

University Faculty Attitudes on Affirmative Action Principles Toward Faculty and Students

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Abstract:

Despite its relatively short history, policies connected with Affirmative Action have endured a controversial social, political, and legal past. Higher education has witnessed much of this controversy firsthand. Because the venue of many Affirmative Action battles has been waged within educational settings, faculty in higher education are uniquely positioned because they are integrally involved in decisions regarding faculty hiring as well as student admissions, particularly at the graduate level. Therefore, this study examined the attitudes of faculty toward Affirmative Action principles and reverse discrimination as they might apply to students and faculty colleagues, with particular attention to which concepts were more supported. Results from 428 faculty indicated general support for diversity, although specific concerns were raised regarding reverse discrimination and the appropriateness of targeting persons of color or women. The most favorable attitudes supported students with demonstrated financial need. Potential future approaches to Affirmative Action in higher education are discussed.

Article:

Introduction

Few public policy phrases carry the widespread recognition and charged emotion of Affirmative Action (AA). Since its inception, Affirmative Action has emerged as a powerfully controversial topic throughout the United States, particularly given its sensationalist portrayal by the media (Fobanjong, 2001).

The definition of AA reflects its purported objective. AA has been represented as a set of policies primarily intended to compensate for historical racism and/or sexism as well as to preclude continued discrimination (Eisaguirre, 1999; Garcia, 1997; Tucker, 2000), in order to redress societal wrongs of the past. However, defining Affirmative Action has been a formidable endeavor, largely because the specific implementation of AA policies has been broadly interpreted (Eisaguirre, 1999). Fundamentally, AA policies aim to identify individuals from a group that has experienced past discrimination in an attempt to balance access and opportunities for all, although the particular target groups, mechanisms, and practice of various programs vary.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The 1960s and the Civil Rights Movements represented an era of considerable social change in the United States, including the emergence of Affirmative Action policies. President Kennedy's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity issued Executive Order 10925 (1961) and President Johnson issued Executive Order 11246 (1965), designed to aid members of minority groups to access employment equal to members of the majority culture (Eisaguirre, 1999). Yet the path leading to the development of Affirmative Action was long and arduous, accompanied by consistent resistance and backlash toward antidiscrimination laws and policies (Eisaguirre, 1999; Fobanjong, 2001; Tucker, 2000). Much of this backlash arises because of the assumption of racial preference in an atmosphere of limited resources, such as jobs or educational opportunities, generating substantial friction and division between majority and minority groups. Opposition to Affirmative Action has risen steadily, beginning in the late 1970s, and higher education has been at the forefront of this battleground. A significant setback for Affirmative Action in higher education occurred in 1978 when Alan Bakke sued the University of California for "reverse discrimination" (Fobanjong, 2001; Post & Rogin, 1998), the first lawsuit to coin the now familiar phrase. The U.S. Supreme Court decided "quotas," or specifying numbers of minorities,

was unconstitutional but maintained that race could still be used as admission criteria into the university as part of AA programs (Fobanjong, 2001). Legal cases have since charged reverse discrimination, sparking a dismantling of Affirmative Action initiatives (Anderson, 2002; Post & Rogin, 1998). Most recently in 2003, in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the Supreme Court ruled that race could be one factor considered in individualized admissions decisions, but in *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), the university would no longer be able to assign points to applicants based on race and ethnicity. Overall, the Supreme Court affirmed universities could consider race or ethnicity in admissions processes to further their “compelling interest in promoting the educational benefits of diversity” (Coleman & Palmer, 2003). These recent court decisions illustrate explicit emphasis on the broad term “diversity” rather than identifying certain underrepresented groups, such as women or racial minorities. Following this trend in the courts, the term “reverse discrimination” grew in familiarity as AA grew in unpopularity, precipitating the passage of California's landmark Proposition 209 in 1996 and the demise of AA in the public university system. This state referendum passed amidst a fierce outcry from many faculty, students, and administrators (Fobanjong, 2001), indicating that the various stakeholders in higher education may have opinions differing from the public at large. Yet faculties' perspectives regarding the perceived importance for diversity may differ from students', despite little research directly assessing faculties' beliefs in this regard.

STIGMA ATTACHED TO AA BENEFICIARIES

Amidst these public legal battles, perception about individuals considered Affirmative Action beneficiaries has been impacted, highlighting the presence of this backlash in the minds of Americans. Polls by *USA Today* in March 1995 found that the majority of Americans opposed Affirmative Action in the workplace and schools (Fobanjong, 2001). Whites surveyed in a poll published by the *New York Times* in July 1995 thought that when minority members are given “preferential treatment” in hiring, an unqualified African American is given a job that a qualified white man deserves. Concerns about AA are raised if one believes a qualified individual is overlooked in favor of a perceived less qualified member of an underrepresented group (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1994) (the premise for reverse discrimination charges). Such concerns that less qualified minorities are favored have been the crux of many of the legal challenges to AA in higher education settings. Questions arise as to whether minorities could succeed without Affirmative Action programs, cultivating a stigma regarding their qualifications (Cahn, 1993; Fobanjong, 2001). Comparable to the public's skepticism regarding the abilities of minorities, doubts regarding minorities' qualifications may also surface among faculty in higher education.

These questions about qualifications lead some to debate the stigma Affirmative Action may induce in the beneficiaries themselves (Fobanjong, 2001; Garcia, 1997), wherein some minorities accept the belief that standards have been lowered for them (D'Souza, 1991). Because of concerns about stigma, some African Americans and other minorities may not endorse AA policies (Fobanjong, 2001; Post & Rogin, 1998). The stigma attached to minorities who are thought to be AA beneficiaries, or even potential beneficiaries, has been popularized, giving rise to the notion that such individuals are actually harmed by AA because they carry this stigma and the fear of incompetence into their work, thereby affecting their performance (Eisaguirre, 1999; Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Thomas, 1993). Thus many faculty members, from both minority and majority groups, may cite concerns about stigma to justify their support to abandon AA programs. Moreover, because majority faculty may believe work performance is impacted by this stigma, they may judge minorities, justly or unjustly, as less productive. The extent to which faculty beliefs about AA have been affected by this stigma debate, however, remains unclear.

ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF AA

Given the backlash, erosion of Affirmative Action has begun impacting higher education, particularly with regard to college admissions. For example, the number of African Americans admitted at the University of Texas School of Law dropped from 38 to only 4 one year after being ordered by the courts to follow a race-blind admission process, and a precipitous drop in minority admissions followed California's Proposition 209 (Anderson, 2002; Fobanjong, 2001).

To respond to this backlash and to the current legal climate, university policymakers are contemplating alternative Affirmative Action initiatives. For instance, socioeconomic status indicators have received greater

attention (D'Souza, 1991; Eisaguirre, 1999; Malos, 2000) to expand beyond traditional conceptualizations of AA as alleviating sexism and racism. For instance, some have suggested socioeconomic disadvantage replace race in admissions decisions, redirecting emphasis on family background and financial condition (D'Souza, 1991). Moreover, non-traditional groups, such as those with disabilities, have been added for deliberation in this re-conceptualization (Middleton, Flowers, & Zawaiza, 1996). Consequently, new angles for AA programs are being considered to augment the palatability of antidiscrimination policies, although research on the acceptability of such new directions has not yet emerged.

CONTINUED UNDERREPRESENTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Although traditional AA programs witnessed an increase in the number of minorities among college faculty and students, progress has been modest (Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002). Students of color, such as African American and Hispanic students, are still underrepresented populations in higher education, both as students and faculty (Smith et al., 2002). For example, with respect to students, although 12.3% of the 2000 census were African American, only 8.4% of doctorate degrees and 7.5% of bachelor's degrees were awarded to African Americans. Even more apparent, although 12.5% of the U.S. population identified as Hispanic, only 4.13% of doctorates and 4.2% of bachelor's degrees were awarded to this group (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Thus, underrepresented groups remain underrepresented in college classrooms. And of those minority students who attain admission to college, many are confronted with a tense racial climate on campus (Watson, Terrell, Wright, Bonner, & Cuyjet, 2002).

Additionally, although Affirmative Action in college student admissions has been the centerpiece of the AA debate, racism is still a reality among academic faculty (Cahn, 1993; Reyes & Halcon, 1988; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). The concept of having “one-minority-per-pot” seems to be a common theme in the hiring of academicians in many universities (Reyes & Halcon, 1988). Although lay perceptions are that overt racism is in the past, covert racism and unintentional racial biases are well documented (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000), suggesting that discrimination may occur at a level that is not apparent to members of majority groups. The experience of many minority and female faculty suggests that they experience difficult campus climate issues comparable to those of students (Smith et al., 2002; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Thus, even without the dismantling of AA, the representation of, and atmosphere for, minorities among both students and faculty remains problematic in higher education.

FACULTY ATTITUDES TOWARD AA

University faculty represent a group of Americans that would potentially support AA principles because those with higher educational attainment are typically more racially liberal (Sniderman, Hagen, Tetlock, & Brady, 1986). Although well-educated Whites support racial equality in theory (suggesting that racial prejudice may not be paramount in this group), several authors have demonstrated that highly educated Whites remain opposed to Affirmative Action in higher education (Glaser, 2002; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997). For well-educated Whites, competition for limited resources appears to override commitment to policies promoting racial equality (Glaser, 2002). Thus, university faculty may demonstrate ambivalence about AA policies because of concerns about threats to their self-interest.

A substantial portion of the literature on Affirmative Action in higher education reflects student attitudes about AA principles and policies (e.g., Sax & Arredondo, 1996; Shmermund, Sellers, Mueller, & Crosby, 2001; Smith, 1999). Student surveys of AA concepts considerably outnumber studies on faculty attitudes (e.g., Sneed & Smith, 1989), and most surveys involving faculty are primarily concerned with student issues (e.g., Rothman, Lipset, & Nevitte, 2003), especially admissions. Relatively few studies have examined faculty attitudes toward AA relative to their colleagues (e.g., Vozzola & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2000), whereas others have targeted selective samples of faculty to assess their broad support for Affirmative Action (Niemann & Dovidio, 1998). Faculty attitudes that assess stigma ascribed to either their colleagues or students are largely unknown. Given the rapidly evolving public debate regarding Affirmative Action and the changing nuances of which group(s) should benefit from its implementation, university faculty are a particularly important target group for study. Faculty members make daily decisions about students' performance in classrooms and judgments regarding

their competence. Additionally, faculty are integral in hiring and retention procedures for faculty colleagues. Thus, faculty are in a unique position to derive opinions and make conclusions regarding those being considered for recruitment, hire, or admission into academic programs.

THE STUDY

The focus of the present study, therefore, was to explore university faculty attitudes toward AA principles as they pertain not only to students but to their faculty peers as well. Because research suggests that Affirmative Action based on race appears to be more unacceptable than any other form of AA policy (Doverspike, Taylor, & Arthur, 2000; James, Brief, Dietz, & Cohen, 2001), the current study centered heavily on attitudes toward persons of color. The principles underlying Affirmative Action were targeted rather than explicitly identifying an Affirmative Action program in order to minimize preconceived reactions about specific initiatives. In order to evaluate various aspects in the unfolding AA controversy, particular comparisons were drawn to distinguish whether faculty favored certain principles or groups over others. Among the beliefs assessed, questions were presented to directly ascertain whether faculty share concerns about the qualifications and productivity of minorities that have previously been raised in the stigma debate. Responses that reflect endorsement of “diversity” in general were contrasted with those that reflect approval of specific traditional AA groups (persons of color, women), to determine if faculty would approve of racial equality (diversity) but disfavor AA, as Glaser's (2002) study on educational attainment implies. Attitudes toward traditionally identified AA groups also were contrasted with those reflecting the trends toward alternative approaches to AA, such as individuals with financial need and disabilities. To investigate these attitude differences, faculty at a moderately large public university in the Mountain West were asked to complete a brief survey anonymously.

METHODS

Respondents

Faculty were recruited from a moderately large public university in an urban setting in the Mountain West with a 2001 student body of over 28,000 and a population of 0.6% African Americans and 3% Hispanics (below estimates of the state's minority populations). A total of 439 faculty responded to a campus-mailed questionnaire. Based on the mailing facility's campus roster, 1251 faculty with tenure/tenure-track or full-time clinical appointments were identified, including regular campus faculty as well as medical school faculty. Consequently, a response rate of 35.1% of those mailed was obtained. Approximately a dozen faculty secretaries called or returned forms, indicating the professor was away on leave. In addition, 11 were eliminated from the analysis because the answer sheet had more than 25% or more of the responses missing. Therefore, a total of 428 surveys were ultimately included in the analysis.

The sample was predominantly male (62.8%), white (84.7%), in their 40s, and from a middle-class background with well-educated parents. However, the obtained sample overrepresented female faculty (obtained sample of 38% compared to campus estimates of 26%) and overrepresented minorities (obtained sample of 15.3% compared to campus estimates of 10.8%).

Questions on academic background were requested (specific details available upon request by e-mail, including: the college(s) with which they were affiliated; typical number of classes taught per year; the average number of students in classes annually; the average number of students they advise/mentor outside class per year, accompanied by percentages of how many of those were students of color or female). Participants also indicated whether they had served on either faculty hiring (53.4%) or retention committees (48.1%). In addition, 34.1% of the faculty reported that they had perceived others to have been discriminated against or treated unfairly because of race or gender and 26.8% perceived themselves to have been discriminated against.

Instrument

The data for this study were gathered via a survey created for the current study, the Faculty Affirmative Action Principles Attitudes Survey (FAAPAS). Feedback during the development of the questions was obtained from the campus Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action office as well as from two colleagues with experience in gender issues and AA issues. Most data on attitudes toward Affirmative Action have been public opinion or

student polls at the college level which included the term “Affirmative Action” in the survey. The current survey intentionally excluded the emotionally-laden term “Affirmative Action” on the survey to minimize the likelihood of eliciting defensiveness. The survey defined the term diversity as “race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability”; the term “student or faculty of color” was defined as “individuals in such groups as African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, and Pacific Islander.”

The initial questions requested background information, followed by 27 attitude questions (see Appendix). Respondents were asked to indicate their attitudes on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) Strongly Agree to (5) Strongly Disagree, with lower scores reflecting more favorable attitudes. Note that several questions, however, were reverse-scored such that high scores are indicative of more favorable attitudes toward AA and low scores suggest less favorable opinions. A Total score across items was generated in addition to ten subscores of interest: Attitudes toward Faculty; Attitudes toward Students; Attitudes toward Color, including Attitudes toward Faculty Color and Attitudes toward Student Color; Attitudes toward Diversity; Attitudes toward Gender which subsumes Attitudes toward Faculty Gender; Attitudes toward Disability; and Attitudes toward Financial Need. The Attitudes toward Color subscore was distinguished from items with the broader term “diversity” to determine differences in attitudes one might have to individuals of color traditionally associated with AA programs versus the concept of diversity in general.

Procedures

Toward the end of spring semester 2003, the FAAPAS was mailed to faculty via intercampus mail with a cover letter recruiting participation in a Diversity Study. Faculty were asked to complete responses on a computerized answer sheet with no identifying information and to return the forms via intercampus mail with the return address label provided. Faculty were asked to respond within two weeks because it was believed that busy faculty would respond to shorter deadlines they would be less likely to forget. About nine days after the initial mailing, an e-mail reminder was sent to all faculty. Finally, at the end of the two-week period, a final reminder was initiated by resending the packets using intercampus mail.

RESULTS

All statistical analyses were conducted using the SPSS for Windows package. An examination of the psychometric properties of the FAAPAS indicates high internal consistency for the Total score ($\alpha = .94$). In addition, the ten FAAPAS subscores demonstrated good internal consistency, ranging from .74 to .91, with the two subscales with the fewest items (two items each on Attitudes toward Disability and Attitudes toward Financial Need) demonstrating the lowest coefficient α 's (.77 and .74, respectively) and Attitudes toward Students, Attitudes toward Color, and Attitudes toward Diversity demonstrating the highest (.91, .90, and .90, respectively). An examination of the correlation matrix among the FAAPAS subscales indicated that all ten scales were correlated (all $p \leq .01$), with nearly all correlations between .53 and .96. Many of these correlations are artificially elevated because items from one scale appear on another. Correlations between independent subscales of interest without item overlap are presented in Table 1, indicating high correlations even between those scales without item overlap. Such correlations, together with high internal consistency, suggest attitudes toward Affirmative Action issues as measured by the FAAPAS are fairly uniform.

Responses to individual items on the FAAPAS appear in the Appendix. Included are item means and standard deviations (3 demonstrates neutrality) and what percentages agreed/strongly agreed versus disagreed/strongly disagreed with each item. Overall, the Appendix indicates that respondents had largely favorable attitudes toward many of the AA principles, given that means were usually below or near the midpoints on each item and the overall composite attitude score, the FAAPAS Total, was below the midpoint ($M = 2.16$, $SD = .67$). A closer examination of responses indicates some questions gained specific support from participants. For instance, female faculty and faculty of color were considered productive and students with financial need were deemed good candidates for financial support to attend university. Moreover, faculty indicated their support for a more diverse faculty and student body.

Table 1 Correlations and t-Tests Comparing Faculty Attitude Subscale Scores on the FAAPAS

| Subscale comparison | M (Sd) | t-test | r |
|--|-----------------------|---------------|----------|
| Attitudes toward Faculty vs. Attitudes toward Students | 2.17 (.68) 2.23 (.66) | 2.97* | .85** |
| Attitudes toward Gender vs. Attitudes toward Color | 2.37 (.64) 2.22 (.69) | 5.47** | .67** |
| Attitudes toward Color vs. Attitudes toward Diversity | 2.22 (.69) 2.06 (.84) | 7.75** | .87** |
| Attitudes toward Color vs. Attitudes toward Diversity + Financial Need | 2.22 (.70) 2.05 (.71) | 6.29** | .70** |
| Attitudes toward Color vs. Attitudes toward Financial Need | 2.22 (.69) 1.89 (.71) | 10.23** | .58** |
| Attitudes toward Color vs. Attitudes toward Disability | 2.22 (.70) 2.20 (.84) | .58 | .68** |
| Attitudes toward Faculty of Color vs. Attitudes toward Students of Color | 2.09 (.75) 2.33 (.71) | 10.87** | .83** |
| Attitudes toward Faculty Gender vs. Attitudes toward Faculty Color | 2.37 (.63) 2.09 (.74) | 9.94** | .67** |

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .001$.

On the other hand, responses to several items run counter to obtaining the diverse campus faculty suggest they seek. For example, a considerable percentage of faculty would not actively attempt to recruit or hire faculty of color, which may reflect a belief that diversity was not an important consideration in hiring faculty. With respect to concerns that a qualified white male might be disadvantaged, a sizeable percentage of the participants indicated that an applicant of color or woman would be favored for a faculty position, and analogously, that a student applicant of color or woman would be favored for college admissions. Respondents also tended to believe that the gender balance in their department was adequate. In addition, a sizable minority of respondents did not believe students of color should receive financial support to facilitate attendance or special consideration if qualified for admission. Finally, stigma regarding the abilities of students does not seem to match the faculty's assessment of the high productivity ascribed to their colleagues because respondents only agreed 50.1% with the statement regarding earning grades comparable to majority students.

Several statistical analyses were conducted to determine the existence of any differences based on demographic characteristics. With regard to gender differences on the FAAPAS Total Score, women were significantly more likely to hold favorable attitudes than males ($t = 5.42, p \leq .001$). In evaluating which aspect was most relevant to account for this gender difference, female faculty were significantly more favorable on Attitudes toward Gender scores ($t = 6.21, p \leq .001$) compared to male faculty. With respect to ethnicity, white participants were contrasted with faculty of color for a t -test analysis of differences on FAAPAS Total Score. Although faculty of color were more favorable than Whites, no significant differences were found on FAAPAS Total Scores ($t = 1.38, p > .05$), but the minority group size was imbalanced with the majority group, complicating the ability to detect a difference.

Non-parametric statistics for age group and parent's educational attainment revealed no significant correlations with FAAPAS Total scores (both Spearman's ρ at $p > .05$). Similarly, no significant difference on the one-way analysis of variance was determined for respondent's childhood socioeconomic status, although upper-class respondents showed a trend to be the most favorable and middle-SES respondents showed the least support for AA principles.

Additional analyses were conducted to determine differences on other background questions. Those faculty who had experience serving on a hiring committee had significantly more positive ($t = 4.69, p \leq .001$) FAAPAS Total scores than those who had not served. Those who had served on hiring committees indicated that they would be more likely to take extra steps to recruit ($t = 4.17, p \leq .001$) and hire ($t = 4.81, p \leq .001$) faculty of color than those with no such experience. Those who had served on faculty retention committees were only

marginally more favorable on FAAPAS Total scores ($t = 1.79, p = .07$) than those who had not served. Finally, respondents who indicated they had perceived others to have been discriminated against were significantly more positive on the FAAPAS Total scores ($t = 4.65, p \leq .001$) than those who had not. Similarly, those who believed themselves to have been discriminated against in the past were more favorable on the FAAPAS Total score ($t = 2.98, p \leq .05$) than those who had not.

Finally, a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance was conducted for the FAAPAS subscores to determine whether respondents evidenced differential support across various aspects of AA principles. Given that many subscale scores are not independent (i.e., contain item overlap), their correlations would actually *diminish* the power of obtaining significant differences between subscales. Consequently, this multivariate test would be sensitive to detecting differences, and the obtained within-subjects effect was significant, $F = 54.69, p \leq .001$. Subsequent subscale t -test comparisons identified whether respondents held different attitudes toward particular subsets of items, as measured by the FAAPAS subscale scores (see Table 1). Comparisons between particular subgroups of AA beneficiaries were assessed. Participants held significantly more positive attitudes toward faculty than toward students, particularly comparing Faculty of Color versus Students of Color. Faculty respondents were more supportive of attitudes promoting diversity in general rather than the traditional recipients of AA, individuals of color. Financial need was clearly more acceptable to respondents than identifying a specific racial/ethnic group of individuals or those with disabilities. Interestingly, gender was significantly less supported than issues regarding individuals of color.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the attitudes of 428 university faculty toward Affirmative Action principles as they apply to both students and faculty colleagues. Faculty anonymously completed a mail survey created for the current project, the Faculty Affirmative Action Principles Attitudes Survey (FAAPAS) including 27 items. Overall, faculty were generally supportive of Affirmative Action principles, although reactions were mixed regarding who represented the most acceptable beneficiaries of such programs.

Several specific favorable attitudes were demonstrated in the current sample. Past concerns have been raised whether those construed as beneficiaries of AA programs may be stigmatized in terms of their qualifications and productivity (Heilman & Alcott, 2001). Faculty in the present study, however, typically considered their fellow female and minority colleagues to be productive. Also favorable was the general support for increasing campus diversity among both the faculty and student body. Furthermore, those faculty members who are in fact involved in hiring committees reported considering proactive steps to recruit and hire faculty of color. Perhaps faculty who have served on hiring committees have personally reviewed the qualifications of all candidates and thus any skepticism regarding minorities' qualifications may have been directly challenged, enabling them to be more supportive and open to AA policies. In sum, the faculty revealed considerable acceptance of AA beliefs on the whole, across various concepts.

Nonetheless, the results also point to particular preferences within faculty attitudes. Although the faculty professed a desire for greater diversity on campus, a considerable minority of respondents did not agree with actively pursuing diverse applicants for either faculty positions or student admissions. Additionally, although respondents predominantly did not appear to stigmatize their colleagues, approximately half of the sample did not agree that students of color attain grades comparable to students in the majority group. Such beliefs are consistent with previously described myths that "diversity means dumber" (Duster, 1993, p. 30). Minority students must maintain comparable grades to ultimately become faculty colleagues. Thus it is unclear how colleagues escape the stigma that may be ascribed to their student qualifications. Faculty respondents also were more favorable toward AA policies applied to faculty than to students, although if universities do not consider student minority status at admission, it appears unlikely these individuals will rise to the ranks of academia. Furthermore, as has been previously demonstrated (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1994), a considerable percentage of faculty participants expressed concerns consistent with the "reverse discrimination" belief that unqualified recipients are favored over qualified white individuals. One in four respondents relayed concern that a faculty of color may gain a position over a qualified white applicant, which would indirectly imply concerns regarding the

qualifications of minority applicants. Similarly, one in five respondents expressed similar sentiments regarding favoritism toward female faculty applicants.

A comparable pattern emerged for student applicants for admission, with one in five respondents concerned over favoring a student of color for admissions and nearly 15% concerned regarding favoritism for women. Therefore, anxieties about reverse discrimination have clearly begun to weave their way into faculty perceptions.

In a different vein, few background characteristics predicted responses to the FAAPAS. However, women were typically more positive toward AA beliefs overall, which has been demonstrated in some previous research on faculty attitudes (Niemann & Dovidio, 1998). Insufficient numbers of faculty of color in this sample prohibited a true analysis of whether they were more or less favorable toward AA attitudes. Although they tended to be more favorable, some have suggested that concerns over stigma have polarized minorities on AA issues such that many reject such programs (Fobanjong, 2001). Future researchers may consider campuses with more diverse faculty to examine this further. Interestingly, although not significant, middle-SES background respondents tended to be the most unfavorable toward AA policies, perhaps because this group feels most threatened by such programs. Greater numbers of respondents across socioeconomic categories may be needed to clarify this issue in future research, particularly if the push to refocus on financial need in AA practices continues.

Faculty expressed some preferences on how they would support AA principles. Faculty were significantly more supportive of AA concepts to promote “diversity” rather than targeting individuals of “color.” This finding may be consistent with Glaser's (2002) conclusion that well-educated Whites support racial equality but resist programs like Affirmative Action. Given the 2003 Supreme Court ruling emphasizing “diversity,” faculty may be more receptive to such images of AA. Some indications suggest that the concept of “diversity” is deemed less emotionally laden and more inclusive, distinct from and more acceptable than AA policies that center on race-based policies (Doverspike et al., 2000). Although “diversity” encompasses persons of color, the broader overtones of the term diversity may be more appealing than alternative definitions of AA. Yet the very inclusiveness of the term “diversity” is subject to a breadth and subjectivity in interpretation that can de-emphasize the needs of historically excluded groups, wherein minorities and women may be lost amidst the wealth of what constitutes diversity.

Findings from this study support trends to focus on financial hardship (D'Souza, 1991; Malos, 2000). However, some of the recent intentions to include disability as part of diversity (Middleton et al., 1996) did not gain particular support from respondents in the current study, perhaps because conceptions of persons with disabilities carry overtones regarding lower qualifications. The relative support for financial hardship again reflects a broader concept that diverges from the less acceptable race-based policies. However, empirical research indicates that SES-based programs would disproportionately benefit poor Whites rather than minorities (Bernal, Cabrera, & Terenzini, 2000). Indeed, economic considerations alone do not ensure diversity on either racial or gender lines. Consequently, the recommendation that traditional AA programs work in concert with SES-based models appears to be a sound strategy to foster greater diversity (Bernal et al., 2000), which may augment the acceptability of AA policies overall.

An intriguing pattern of results emerged regarding gender in AA policies. Although female faculty were considered productive, they do not appear to be a group considered to be appropriate for AA programs. Of all the subscores computed, Attitudes toward Gender was the least supported. A possible interpretation of this result rests in public perceptions that women are no longer subject to discrimination and sexism has been overcome. In contrast, public opinion polls suggest support for programs favoring women compared to racial minorities (Steeh & Krysan, 1996). Hence, faculty may view the status of women differently than does the general public. However, recent arguments on sexism in the workplace continue to call for the need to have programs to ensure opportunities and access for women (Busenberg & Smith, 1997).

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these results. The most salient concern revolves around the size and nature of the sample. A 35% response rate was obtained in the current study of university faculty. Others have obtained similar or lower response rates from faculty in studies of controversial topics (e.g., homosexuality in Ben-Ari, 2001) or work related issues (e.g., job satisfaction in Helgeland, 2001). Although a large sample of respondents was obtained, a higher response rate would be ideal, and future studies could aim for wider faculty participation, perhaps timed at a point in the semester when faculty are least busy. The campus mailing system is also imperfect such that some faculty might not receive misaddressed mail, although no clear solution to relying on mail records is apparent when utilizing an anonymous mail survey approach. Of those faculty who did not elect to participate in this study, we suspect such individuals would likely be less interested or supportive of AA; therefore any bias in the obtained results would likely tend to be more supportive of AA principles rather than less.

Further, the current university sample may not reflect the opinions of university faculty on other campuses across the U.S. The state population in which the study was conducted has 0.7% African Americans and 9% Hispanics in its census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Therefore, minority student enrollment is low, as is the percentage of faculty of color, which may prompt greater sensitivity and appreciation of diversity issues. Comparisons of these results with other college campuses would clarify differences geographically as well as any national trends among faculty toward evolving conceptualizations of Affirmative Action. Moreover, attitudes of faculty at private, selective institutions, in which the competition for resources is magnified, may differ from those faculty involved in the current study. Involvement of a more diverse faculty also would facilitate more fine-tuned analyses of differences across various ethnic/racial faculty groups.

A final limitation lies in the issue of social desirability. Despite anonymity of the survey, respondents were likely predisposed to report attitudes in a politically acceptable, socially desirable manner. Any self-report measure is susceptible to limitations of the reliability of the reporter's attitudes. Moreover, any self-report of attitudes may not match actual behavior, particularly as research is accumulating that much bias and discrimination is unconscious and unintentional (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Ultimately, given a sample of respondents who were motivated enough to take time out of their busy schedules to participate in this study, a sample that overrepresented women and faculty of color, being asked to report on a politically sensitive topic, the likelihood seems high that the current results reflect the most favorable opinions the faculty on this campus hold about Affirmative Action principles.

CONCLUSION

In sum, findings of this study suggest the current faculty favored many of the AA principles. Yet potential problem areas arise from concerns related to reverse discrimination. Some have implied that if diversity was prioritized as an ultimate goal that is explicitly sought in higher education, we might be able to transcend the need for Affirmative Action altogether (Post & Rogin, 1998). In light of the current climate in higher education, which questions the role of race and gender in admissions, scholarships, and hiring (Smith et al., 2002), reduced access and opportunities for women and persons of color remain, particularly as the legal atmosphere pervading Affirmative Action has precipitated an erosion of minority enrollment.

One possible direction for Affirmative Action may lie in promoting individuals with financial need, which appear more acceptable to faculty. Although this socioeconomic path may prove promising for some individuals who have been traditionally excluded or impeded in higher education, encompassing women, persons with disabilities, as well as diverse ethnic and racial groups, a more complex approach should be considered that will not exacerbate their existing underrepresentation. Substituting one set of policies (e.g., SES) for traditional policies (e.g., race and gender) as previously suggested by D'Souza (1991) appears likely to exclude members of the groups for which the programs were originally designed (Bernal et al., 2000). Models that promote additional diversity may be more popular and considered inclusive if race-based or gender-based policies were a subset of the programs available. Yet, more programs mean the institutional resource pie would be further divided, inevitably reducing opportunities for historically underrepresented groups. Institutionally, then, greater

resource commitments are needed to rise to the challenge of accomplishing the much-heralded “diversity,” if academia truly hopes to advance the case that diversity adds to the educational experience of all.

APPENDIX

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentage Agreements for Individual FAAPAS questions

| Survey item | M (SD) % | Agree ^a % | Disagree ^b % |
|---|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| I consider diversity to be an important criterion in hiring and retention of faculty | 2.06 (1.06) | 74.2 | 10.0 |
| If I had the opportunity, I would take extra steps to actively <i>recruit</i> new faculty of color | 2.04 (1.06) | 72.9 | 10.0 |
| If I had the opportunity, I would take extra steps to <i>hire</i> more faculty of color | 2.20 (1.07) | 64.8 | 12.2 |
| If I had the opportunity, I would take extra steps to <i>retain</i> faculty of color | 2.07 (1.07) | 68.9 | 9.6 |
| This university needs to have a more diverse faculty | 1.83 (.91) | 78.0 | 4.9 |
| My department needs to have more diverse faculty | 2.15 (1.01) | 65.8 | 8.9 |
| ^c The gender balance in my department is adequate | 2.73 (1.25) | 51.9 | 30.8 |
| ^c I am concerned a qualified white individual may be overlooked for a job in favor of an applicant of color | 3.46 (1.17) | 23.0 | 53.8 |
| ^c I am concerned a qualified male may be overlooked for a job in favor of a woman | 3.58 (1.14) | 19.4 | 55.9 |
| Faculty of color can be as productive as or more productive than majority faculty | 1.63 (.78) | 86.7 | 2.1 |
| Female faculty can be as productive as or more productive than male faculty | 1.61 (.79) | 86.7 | 1.9 |
| Faculty of color need to be more represented in administrative positions at this university | 2.07 (.91) | 68.5 | 5.0 |
| Women need to be more represented in administrative positions at this university | 2.17 (.98) | 63.1 | 7.5 |
| I consider diversity to be an important admissions criterion | 2.36 (1.09) | 60.0 | 14.8 |
| At this university, we should more actively recruit students of color | 2.03 (.98) | 74.1 | 8.7 |
| At this university, we should give more financial support to encourage attendance of students of color | 2.22 (1.07) | 64.9 | 11.7 |
| At this university, we should give more financial support to encourage attendance of students with disabilities | 2.21 (.96) | 65.3 | 8.3 |
| At this university, we should give more financial support to encourage attendance of students with greater financial need ... | 1.81 (.79) | 84.0 | 3.1 |
| At this university, we need to improve retention of students of color | 2.14 (.92) | 63.2 | 5.2 |
| At this university, we need to improve retention of students with demonstrated financial need | 1.98 (.80) | 74.2 | 2.1 |
| At this university, we need to improve retention of students with disabilities | 2.17 (.87) | 62.2 | 3.8 |
| This university needs a more diverse student body | 1.88 (.88) | 77.5 | 4.0 |
| Student applicants of color are as qualified as applicants of the majority group | 2.17 (.96) | 61.0 | 6.7 |
| ^c I am concerned a qualified white student may not be admitted in favor of an applicant of color | 3.56 (1.14) | 19.4 | 54.8 |
| ^c I am concerned a qualified male student may be overlooked for admission in favor of a woman | 3.67 (1.07) | 14.6 | 58.3 |
| I believe special consideration should be given to applicants of color who meet minimum qualifications for admission to a competitive program | 2.85 (1.14) | 41.4 | 31.0 |
| Students of color get grades as good as majority students | 2.39 (.99) | 50.1 | 11.0 |

^aPercentage of faculty indicating they Strongly Agree or Agree with the item.

^bPercentage of faculty indicating they Strongly Disagree or Disagree with the item.

^cItems that are reverse-scored, such that *high* scores are indicative of *less* favorable attitudes toward AA.

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