



1973

1973 Department of Geology Report on Perceived Student Issues

Commission for Blacks

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE 37916
DEPARTMENT OF GEOLOGY

July 11, 1973

Dr. Hardy Liston, Jr.
Chairperson, Task Force on Blacks
Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee 37916

Dear Dr. Liston:

First, my apologies for the slowness in providing this information to you and for missing the meeting on May 9 relative to the same subject. I marked the date on my calendar for July 19 instead of the ninth and it was not until I spoke with a fellow Department Head that I realized I had slipped up. Nevertheless, I have some thoughts on the subject of recruiting Black faculty and students and wish, even at this late date, to share them with you and whoever else might be interested.

The Ph.D. Degree is sort of a "union card" for employment as a professor (assistant professor or above) in Geology Departments of major universities such as UTK. To my knowledge, only three Blacks hold Ph.D's in Geology in the United States (this number may be slightly larger in recent months due to possible new recipients of the degree). The demands being what they are for Blacks, both in industry and education, have made the competition for employment of these few persons quite keen. Although notices concerning positions available in this department are published in the most widely-circulated national publications in Geology, we have never received an application from a Black. The problem is simply one of supply and the solution, one of greater production of Black Ph.D's. It is toward that end that I address the following remarks and concerns.

We have no Black majors or graduate students in this department at the present time. Last year we had one Black graduate student, but he was from Africa and, in terms of minority recruitment, he did not count.

I estimate that five percent of our introductory course enrollment are Blacks, but of those, we have failed to attract any lasting majors. Speaking only from my own experience, I must declare that the Black students have, with few exceptions, done very poorly academically.

Attempts have been made to aid the Black students in improving their performance but to date, the results of our efforts have been disappointing. Two personality types or attitudes are prominent.

Page 2
July 11, 1973

1. Some of the Black students are timid and will not avail themselves of our offers to help them.

2. Some Black students have requested special consideration in grading or in meeting deadlines. The attitude they portray is one of "I am Black; therefore, you must give me special consideration or be more lenient with me." Indeed our wishes to help do cause us to give our Black students special consideration.

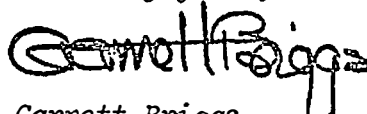
The basic problem behind the Black students' failure to perform well in our introductory course is a weak pre-college background. (I should be interested to know if this opinion is shared by professors in other departments). The Black students appear to be handicapped by weaknesses in primary and secondary level material, such as math and science, and thus progress more slowly than the White students with stronger backgrounds.

I should like to suggest that Blacks be given greater exposure to the entire spectrum of subject majors and career opportunities offered at UTK. Most have seldom, if ever, heard of Geology prior to entering UTK, and consequently never consider it beyond the fulfillment of a degree requirement. Suggestion: Have a career day for Blacks wherein representatives of colleges or departments advertise career opportunities and solicit interest. Such a program could be initiated at the high school or pre-college level on a yearly basis. Invite parents, show slides, discuss job opportunities, and invite interested students and parents to visit the campus or particular departments.

I view with displeasure the fact that by our efforts to recruit Black students and Black faculty, we are causing a lethal drain of talent from some fine Black institutions such as Knox College. Efforts to cooperate with Knox College are mutually beneficial and should be enlarged. Although never contacted to assist, I should be happy to teach a course at Knox College at no charge with the hope that doing so would expand their offering without duplicating their efforts and that outstanding Black students could be made aware of Geology as a graduate major and ultimately a career.

Please accept my apologies for having missed the meeting. I am indeed in hopes that my comments will be of some value. The Geology Department shall be happy to participate in any way that you suggest in assisting Black students.

Sincerely yours,



Garrett Briggs
Interim Head

GB/sc

cc: Dr. Arthur M. Ford, Jr.
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