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A Pessimistic Finding Regarding Faculty
Affirmative Action in Higher Education

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Abstract

A sample of university students were given resumes of hypothetical prospective faculty members which were systematically manipulated to include differences in gender, race, age, and whether the person had a disability. The students were asked to rate the hypothetical prospective faculty members on the basis of teaching and professional characteristics and whether they would recommend hiring them. In spite of growing numbers of women, African American, and a few disabled faculty members presently teaching in higher education, the old prejudices remain: older, white, male, nondisabled faculty received the higher ratings.

One important part of the academic work-place is the classroom. In order for affirmative action employment programs to succeed in academia, there must be a non-hostile classroom environment in which the instructor can demonstrate ability. (Milward, Denhardt, Rucker, & Tucker, 1983) The purpose of this study was to determine the quality of the classroom environment which might be encountered by an instructor who is not a member of the dominant group in academia today which is composed of white (92%) males (58%) over the age of 40 (72%). (*Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2000, Table 669*) The percentage of faculty members with disabilities is not known, but it is far less than the 30% found in the general population.

Questionnaire Development

A number of studies focus on the factors which are related to instructor evaluation and to the decision to enroll in a

class. These studies showed that instructor evaluations were related to different variables including the physical attractiveness of the instructor. (Goebel & Cashen, 1979) In addition, various other characteristics, judged attractive by the student, were related to a positive evaluation of the instructor. *These characteristics include such things as whether the instructor was perceived to be a fair grader, the perceived level of knowledge of the instructor, the instructor's communication skills, and the instructor's enthusiasm in class. (Barry & Dubinsky, 1981; Dion, Berscheid, & Walter, 1972; Kerin, Peterson, & Martin, 1975; Spitz & Weller, 1980; Tauber, 1973; Flood & Downs, 1979; Kane, Gilmore, & Crooks, 1976; Painter & Granzin, 1972; Kassaye & Feldman, 1983) Finally the student's decision to enroll in a class was related to the size of the class (King, 1983), the grade expected by the student (Dilts & Fatemi, 1982), the friendliness of the instructor (Spitz & Weller, 1980), and personal characteristics of the instructor which the student judged to be attractive (Kassaye & Feldman, 1983; Kassaye, 1984a & 1984b).

With these factors in mind, in-depth discussions were held with groups of students. Out of these discussions five dimensions emerged which appear to be related to students' decisions to enroll in a class. These dimensions are: the instructor's communication skills; the instructor's grading practices; the instructor's educational qualifications; the "likeableness" of the instructor; and whether other students were willing to enroll in the class.

Almost all previously published studies were carried out after the fact of enrollment. The research question in this study focuses upon student attitudes toward potential instructors before enrollment. It is an attempt to determine if there are stereotypes in students' minds which would cause the student to avoid classes taught by certain instructors.

In order to carry out the research project a model vita of a hypothetical instructor was prepared along with a questionnaire about the student's perception of how the instructor would probably perform in the classroom. They were distributed to 27 classes randomly chosen from 147 classes offered during one Spring semester at a New England university. The sample size is 307.

Administration of the Questionnaire

The students were told that the university was interested in their evaluation of the instructor based upon the vita. The hypothetical vita indicated a bachelor's degree from a well known Boston area college, a master's degree from a nationally known Boston area university, and a Ph.D. (expected at the end of the semester) from a well known midwestern public university. In addition the vita indicated three years work experience between the master's degree and beginning doctoral study, five years of experience as a teaching assistant at the doctoral university, two published articles, and professional association memberships.

All candidates were in excellent health, were married and had one child.

The hypothetical prospective faculty member was a woman in 42% of the cases (Finifter, 1973; Howard, 1978; Exum, Menges, Watkins, & Berglund, 1984; Robbins & Kahn, 1985; Lott, 1985; Baldwin and Johnson, 1995; Woodard, 1995; Nance and Ruby, 1996; Timms, 1998; Ference, 1999; Hojat et al., 2000) and white in 67% of the cases (Fleming 1976; Fleming, Gill, & Swinton, 1978; Prestage, 1979; Jacques & Hall, 1984; Bjork & Thompson, 1989; Feldblum, 1996; Cuccaro et al., 1996; Scullion, 2000; Selden, 2000; Gordon and Rosenblum, 2001). The ages varied between 30 and 50. (Cleveland, 1987; DeMille, 1989; Walters, 1996; Clark and Liebig, 1996; Minkler and Estes, 1998; Kempen, Brillman, and Ormel, 1999) One hundred twenty seven of the vitas (41%) indicated that the candidate was disabled and used a wheelchair. (Levitan & Taggart, 1977; Pati, 1978; Gittler, 1978; Wolfe, 1980; Bernstein, 1980; Acton, 1981; Pfeiffer & Giampietro, 1981; Pati & Morrison, 1982; Pfeiffer, 1991, 1993, 1998, 1999a, 1999b) The other vitas had no indication of a disability.

The questionnaire with which the students evaluated the candidates contained twelve questions concerning the perceived probable classroom performance. They were asked (on the basis of the vita) whether they agreed or disagreed that the instructor would be stimulating, confusing, clear, enjoyable, constructive, logical, exciting, thorough, and thought provoking. Two questions asked the student to rate the candidate's ability to communicate effectively in the classroom and the candidates probable accessibility outside of the classroom. The student was also asked to rate the candidate's educational qualifications, how well the candidate would be liked by other students, how hard and how fair the candidate would be in grading. The final question regarding teaching was whether students would sign up for a course taught by the candidate. These questions were combined into a score for teaching qualifications.

The students were asked four non-teaching questions: what salary level would the candidate demand, would the University offer enough salary to hire him or her, would the candidate fit in with the present faculty, and would the candidate be interested in carrying out research. These questions were combined into a score for what was called the professional dimension. The two final questions concerning the candidate asked for the student's overall evaluation and the student's recommendation in regard to hiring the candidate. These two questions composed a scale measuring the overall dimension.

The Results

The question investigated was whether certain characteristics (being younger, disabled, non-white, and/or female) produced lower evaluations of the hypothetical prospective faculty member. Being a woman, being non-white, and being disabled were coded zero in a dummy variable and used with the age to predict the scores on the three dimensions. The

following results were found forcing the regression line through the origin.

$$\text{TEACHING} = 0.66\text{AGE} + 0.15\text{RACE} + 0.16\text{DISABLED} + 0.07\text{GENDER}$$

R Square = 0.93 p < 0.00005

$$\text{PROFESSIONAL} = 0.67\text{AGE} + 0.14\text{RACE} + 0.16\text{DISABLED}$$

+ 0.08GENDER

R Square = 0.93 p < 0.00005

$$\text{OVERALL} = 0.60\text{AGE} + 0.16\text{RACE} + 0.19\text{DISABLED} + 0.07\text{GENDER}$$

R Square = 0.87 p < 0.00005

On each dimension the older, white, non-disabled men received a higher evaluation. The variable age produced the greatest impact. Race and disability produced the next greatest impact with gender playing a significant role.

These findings present a pessimistic view of the future. Even though policy makers and university administrators may make pronouncements in favor of hiring members of the protected groups, the younger minority, female, and disabled persons who are hired will face rough going from their students. They may be good teachers and scholars, but their students will view them as less capable than the older, white, non-disabled men.

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