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Commission for Blacks

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Review of the Affirmative Action Plan
Comments and Summary
11 November 1988

Members of Committee

Dennie Littlejohn, Chair
J. Otis Cochran
Diane Cudahy
Nina Elliott
John Hodges
Norma Mertz
Otis Stephens

Units Interviewed:

College of Business Administration, Dean Warren C. Neel
College of Communications, Dean Kelly Leiter
College of Education, Dean Richard Wisniewski
College of Engineering, Dean William Snyder
College of Human Ecology, Dean Jacquelyn DeJonge
College of Law, Dean Marilyn Yarbrough
College of Liberal Arts, Dean Larry Ratner
College of Nursing, Dean Sylvia Hart
College of Social Work, Former Dean Ben Granger
Continuing Education, Dean Joseph Goddard
Admissions and Records, Dean Gerald Bowker and Associate Dean Tom Ayers
Dean of Students, Dr. Jerry Askew
Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Mr. Phillip A. Scheurer
Executive Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance, Mr. Homer Fisher
Physical Plant, Mr. John Parker

Overview

We found the administrators of all the various units to be cooperative and willing to discuss the Affirmative Action Plan and Policy. These comments reflect responses from fifteen top University administrators: ten of whom are academic deans, three are student affairs administrators, and two are administrators in the area of Business, Planning and Finance. One unit is operated by the dean only; there are no department heads.

The administrators saw the interviews as a way of sharing the best ideas and suggestions from across the campus. Accordingly, they hope that a summary of our findings can be made available to them. We concur in this and believe that this would be one way for our work to achieve some positive results.

We have included, in a summary fashion, some of the responses given to each of the questions posed, together with some of our own personal comments and reactions, which are generally indicated in parentheses. While the comments represent (we hope faithfully) the views of the various administrators, we have not attempted to identify any particular response with the individual who made it. In a number of cases, similar responses were given to the same question. Where this occurs, we have attempted to avoid unnecessary duplication. It is inevitable, however, given the questions asked and the range of response, that some responses may fit equally as well under other questions.

AA Plan Review, p. 2.

How well is the Affirmative Action Plan working for your unit?

All of the administrators were familiar with the Plan and generally viewed it as positive. Most feel that the current version of the Plan is superior to previous ones in that the specific guidelines and procedures are spelled out much more clearly. In one case, the guidelines and procedures were not adequately explained to a newly hired dean. This led to some initial mistakes when the dean began a search. There was also the sense that the whole process takes too long.

All feel that progress in affirmative action is being made, but that more progress needs to be made in the future. The main hindrance to limited progress seems to be the tough competition for a relatively small number of blacks available for employment. In order to increase the number of blacks in the various applicant pools, an aggressive effort of recruitment must be undertaken. One of the deans questioned whether the Plan adequately addresses the problem of limited applicant pools in certain areas. Several of the deans and heads stated that we must go beyond the letter of the Plan to insure positive results. Recruitment involving personal contacts is seen as much more effective than "passive recruitment" (advertising and mailings only). Telephone calls to individuals in the field, especially to minorities, must be made. In at least one case, the Dean mentioned the importance of contacting the prospective candidates themselves.

What methods do you use to communicate the Affirmative Action policy and plan to your staff?

It is clear that it is not enough merely to circulate copies of the Plan to all department heads. The deans feel that it is important to meet on a regular basis with the staff and discuss affirmative action on an on-going basis. Some of the smaller units that we interviewed meet from two to four times a month and include affirmative action problems and efforts as a standing item of the agenda.

In one of the areas, the Associate Dean has as one of his responsibilities the monitoring of affirmative action compliance. In several other areas the monitoring is done by a special committee. (This well may be an idea that larger units may wish to adopt.) One unit produces a weekly printout of exempt vacancies and meets quarterly with the black professional staff in the unit to listen to Affirmative Action matters and other concerns.

One dean invited a representative from the Provost's office to discuss the AA Plan with her staff.

Do you consider Affirmative Action as part of your evaluation of department heads?

All units report that affirmative action is one item among others used in evaluating department heads. It is not clear to us, however, the relative weight which is given to affirmative action in the overall evaluation. Nor is it clear to us the extent to which the deans make the heads aware that they are being evaluated on their efforts in affirmative action. But in at least three cases, we feel that the deans have provided clear signals that affirmative action is a significant part of the evaluative process. A specific question regarding affirmative action efforts is included on forms that the department heads must complete. And in one case, a dean reiterated

AA Plan Review, p. 3.

clearly in a memo to one of his heads that affirmative action will be one of the areas that will be considered in the head's evaluation.

Can you comment on the responses that you get from your department heads on the Affirmative Action Plan?

The administrators report that the Plan, in general, is viewed positively. The present version seems clearer and more direct. In some cases, heads initially resisted the Plan because of the amount of effort and work needed to follow the guidelines and procedures.

The heads cooperate with the deans in carrying out the Plan. (Cooperation is one thing, however, and commitment is quite another. But we have been assured that most of the heads seem to be committed to the Plan.)

In at least one case, the Dean said that that there might be some resistance to the Plan if it were perceived as undermining a program's academic integrity. But this dean feels that following the guidelines and procedures of the Plan has resulted in better candidates overall.

One of the deans admitted that there was constant griping about the long paper trail generated by the Plan. Another mentioned the excessive cost of recruiting. (We take this to mean the cost of advertising and of bringing several candidates to campus.)

How do your department heads view affirmative action?

This seemed to be a difficult question for some of the administrators to answer. Several points that were made have already been cited in the preceding response.

Publically, the heads state that they are committed to the goals and ideals of affirmative action. We were not able to determine (nor were all the deans) whether the heads cooperate with affirmative action because it is the law or because they feel it is the right thing to do.

What changes would you suggest about UTK's Affirmative Action Plan

Several of the items below do not speak specifically to the Plan but are included here because they relate to what the deans feel would be positive steps in affirmative action. Many of their views expressed above are presented here in summary.

1. We must be concerned not only with the letter of the Plan but also with its spirit. Innovative ways must be used to attract minorities to UTK.
2. The Plan should be checked for its accuracy of data, especially as it relates to the work force analysis.
3. Someone from the Provost's office should be invited to discuss the Plan with the deans and heads and with the Commission on Blacks. A clearer explanation of the work force analysis should be included in these discussions.

AA Plan Review, p. 4.

4. While several of the deans and heads mentioned the assistance they have received from the AA officers, one head complained about the lack of communication between their office and his. As it stands now, it is extremely difficult to get a narrative approved. He suggested that the AA officers and the Provost (or his representative) should meet with the various deans.
5. Several mentioned the need to streamline and simplify the guidelines and procedures. The process is too long and costly.
6. Much more needs to be done regarding affirmative action for non-exempt employees.
7. One dean wondered if making a search mandatory at the departmental head level made it more difficult to promote from within.
8. A vita bank might be established of unsuccessful candidates for one position who may well qualify for other positions on campus.
9. Affirmative Action must continue beyond the hiring phase to include nurturing of minority candidates.
10. The importance of networking was emphasized by all. It is equally important to bring blacks into the network.
11. Active recruitment is necessary; passive recruitment is not sufficient.
12. Better advantage should be taken of the "Grow Your Own" program for black faculty and staff.
13. More faculty could be recruited from the traditional black colleges. Where necessary reduced teaching loads should be assigned and sensitive mentoring provided to improve research skills.
14. More research support should be made available to minority faculty.
15. Special scholarships and fellowships should be targeted for black graduate students.
16. Current black students and alumni should be used in recruiting other minority students.
17. Black high school should be targeted and efforts should be made to attend career days (high school and college).