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1973 Department of Political Science Report on Recruiting Minorities

Commission for Blacks

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

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KNOXVILLE
37916

THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
McClung Tower

July 16, 1973

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Hardy Liston, Chairman
Task Force on Blacks

FROM: Tom Unga, Head
Department of Political Science



This is in response to your request for written replies to the questions you posed in your memorandum of July 10th.

Question 1. "Describe in detail the efforts to recruit Black faculty for academic school year 1973-74."

The department recruited for three positions for the 1973-74 academic year--1 in public administration, a senior position; 1 in international politics at the assistant professor level; and 1 in public administration (Nashville Bureau of Public Administration) at the assistant professor level. Special effort was made to identify and recruit qualified black and qualified women for all these positions. Such efforts included: (1) utilization of professional listings of black and women political scientists. /These included the American Political Science Association "Directory of Black Graduate Students in Political Science"; "Directory of Black American Doctorates in Political Science" prepared by Dr. Jewel Prestage, Southern University; and a directory of women and other minority persons prepared by Dr. Tom Mongar, University of North Florida./ (2) letters and phone calls to department chairmen at universities throughout the country, especially to departments with strong graduate programs in the particular areas for which candidates were being recruited. (3) advertising positions in the American Political Science Association Newsletter. (4) careful screening of placement brochures of departments seeking to place doctoral candidates. Although race is almost always excluded from such listings, where some reasonable identification could be made along these lines, letters were written to individuals requesting that they submit their vita.

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Where any initial interest was shown by qualified perspective candidates there was follow-up through letters and/or phone calls.

Question 2. "What do you consider to be the most significant limiting factors to such recruitment?"

There are several factors. Perhaps the most important is the relatively small number of qualified blacks available for employment. This is especially true where senior-level positions are involved and in certain areas of the discipline (e.g. public administration). Competition is very keen for those candidates who have strong vita. Secondly, there is some reluctance on the part of some black candidates to consider the University of Tennessee. Tennessee is identified as part of the "South" and while distinctions are made between what might be termed the "upper South" and the "deep South" this identification remains a factor.

The demand-supply ratio for academic positions is also a factor in recruitment. It emerges in several respects. Some departments have felt the pressure from white applicants who complain that giving special treatment to blacks violates their own right to ~~be~~ compete on the basis of merit. Second, faculty members, within the department while not in opposition to affirmative action programs, are reluctant or refuse to overlook better qualified candidates in order to accommodate black applicants. The implication is not intended that blacks are always less qualified--that is a false assumption. The point is that there are relatively few blacks available, the competition among applicants is very keen, and with the tight academic market place the department is able to attract outstanding and experienced applicants. "Equal protection!" applies, it is argued, to whites as well as blacks. I would stress, however, that this department is not only interested in hiring black political scientists but has and will continue to make special efforts to recruit them.

Question 3. "Can you suggest alternative methods of recruiting that might increase chances of success in this regard?"

I think that the University must make a more positive commitment to hire qualified blacks, especially those whose record is outstanding, when the opportunity arises. By "opportunity" I refer to the availability of the person, not simply a vacancy or a new position in a specific area. For example, a few months

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ago I talked to a young black political scientist, Dr. Frank Henderson, presently teaching at State University New York, Buffalo whom I had almost succeeded in hiring when I was chairman at Kent State University. Henderson is in the field of political theory and was interested in moving but could not fit any of the positions for which we were recruiting. In my judgment, a strong affirmative action program would provide special funds for hiring of outstanding blacks such as this man.

Question 4. "Do you have any special procedures for recruiting Black students in your department?"

The department takes special notice of applications for graduate study from black students in those instances where race can be identified. I have also written letters to black students whose names have been forwarded to me from Marvin Peek or others inside and outside the university.

I have followed the practice of informing faculty members at the student's undergraduate institution concerning the success of their students in our program. At the same time I invite and encourage black students to apply for admission if they are able to meet entrance requirements.

Question 5. "What is your conception of affirmative action?"

Affirmative action is a commitment by the University to actively encourage the recruitment and employment of minority group applicants for faculty, administrative, and staff positions. For these purposes, a minority candidate is defined as a woman, Black, Chicano, or American Indian. While candidates for employment are expected to meet the announced qualifications for positions for which they apply, personnel responsible for recruitment and hiring must advertise the University's commitment to affirmative action, must identify and contact potential minority candidates, and must carefully and thoroughly follow up any expressed interest by qualified applicants. Additionally, where minority candidates are equal in qualifications to other candidates, preference should be given the minority candidate. So far as is possible, an academic department should hire personnel from each of the minority groups specified above. Finally, given the keen competition for qualified and especially outstanding Black, Chicano, and American Indian candidates, the University should be prepared to commit and utilize its resources to secure minority personnel. In this sense, affirmation must be joined by vigorous and positive action.

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Question 6. "What is your impression of the relations between students and faculty?"

Student-faculty relations are generally good. The Department of Political Science has made special efforts over the past two years to involve graduate and undergraduate students in department affairs. Such action includes student membership on department curriculum and personnel committees, the formation of an undergraduate student association, and the encouragement of an active graduate student association. Due to a general lack of student interest the undergraduate association is effectively defunct.

There are, of course, complaints by students, usually involving grades or other course-related matters. Where other types of complaints arise a serious effort is made to fully understand the specifics and to resolve them in as mutually satisfactory manner as possible.

A continuing problem, however, is the identification of complaints and grievances before they become very difficult to resolve. Unless students feel that they are able to express grievances or concerns without fear of injuring their standing there is no effective way of developing a stronger student-faculty relationship. The student ombudsman is a useful office but it is (nor can it be) the entire answer to the problem.