

Report and Recommendations on The Access and Equity Program

"Academic excellence cannot exist without diversity. Given what we know about population trends, it is becoming increasingly essential for diversity and high academic standards to coexist on campus."

Cheryl Fields

For more than a decade, the Commission on Higher Education and the State's colleges and universities have been systematically engaged in efforts to improve access and achievement of minorities in higher education. To some extent, these efforts have been successful, while in many instances it is quite clear that much remains to be done. For example, the State is currently experiencing the highest overall college participation and achievement rates in history by minority students. Yet, these rates remain disproportionately low, when compared to the presence of minorities in our State's population. The number and proportion of African American faculty members and executive level administrators on our campuses remain dismally low.

Demographic trends show that new communities of color, in addition to the approximately 30% African Americans who make up our State's population, are continuing to increase in South Carolina, making the State more racially diverse. This report suggests ways for higher education leaders to open more doors of opportunity for minority students and to improve race relations, while building on the foundation of progress that has been made in the State over the past decade.

In recent years, much attention has been given to a new funding strategy for higher education, planning and assessment, new State financial aid programs, and improving excellence in colleges and universities. Development and implementation of such State initiatives can be viewed as either an obstacle or an opportunity, when considered in light of access and equity goals. Progress toward access and equity goals cannot be made in a vacuum. These efforts may be affected, either positively or negatively, by other statewide initiatives. This report provides the view that other Statewide initiatives can and should enhance access, equity, and diversity in our colleges and universities. We view diversity as vital to the pursuit of excellence; and we believe that diversity and academic excellence can and must be a reality in higher education. This report offers some suggestions on how this might be achieved.

We hope that the recommendations included in this report will provide the Commission, the Governor, legislators, college and university boards of trustees, and college and university presidents and administrations information that will be helpful in strengthening and enhancing present efforts to provide opportunity to all. These recommendations are intended to be constructive, positive, and to foster dialogue among various decision-makers, as the policies regarding access and equity for a new century are determined.

Report of the Access and Equity Ad Hoc Advisory Committee

Executive Summary

Background

In August 1998, the Commission on Higher Education approved a recommendation to establish an ad hoc advisory committee to review and make recommendations on the Access and Equity Program. The committee was asked to prepare a report that included responses to seven questions.

Questions

1. How do the purpose and goals of the Commission on Higher Education affect State and institutional efforts to promote access and equity for underrepresented racial minorities, first generation college students, and economically disadvantaged students?
2. Is diversity an expressed value in Statewide planning priorities?
3. Is diversity an expressed value in public higher education institutions?
4. How can other higher education initiatives, such as performance funding, Statewide planning, and State financial aid programs be implemented in ways that enhance Access and Equity Program goals?
5. What are some barriers that prevent the State, institutions, and individuals from achieving access and equity goals? What can be done at State and institutional levels to remove such barriers?
6. What impact, if any, is the current use of SAT and/or ACT scores having on access to higher education for underrepresented racial minorities, first generation, and economically disadvantaged students?
7. Describe and/or recommend appropriate uses of the SAT and/or ACT scores in higher education.

Method

The committee held five meetings over a five month period (October 1998 – February 1999) and reviewed data, information, and suggestions from a variety of sources, including the CHE staff, institutional representatives, and the Chair of the Access and Equity Committee.

Recommendations

1. The Commission should clearly articulate, in its mission statement and the strategic plan for higher education, expressions of support for goals to improve minority access and equity in higher education.
2. The Commission should work with colleges and universities and annually monitor progress toward attaining Statewide access and equity goals, in accordance with Access and Equity Program policies.
3. The CHE staff should prepare an annual report that includes data on institutional progress toward meeting Access and Equity goals. The report should be distributed to the Commission and the Legislature.
4. The Commission on Higher Education should broaden the focus of the Access and Equity Program to include all underrepresented racial groups, while maintaining a focus on African Americans, the State's largest minority population who continue to be underrepresented in college enrollments, graduation classes, and among faculty members and executive level administrators.
5. For increased success in pursuing Access and Equity Program goals and fulfilling the mission of higher education in South Carolina in 1999 and beyond, we recommend annual program allocations of at least one half of one percent of annual higher education appropriations. The allocated funds would be used as follows: 40% for basic grants; 40% for competitive grants; 10% for graduate fellowships; and 10% for enhancement programs at S.C. State University and Denmark Technical College.
6. Provide an additional \$10,000,000 for need-based financial aid to enable more students to overcome economic barriers and attend college on a full-time or part-time basis. (This recommendation was advanced earlier and was approved by the Commission at its December 1998 meeting.)
7. Periodically review State and institutional policies to ensure that opportunities for access to higher education are provided equitably for minority students at both two-year and baccalaureate degree granting colleges.
8. Colleges and universities should express diversity as a value and should include goals to achieve and maintain diversity in appropriate institutional documents, such as strategic plans and recruitment materials.

9. The Commission staff should gather information from all public institutions and prepare a report which describes access and equity programs and strategies that institutions have found to be effective on their respective campuses. The report should be disseminated to the Commission, the Legislature, and others who work to improve access and equity in higher education.
10. Eligibility for the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program should be implemented with more flexibility, allowing students to qualify for this Scholarship by meeting any **two** of the three criteria. 1.2200
11. Eligibility for the LIFE Scholarship Program should be implemented with more flexibility, allowing entering freshmen who enroll in four-year colleges and universities in the State to meet **one** of the two current eligibility criteria. 1.2200-201-
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12. Specific Performance Funding incentives should be given for the recruitment and retention of "other race" faculty.
13. Institutions should be required to include in their Performance Funding Planning Reports information on the recruitment and retention of "other race" students, faculty staff, administrators and trustees/commission members.
14. Consideration should be given to using the following criteria for establishing and maintaining eligibility for future State-sponsored scholarship programs:
 - (a) at least a B average, as determined by the student's high school;
 - (b) evidence that the student was involved in extra-curricular activities;
 - (c) evidence that the student meets the college admissions requirements; and
 - (d) evidence that the student meets the institution's definition of progression toward the completion of a degree.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Charge to the Committee

At its August 1998 meeting, the Commission on Higher Education received and approved, from the Access and Equity Committee, a Task Force Report on the Access and Equity Program. The Report included a recommendation that a Statewide ad hoc committee should be established to review, study, and report further on the Program. Accordingly, a twelve member committee was established with representation from the Governor's office, the General Assembly, college and university governing boards, community organizations, the business community, and campus access and equity representatives. The selected ad hoc committee was a racially and geographically diverse group of both men and women.

The Committee was asked to do the following:

- A. Examine issues affecting minority access and equity in South Carolina public colleges and universities.
- B. Clarify the role of the Access and Equity Program as it relates to current Statewide planning priorities for higher education in South Carolina. Recommend appropriate policy changes, if necessary.
- C. Prepare and submit to the Commission on Higher Education by December 31, 1998, or as soon thereafter as possible, a written report that summarizes the results of items A and B above, and more specifically, which includes the Committee's findings and recommendations on issues that are reflected in the following questions:
 - 1. How do the purpose and goals of the CHE affect State and institutional efforts to promote access and equity for underrepresented racial minorities, first generation college students, and economically disadvantaged students?
 - 2. Is diversity an expressed value in Statewide planning priorities?

3. Is diversity an expressed value in public higher education institutions?
4. How can other higher education initiatives, such as performance funding, Statewide planning, and State financial aid programs be implemented in ways that enhance Access and Equity Program goals?
5. What are some barriers that prevent the State, institutions, and individuals from achieving access and equity goals? What can be done at State and institutional levels to remove such barriers?
6. What impact, if any, is the current use of SAT and/or ACT scores having on access to higher education for underrepresented racial minorities, first generation, and economically disadvantaged students?
7. Describe and/or recommend appropriate uses of the SAT and/or ACT scores in higher education.

Method

The Ad Hoc Committee held five meetings (October 30, 1998; November 16, 1998; December 14, 1998; January 20, 1999; and February 17, 1999) at the Commission on Higher Education. At the initial meeting, the Committee reviewed its charge, along with background information on the Access and Equity Program. Also at this meeting, the Committee selected Co-Chairs and established three subcommittees to be responsible for developing responses to each of the seven questions that were included in the charge to the Committee. Subcommittees were assigned to study and prepare initial drafts to the respective questions as follows:

- Subcommittee A - Questions 1, 2, and 3
- Subcommittee B - Questions 4 and 5
- Subcommittee C - Questions 6 and 7

During the second meeting, the respective subcommittees, along with resource persons from the CHE staff, discussed and recommended ways to

expand access and equity in higher education. Subcommittees reported on the following topics and discussed how they affect access and equity goals:

Subcommittee A

- The Purpose and Goals of the Commission on Higher Education
- Statewide Planning Priorities in Higher Education
- Diversity as a Value in Higher Education

Subcommittee B

- Performance Funding and Statewide Planning
- State Financial Aid Programs

Subcommittee C

- Uses of the SAT and Similar Tests in Higher Education

At the third meeting, access and equity representatives from colleges and universities described access and equity activities on their respective campuses and offered suggestions for improving the Program.

During its fourth meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee reviewed, analyzed, and edited initial draft reports from each subcommittee. The revised drafts were combined and reviewed at the fifth and final meeting.

Participating, along with Ad Hoc Committee members, in one or more of the meetings were college and university access and equity representatives, the Chair of the Access and Equity Committee, the Director of the Houston Center for the Study of the Black Experience Affecting Higher Education, and the following Commission staff members: Executive Director, Access and Equity Officer, Student Services Division Director, Planning and Performance Funding Division Director, and Academic Affairs Division Director. The Access and Equity Officer and the Director of the Houston Center provided resource materials and assisted in preparing the final report.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

How do the purpose and goals of the Commission on Higher Education affect efforts to promote access and equity?

The purpose and goals of the Commission on Higher Education clearly support goals of access and equity for minorities in the State's higher education system. More specifically, S.C. **Legislative Act 359** states, "The mission for higher education in South Carolina is to be a global leader in providing a coordinated comprehensive system of excellence in education by providing instruction, research, and life-long learning opportunities which are focused on economic development and benefit the State of South Carolina." This legislation states also that one of the goals to be achieved through this mission is "affordable and accessible education."

In addition, the **Strategic Plan for Higher Education** (CHE, June 1998) asserts that the Commission on Higher Education and institutions of higher education are "committed to a broadly educated citizenry in order to promote informed leadership, economic development, and workforce preparation to meet the needs of the State of South Carolina." The Plan states further that:

It is the duty of the higher education community to provide access to higher education for citizens of South Carolina and to promote their intellectual growth and development. ...major industry will find the State more attractive if the general educational level of the potential workforce throughout the State and for all of its citizens, regardless of race, creed or ethnic origin, is high.

The mission statement of the Commission on Higher Education includes a mandate to "monitor and evaluate the progress of the institutions in implementing the State program for access and equity in higher education" (SC Commission on Higher Education Web Page). Accordingly, the Commission and institutions of higher education work together to implement Access and Equity Program strategies for improving minority achievement in higher education. However, the lack of substantial progress in improving

minority enrollments, degrees awarded to minority students, and the number of minority faculty and professional employees suggests the need for more effective measures. Fields (1999) states, "Academic excellence cannot exist without diversity. Given what we know about population trends, it is becoming increasingly essential for diversity and high academic standards to coexist on campus." The Committee views diversity as vital to the pursuit of academic excellence. In 1999 and beyond, the Commission, the Legislature, college and university governing boards, and campus personnel are challenged to improve minority access and equity in higher education, while pursuing academic excellence. Colleges and universities need to admit and graduate more minority students while maintaining high academic standards, if we are to satisfy State and National requirements for a trained workforce and meet the educational needs of our increasingly diverse population.

Recommendations

1. The Commission should clearly articulate expressions of support for goals to improve minority access and equity in its mission statement and the strategic plan for higher education.
2. The Commission should work with colleges and universities and annually monitor progress toward attaining Statewide access and equity goals, in accordance with Access and Equity Program policies.
3. The CHE staff should prepare an annual report that includes data on institutional and Statewide progress toward meeting Access and Equity goals. The report should be distributed to the Commission and the Legislature.
4. The Commission on Higher Education should broaden the focus of the Access and Equity Program to include all underrepresented racial groups, while maintaining a focus on African Americans, the State's largest minority population, who continue to be represented in college enrollments, graduation classes, and among faculty members and executive level administrators.

Is diversity an expressed value in State-wide planning?

Diversity is an expressed value in Statewide planning for higher education. In addition to statements found in Act 359 and in the strategic plan for higher education, the Commission's Access and Equity Program has seven goals that address diversity issues from a variety of perspectives. They are as follows:

1. Develop and maintain institutional environments where cultural diversity and the presence of minorities are valued aspects of campus life.
2. Achieve parity in black and white enrollment and graduation rates at undergraduate, first professional, and graduate levels.
3. Make additional progress in hiring minority faculty, professional staff, and other employees.
4. Encourage the transfer of minority students from two-year to baccalaureate degree granting institutions.
5. Address financial needs and provide incentives for minority students by structuring and maintaining State aid programs for undergraduate, professional, and graduate students.
6. Address the problem of under-representation of black males in higher education in South Carolina.
7. Continue to strengthen historically black colleges to ensure that they will be able to fulfill their missions as full partners in the higher education system and provide quality education programs.

These goals are worthwhile and should be reaffirmed by State policymakers. Increased financial allocations should be provided to ensure that progress will continue toward attainment of goals of the Access and Equity Program. It is noted that declines in funding for the Program over the years, along with competing higher education priorities, have placed severe limitations on State and institutional efforts to increase minority access and achievement at public colleges and universities in South Carolina. Clearly, there is need for additional resources to improve access and equity for minorities, while embracing diversity as a vital aspect of academic excellence in higher

education in South Carolina. Adequate funding is needed to support efforts to recruit and retain African American full-time faculty members and administrators at executive and professional levels in our colleges and universities. Resources are needed also for more doctoral fellowships for minority students. There is a need for resources to support higher education/K-12 collaborative efforts to provide more rigorous curricula and bridge programs for increasing numbers of minority students. Moreover, adequate support is required for continuation of minority recruitment and retention efforts that have been shown successful results in previous years.

Recommendations

1. For increased success in pursuing Access and Equity Program goals and fulfilling the mission of higher education in South Carolina in 1999 and beyond, **we recommend annual Program allocations of at least one-half of one percent of annual higher education appropriations (approximately \$3.5 million in 1999-2000).** The allocated funds would be used as follows:
 - **40% for basic grants** to institutions for funding, on a matching basis, minority recruitment and retention activities which are described in their Access and Equity Plans that are filed submitted to the CHE
 - **40% for competitive grants** to support institutional projects that enable higher education institutions to form partnerships with K-12 schools and provide more rigorous coursework for minority and low-income students to help improve their academic preparation and increase their chances for success in being admitted to, and graduating from, college.
 - **10% for graduate fellowships**, with at least 60% of these funds earmarked for doctoral fellowships to increase the number of doctoral recipients who will be available to join faculty ranks in colleges and universities
 - **10% for Enhancement** programs and activities at South Carolina State University and Denmark Technical College (the State's two historically Black institutions)

2. Provide an additional \$10,000,000 for need-based financial aid to students to overcome economic barriers and attend colleges in South Carolina on a full-time or part-time basis. (This recommendation was advanced earlier and was approved by the Commission at its December 1998 meeting.)
3. Periodically review State and institutional policies to ensure that opportunities for access to higher education are provided equitably for minority students at both two-year colleges and baccalaureate degree granting colleges.

Is diversity an expressed value in higher education institutions?

Available information indicates that diversity is an expressed value in South Carolina public higher education institutions. To document this belief and get details on the nature of strategies and activities that are being implemented on campuses to achieve greater diversity, the subcommittee polled each institution to get answers to the following questions:

Is diversity an expressed value at your institution?

If so, how is it expressed (list documents, occasions, individuals for ensuring that it is, etc.)

Describe programs and/or strategies that you have found to be particularly effective.

Sixteen institutions responded to the questionnaire. One hundred percent of institutions that responded stated that diversity is an expressed value at their institutions, and they submitted various statements and documents to support their responses. They also described programs and strategies that were effective on the respective campuses.

Recommendations

1. Colleges and universities should express diversity as a value, and should include goals to achieve and maintain diversity in appropriate institutional documents, such as strategic plans and recruitment materials.
2. The Commission staff should gather information from all public institutions of higher education and prepare a report which describes access and equity programs and strategies that institutions have found to be effective on their respective campuses. The report should be disseminated to the Commission, the Legislature, and others who work to improve access and equity in higher education.

How can other higher education initiatives, such as performance funding, Statewide planning, and State financial aid programs be implemented in ways that enhance access and equity goals?

In addressing this question, the committee researched, studied, and deliberated the following:

- ✓ The thirty-seven Higher Education Performance Indicators, with special attention to indicators 6A (SAT and ACT scores of student body), and 8C (accessibility to the institution of all citizens of the State)
- ✓ The South Carolina Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program, the Need-Based Grants Program, the LIFE Scholarship Program, the STAR Scholarship Program, and the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program
- ✓ SAT Profile of South Carolina College-bound Seniors (provided by the SAT Program Summary Reporting Service of the College Board)

With regard to access and equity for minorities, the committee noted that minimum eligibility requirements for the Legislative Incentives for Future Excellence (LIFE) Scholarship Program and the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program are having the effect of excluding many minority students from receiving these scholarships. Specifically, the LIFE Scholarship program requires that entering freshmen must earn a 3.0 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale and score a minimum of 1000 on the SAT (or its equivalent). The Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program requires students to rank in the top five percent of either their sophomore or junior class, earn a 3.5 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale, and score a minimum of 1200 on the SAT.

Recommendations

1. Eligibility criteria for the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program should be implemented with more flexibility, allowing students to qualify for this Scholarship by meeting any **two** of the three current criteria, which are as follows:

- ✓ Score a minimum of 1200 on the SAT (or earn an equivalent ACT score)
 - ✓ Earn a cumulative GPA of 3.5 on a 4.0 scale
 - ✓ Rank in the top five percent of the sophomore or junior class
2. Eligibility criteria for the LIFE Scholarship Program should be implemented with more flexibility, allowing entering freshmen who enroll in four-year colleges and universities in the State to meet one of the two eligibility criteria, which are as follows:
- ✓ Score a minimum of 1000 on the SAT (or earn an equivalent ACT score)
 - ✓ Earn a cumulative GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale

Regarding Performance Funding policies, it is noted that there is no specific incentive "other race" faculty recruitment and retention as part of performance funding. This is the case even though there has not been an increase in the percentage of minority faculty in recent years.

Performance Funding requires a planning report to be submitted by each institution. The report covers several areas, specifically, staffing, student services, and instruction, but does not call for diversity and access issues to be addressed.

Recommendations

1. Specific performance funding incentives should be given for the recruitment and retention of "other race" faculty.
2. Institutions should be required to include in their Performance Funding Planning Reports information on the recruitment and retention of "other race" students, faculty, staff, administrators and trustees/commission members.

What impact if any, is the current use of the SAT and/or ACT scores having on access to higher education for minorities?

As the SAT and ACT are currently used, the pool of minorities that qualify for state scholarships is greatly reduced. It is well documented that, as a group, African-American children, nationally and statewide, score lower on these tests. Scores from these tests are routinely used by public colleges and universities in granting admissions, and awarding financial aid. Most recently South Carolina includes test scores as a factor in determining funding for public colleges and universities. The greatest impact seems to be in the awarding of financial aid. Both of the State's scholarships (Palmetto and Life) have SAT or ACT requirements. The qualifying test scores are well above the average score for African Americans. Consequently, African Americans are grossly underrepresented among scholarship recipients. In the admissions process, most South Carolina colleges and universities use the scores in conjunction with other predictors, but it appears that more weight is given to the test scores. "Cut-off" scores are often presented in admissions brochures, and catalogues. When presented with these "cut-off" scores, many minorities may choose not to apply for admissions. In financial aid/scholarship decisions, the scores are used similarly. When state funding is allocated to state-supported colleges and universities, publicly-funded institutions are rewarded for the number of first-time students who are enrolled with SAT scores higher than 1000. Although this performance indicator is not a major factor during the funding allocation, it is used and institutions are rewarded on this indicator.

A student's grades in high school courses are a better predictor of college success than SAT and/or ACT scores according to studies. Further, "persistence of effort," as shown by such indicators as extra curricular activities, is found to be a good forecaster of college success. And the strongest pre-college indicator of whether a student will succeed in earning a bachelor's degree is the academic intensity of the student's high school courses. Still, the State of South Carolina continues to use SAT and/or ACT scores as the gatekeeper for higher education.

The use of the SAT and/or ACT score as a gatekeeper to screen applicants, therefore, gives minorities a "double whammy" when it comes to an opportunity for higher education. Setting a minimum SAT and/or ACT score closes off access to scholarships for colleges and access to four-year higher education institutions. Students who have been denied quality K-12 education are thus further denied the

opportunity to recover from such backgrounds in a quality higher education institution.

The lack of access to higher education needs to be addressed with both long-range and short-range actions. In the long-range, South Carolina must continue to strive to upgrade the quality of education available to all children. The accident of where a child's family resides should not determine the quality of the education available to that child. In the short-range, the SAT must not continue as a criterion that automatically eliminates students from eligibility for LIFE and Palmetto Fellows Scholarships. A more flexible approach to the criteria needs to be developed. Need should be a primary consideration, and increasing revenue to the State Need Based Grant program can do this. Only after the State Need Based Grant Scholarship program has been funded, should the state consider enlarging the funds available for other scholarships. Additionally, the state should provide funding for grants for innovative programs involving colleges, high schools, parents and communities in partnerships with students. These programs should prepare parents of students in South Carolina's future classes to assist in providing quality academic preparation for their children.

Recommendation

1. It is our recommendation that consideration should be given to using the following criteria for establishing and maintaining eligibility for future state-sponsored scholarship programs: (a) at least a "B" average as determined by the student's high school, (b) evidence that the student was involved in extra-curricular activities, (c) evidence that the student meets the college admissions requirements, and (d) evidence that the student meets the institution's definition of progression toward the completion of a degree.

Describe and/or recommend appropriate uses of the SAT and/or ACT scores in higher education.

It would be more appropriate to use the SAT and ACT diagnostically. Rather than reviewing only the scores, the entire test protocol could be analyzed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Educators could use this information to plan educational programs for students and to assess the quality of instruction in schools.

Some states have looked at abolishing the use of standardized tests in the admissions process (proposed in California), or offering automatic admissions to students in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating classes (enacted in Texas), or using a lottery to admit students from a pool of applicants who meet admission requirements (proposed in California).

Initially SAT and ACT scores were used to assess what students had learned during the K-12 experience. We are convinced that South Carolina should return to using these tests as assessments and in doing so, could use the assessments to strengthen schools. In districts where schools are poor, local colleges could design programs that make their educational resources available to pre-college students. If the tests are used diagnostically, curriculum deficits could be identified in schools.

When test scores are used to make admissions and financial aid decisions, the quality of the student's high school should be taken into account. Average SAT scores for each school should be used in the decision-making processes for admissions and financial aid decisions. Students from low resource schools would thus receive favorable weighting.

Other ideas should also be explored. * We must move quickly to offer summer bridge programs for under-prepared students. A second consideration is to look at changing the admission cycle to a rolling schedule, admitting about 11 percent of next year's freshmen class each month from November through July. Applicants should be given greater latitude in what SAT and/or ACT test scores they present to an institution. Also, if the SAT/ACT score is low, an applicant should have the option of presenting additional information to counter the often-inaccurate prediction of failure.