persons of color.

The initiatives identified in this article are divided by type into five categories: 1) consortium initiatives; 2) national fellowship programs; 3) leadership training development programs; 4) state initiatives; and, 5) summer research and internship programs. The programs that are briefly described in this essay represent important strategies for addressing the changing needs of graduate students and junior faculty of color. Furthermore, the programs reflect several interrelated strategies and tactics that should be explored further: encouraging students early in the educational pipeline; providing mentors of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds; facilitating faculty-student research; and, forging collaborative partnerships with business, industry, government, and nonprofits to identify and address unmet needs.

Consortium Initiatives

- *Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), Minority Fellowship Program.* In operation since 1978, the CIC assists students of color who pursue doctorates in the humanities and social sciences. Sponsored by the Big Ten, each year the CIC awards thirty-five, four-year fellowships including full tuition and a minimum annual stipend of \$8,000. These awards may be applied to a graduate program at any of the eleven CIC universities. This program is partially funded by the Lilly Endowment and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

- *National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering, Inc. (GEM).* This program is designed to increase the number of students of color pursuing a master’s degree in engineering and encourage leadership positions in the engineering industry. This program covers all tuition, a \$5,000 annual stipend, and engineering-related employment each summer. The consortium includes fifty-four participating universities and

sixty cosponsoring industrial organizations.

- *Consortium for Graduate Study in Management (CGSM)*. This nine-member university alliance program is designed to prepare students of color who are interested in pursuing an MBA degree for managerial positions in business and industry. The program provides full tuition and fees and a \$5,000 annual stipend. Each person who qualifies for admission can apply to a maximum of four of the nine participating universities for fellowship consideration. In the past twenty-two years, this program has supported over thirteen-hundred students.

- *Illinois Consortium Educational Opportunity Program (ICEOP) Award*. Created in 1985, the ICEOP program provides financial assistance to graduate students of color in Illinois institutions. The purpose of the program is to increase the number of students and staff of color. Program recipients receive an annual stipend of \$10,000 plus tuition while enrolled full-time. Participants must agree to accept a full-time teaching or administrative position at an Illinois educational institution for a period equal to that of the number of years the awards were received.

- *National Consortium for Educational Access (NCEA), Georgia Institute of Technology*. Founded in 1984, NCEA provides a minimum of \$10,000 and full tuition for three years to qualified African-American students pursuing a Ph.D. in science or technology. Participating institutions include fifty historically black colleges and universities and forty Ph.D. granting universities.

National Fellowship Programs

- *National Science Foundation, Minority Graduate Fellowship (NSF/MGF)*. Each year, this program provides one-hundred students of color partial tuition and an annual stipend of \$14,000 for three years. The purpose of the program is to encourage new graduate students to pursue graduate degrees in science, mathematics, engineering, and the social sciences.

- *National Institutes of Health, (NIH/MIRT) Minority International Research Training Grant, Undergraduate Research Training Program, Predoctoral Program, and International Faculty Program*. This award provides international research training abroad to undergraduate, graduate, and faculty persons of color who are pursuing careers in the biomedical and behavioral sciences. Training ranges from eight weeks to twelve months and involves collaborative research projects with scientists in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa.

- *Ford Foundation Doctoral Fellowship Program (FF/DFP)*. Sponsored by the National Research Council, this program provides predoctoral and dissertation fellowships to new graduate students of color. The fellowship includes an annual stipend of \$11,500 and partial tuition for up to three consecutive years.

Leadership Training Development Programs

- *Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, Administrative Fellows Program*. This one-year program is designed to increase the pool of qualified professionals in

academic and financial areas in higher education. Each fellow is assigned—based on the fellow's skills, expertise, and interests—to a crucial problem of balancing cost and income while maintaining operational and educational effectiveness. The fellowship provides a salary subsidy to the institution where the fellow is employed.

- *W. K. Kellogg National Foundation Fellowship Program*. This three-year program is designed to broaden the social and intellectual sensitivity, awareness, and leadership potential of persons early in their professional careers. The fellowship is open to any professional in the areas of business, education, human services, and private practice. Fellows devote 25 percent of their time to fellowship-related activities, based on a self-designed learning plan for personal and professional development.

- *Harvard University, Management Development Program (MDP)*. Created in 1986, the MDP is a two-week program geared toward middle-level administrators within and outside the academy. MDP is designed to broaden the management perspectives and leadership skills of participants through case studies and other activities.

- *University of California, President's Fellowship Program*. Created in 1984, this program provides a one-year, post-doctoral fellowship designed to encourage talented, recent Ph.D. graduates of color to become more involved in research activities. The program includes faculty mentoring and guidance to nurture the advancement of the fellow's career.

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State Initiatives

- *New Jersey Minority Academic Career Program (MAC)*. The MAC program provides up to \$10,000 in forgivable, interest-free loans to students of color who enroll in one of eight New Jersey university doctoral programs. Following graduation, for every year of service at a qualified employer in New Jersey, the MAC program will cancel one-quarter of the loan value for four consecutive years until the loan is paid in full.

- *California State University Forgivable Loan/Doctorate Incentive Program*. This new endeavor is a three-year pilot program designed to increase the university faculty in selected fields at CSU through financial assistance, mentoring, and job assistance. The program provides up to \$30,000 over a three-year period for full-time doctoral students at accredited California universities. The loan is considered forgivable—at a rate of 20 percent each year for five years—if the student is gainfully employed as a faculty member at a CSU institution

- *Florida Endowment Fund (formerly McKnight Black Doctoral Fellowship), Black Doctoral Fellowship, and*

the Junior Faculty Development Fellowship Program). The Black Doctoral Fellowship is a three-year award of up to \$5,000 in tuition and fees, and an \$11,000 annual stipend for doctoral students at a Florida public or private institution in the areas of the arts and sciences, business, or engineering. The program is designed to encourage African-American students to become faculty members. The Junior Faculty Development Fellowship provides women and African-American junior faculty an opportunity to pursue special academic interests and/or research projects that could enhance their teaching, as well as their tenure and promotion status. Each faculty fellow receives an annual award of \$15,000.

Summer Research and Internship Programs

- *Association for Education in Journalism, New York University, Summer Internship for Minorities in Journalism.* Since its inception in 1970, this ten-week summer program assists students of color who are interested in careers in the media industry. The program places college juniors and seniors in a thirty-five-hour-a-week, full-time, paid internship in the industry, along with a two-hour-a-week course at NYU designed to enhance the writing, editing, research, and interviewing skills of students.

- *University of New Mexico PreLaw Institute, American Indian Law Center, Inc.* This eight-week summer program is designed to expose Native American students (with proof of membership in a federally recognized tribe and a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood) who have already taken the LSAT, an opportunity to take an introductory course in the law school. The program provides a small stipend, tuition, and the necessary materials.

- *Michigan State University, Medical Education Support Project (MESP).* Begun in 1984, this summer enrichment program identifies and selects premed students for a seven-week program designed for students of color who are exploring careers in medicine. The MESP includes a weekly stipend and housing. The program devotes four days each week to collaborative research projects with the medical faculty and one day each week in a seminar on various health-related topics.

- *Purdue University, Access Internally for Minorities (AIM) Summer Research Opportunity Program.* Initiated in 1981, this summer-long program seeks to increase the number of students in disciplines where students of color are traditionally underrepresented. The program is targeted to sophomore and junior students at historically black colleges and universities, as well as Purdue. The program combines in-depth research, faculty mentoring, workshops and symposia, and several other campus-based activities.

- *Mellon-Ford Summer Minority Research Exchange Program.* Developed in 1985, this eight-week summer research exchange program is designed to enhance the number of students of color entering Ph.D. programs by preparing them for teaching and research careers. The internship is exclusively offered in the fields of engineering, and the biological, physical, and social sciences, and is further limited to sophomores and juniors

attending Cornell, Princeton, Stanford, Yale, and the University of California at Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Conclusion

There are numerous educational opportunity programs for students of color at graduate and professional schools throughout the country. The programs briefly described in this article are in no way an exhaustive list of such educational opportunities for students of color. It should be noted that students of color admitted to graduate and professional schools through such educational opportunity programs are the exceptional few, and that 90 percent of students of color in graduate and professional schools were regular admits.

It is hard to believe that blacks were legally barred from the University of Texas School of Law until 1950, just forty years ago. In 1992, four rejected white applicants filed a law suit against the school because they believed that a few students of color were admitted over them. They charged the school with reverse discrimination. The University of Texas denied using quotas and vowed to fight hard to defend their access policy. The University of Texas attorney claimed that the four white students were using affirmative action as a scapegoat. Recently, a federal district judge in Texas ruled that it was "legal and appropriate" for the University of Texas School of Law to use an affirmative action plan in its admissions process.

It is regrettable that affirmative action and equal educational opportunity programs are still needed in American society. However, until America overcomes the extremely negative effects of its lengthy history of pervasive racism, affirmative action and other educational opportunity programs will be needed in academia as they are in other major institutions in America.

Mark Yudof, who was dean of the University of Texas Law School until this past summer, along with some of the other law school professors, stood very tall throughout the lawsuit hearings. He noted that if minorities are to be brought into the mainstream in America to the extent that they are able "to participate in our society as government leaders, judges, and influential leaders in the private sector, and to share fairly in the economic rewards of the nation, it is absolutely essential that they be substantially represented in the student bodies of American law schools."¹

As Reginald Wilson, senior fellow at the American Council on Education, has consistently stated in his annual reports on *Minorities in Higher Education*, academia has come a long way with regard to admitting a significant, not just a token, number of students of color, and it yet has quite a long way to go.²

This essay highlights only a few examples of effective programs for training students of color. For further information regarding educational opportunity programs, contact the American Council of Education or the authors of this article. Readers may also obtain further information about these efforts and other efforts by referring to the following reports and articles:

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Notes

¹Debbie Graves, "Federal Judge Affirms University of Texas Affirmative Action Plan," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 11, No. 14 (8 September 1994): 10.

²Deborah J. Carter and Reginald Wilson, *1993 Twelfth Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1994), 38.

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