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Minority Participation
in Education and American Life

by
Georgia M. Daniel

This article presents an overview of the status of minority participation in education and in other aspects of American life, and then focuses on various strategies which the financial aid administrator can employ in responding to the special needs of the minority students of the 21st Century.

This article is intended to present an overview on the status of minority participation in education and American life. Special focus will be on the external role of the financial aid administrator as a strategist in responding to the special needs of the minority student population of the year 2000. Finally, a summary of selected new programs and initiatives that are currently underway to increase the level of minority participation will be reviewed.

In the Spring of 1988, the Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life (established by the American Council on Education and the Education Commission of the States) issued a report on the status of minority participation in American life and education. The consensus highlighted throughout the report entitled One-Third of a Nation, was that there exists a dire need for the United States to renew its commitment to minority advancement. The report suggested that efforts must be magnified to expand the role and status of the minority population. Minorities are defined as Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. The commission suggested seven strategies that could be implemented to achieve full equality for all of America's citizens.

These strategies include:

1. U.S. colleges and universities need to renew and strengthen their efforts to increase minority recruitment, retention and graduation.

2. National leaders need to identify and implement policies that stimulate economic growth and restore national solvency — first of all by dealing with the federal budget deficit.

3. Elected officials need to assume responsibility for leading efforts to assure minority advancement.

4. Private and voluntary organizations need to initiate new programs that increase minority participation and achievement and expand existing programs.

5. Each major sector of society needs to contribute to a new vision of affirmative action around which a broad national consensus could be formed.

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Of the Hispanic students, 59% had verbal scores below 400 and 45% had math scores below that level.

For Whites, only 31% had verbal scores below 400 and only 22% had math scores that low.

Between 1985 and 2000, minority workers will make up one-third of the net addition to the U.S. labor force. By the turn of the century 21.8 million of the 140.8 million people in the labor force will be non-White.

One wonders how these demographic trends will affect the overall future of post-secondary education. These trends have several implications for this arena.

First, the college age population of 18- to 24-year-olds will be decreasing in the coming decades; this decline will mainly result from a shrinking white population. The Black, Native American, Chicano and Puerto Rican populations are younger than the white population and are growing at a faster rate. Thus, the proportion of minority college age persons will rise — and dramatically so, in the case of Hispanics and Blacks.

Second, America is steadily growing older. Presently, 26.1% of our total population of 243,000,000 is comprised of the age group of 1 through 17 years old. Those eighteen to twenty-four years old represent 11.1%; those twenty-five to thirty-four represent 17.8%, and those 35 and older represent 45%. There are now more people over sixty-five in this country than there are under 18. Early in the next century, members of America's baby boom generation (close to 70 million) will retire. Based upon research by the Social Security Administration, relatively fewer active workers will be available to support these new retirees. Today, for every 100 workers contributing to Social Security, 20 individuals are drawing benefits. By the year 2025, there will be 47 beneficiaries per 100 workers. This revealing statistical fact is extremely disturbing if one recalls that over one-third of those working people will be minorities and that currently, in the largest cities, in excess of 50 percent of the minorities will not graduate from high school. We all have a stake in affecting the educational advancement of these individuals.

Aid administrators cannot sit by passively. An active role must be taken in integrating our students of color into the “mainstream” of education. In addition to allocating funds for academically superior students, it is sound advice for aid officers also to adequately adjust need-based resources to deal with part-time students who have to work as well as older students. As professionals in financial aid, administrators must be prepared to develop strategies to compensate for the new minority family life.

THE ROLE OF THE FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATOR AS A STRATEGIST

First, in order to become important strategists, there must be a thorough understanding of the nature of the institution's student body and its mission. Putting this information together with a thorough knowledge of the ways to finance an education will make aid administrators key individuals in accomplishing part of the institution's mission. The financial aid professional must become very adept in analyzing information and doing considerably more research to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, their impact on various populations, and their cost-effectiveness.

As strategists at their institutions, aid administrators can assist policymakers (executive administration) in shaping goals and objectives that positively affect minority enrollment. Such issues as early outreach programs, admissions and retention
tions have direct input to these various groups to reiterate the urgency in addressing minority concerns. Financial aid administrators can serve as an important source of information and advisor to these parties; they can also recommend and encourage the support of policies that are designed to increase minority participation in training initiatives, scholarship and student assistance programs, talent searches and internships, remedial education, and other enrichment activities.

In influencing federal policymakers, such as the United States Department of Education, federal government officials, and members of Congress, lobbying for increased government funding in certain areas will also be critical. History reveals that increased funding at local, state and federal levels of social programs such as Head Start and Chapter 8 of the April 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act have led to real progress for poor and minority students in educational achievement.

SELECTED NEW PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

While there are a number of programs established that encourage minority participation, there still exists a need for many more.

Historically, poor academic preparation and lack of necessary discipline and motivation to study have been sighted as primary reasons for the current low graduation statistics among Black and Hispanic students in both high school and college settings. A review of the academic history of these students shows that about 35% of Hispanics and about 25% of Blacks aged 18 to 21 are high school dropouts. The graduation rates from college nationally for Blacks and Hispanics over age 25 is 10.9% and 8.4% respectively. A lack of motivation and/or the discipline to practice good study habits, as well as not taking enough language, math or science courses to prepare for college are key causes for these statistics. These factors, when combined with the cultural and economic disadvantages of our 21st century minority student, will have an astounding impact on our society. The impact on our university's finances, enrollment and retention, and eventually academic quality could be dramatic. Repercussions would also be felt in the business, military and government arenas.

However, a number of new initiatives are already underway, several of which are outlined below. The first initiative is the Early Intervention Program funded through the Aetna Life & Casualty Foundation in cooperation with the College Board. This program targets grades eight through ten with activities designed to motivate and inform students about academic preparation and admission to college. The program entitled, “College Knowledge,” is designed to complement existing college readiness programs in the Washington, D.C. and Ft. Worth, Texas school systems. Specific activities expose students to area colleges and help them to become familiar with academic and financial planning, college admissions tests and procedures, as well as college selection and careers. The program also enlists the support of teachers and parents. The College Board’s goal is to expand this project to encompass more cities, acquire support from additional foundations, and achieve involvement of one or more school systems in each College Board Region.

Another initiative currently underway may be found in the Liberty Scholarships/Liberty Partnership Program established through the New York State legislature for its citizens. The Liberty Scholarships combined with other state and federal aid, will cover all expenses for disadvantaged students attending any New York public school.

In addition, the Liberty Partnership Program gives colleges and community organizations grants to establish counseling services and dropout prevention programs in elementary and secondary schools.

By enacting this legislation, the State of New York has committed itself to securing support, guidance and financial assistance for its young people to finish high
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