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Recommended Citation

Mitchell, Greg, "Affirmative Action: How Far Does It Go?" (1982). *Black History at W&M Law*. 20.
<https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/blackhistorywmls/20>

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Affirmative Action

How Far Does it Go?

"There are those at the College who feel that William & Mary does not need to attract more black students, and is in fact practicing 'massive reverse discrimination.'" According to professor Vernon Edmonds, "affirmative action is a futile attempt only tolerated because 'social concerns are dominated by feeling, not science.'"

The above statements were taken from a front page article in the Flat Hat, September 5, 1980. Admittedly, the views expressed by the gentleman above have been heartily disclaimed by others in the College academic community. However, the fact remains that: 1) the gentleman so feverishly espousing this view is still on faculty; 2) the gentleman had been (whether or not this is still the case is unknown) permitted to present this position in class as being scientifically credible in spite of rampant criticism; and 3) there has been a reported incident of the gentleman marking incorrect a black student's response to a test question to the effect that Blacks are not inherently inferior to whites.

The above material was not included solely for the purpose of reopening old wounds. The statements themselves and the

College's response to the statements, however, do not seem indicative of a university staunchly committed to the development of, in the words of President Thomas Graves in a September, 1980 issue of the Flat Hat, "an environment that encourages black faculty, students and administrators to join our community, and that provides for those who do join a pleasant and stimulating experience."

The purpose of this article is to give a brief description of the College's efforts at affirmative action. These efforts will be discussed as will the problems encountered by the College. This article is not intended to be an all-encompassing and comprehensive review of the problem. Its sole purpose is to give the law students at Marshall-Wythe some idea of how the affirmative action program at the school operates.

The present affirmative action program at the school has a checkered past. The College first became embroiled in the controversy in January, 1969, when the Office of Civil Rights notified the state that it was one of nine states "operating systems of higher education that were de facto vestiges of a former dual

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system of higher education." In response to the criticism, the state submitted a plan on how to correct the situation. In 1973, the state was notified that the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia had entered an order requiring the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to commence enforcement proceedings against those states not in compliance with Title VI. Once again, the state submitted a second plan that was accepted by OCR but rejected by the court. Enter plan number 3 drawn up under the new criteria sent down by OCR under the direction of the court. Plan number 3 was rejected by OCR. The fourth plan was submitted and is now in effect at the College.

As stated in The College of William and Mary Segment of the Virginia Plan for Equal Opportunity in State Supported Institutions of Higher Education (revised 1978), the basic position of the College can be stated as follows:

- 1) The College is committed to the principle that equal opportunity in education shall be afforded those seeking admission to and those attending the College, without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, political affiliation, sex, handicap or age.
- 2) The College is committed to make a good faith effort to achieve the objectives of the Plan for the entering undergraduate class of the College with the understanding that when these objectives are subsequently reviewed and possibly modified as provided in the Plan, they will again be analyzed by the College administration and considered for action by the Board.

According to the College of William and Mary 1982 Virginia Plan Narrative Assessments prepared by the College, recruitment at the undergraduate level has largely consisted of attending "College Nights" at high schools to acquaint potential enrollees with the school. According to Narrative '82, "Black high school students have attended these 'College Nights' and have had discussions with College representatives." In the attempt to attract out-of-state students, the College has continued to recruit National Merit Achievement Scholars by attending five regional College Fairs geared specifically toward minority students.

Recruitment has also been aided by the Summer Transition Enrichment Program (S.T.E.P.), a program designed to give junior and senior high school students a taste of college life. In the attempt to ease the burden suffered by out-of-state students in regard to increased tuition costs, the College has developed the Minority Student Scholarship Program. Financial aid available to in-state students include the state-supported Incentive Grant Program which gives entering freshman and transfer students a grant of \$1,000.

The College's efforts at minority recruitment "have not attained the quantitative results originally envisioned by the designers of the Virginia Plan," according to Narrative '82. Three reasons given by the College to explain the poor results of the affirmative action program are: 1) better financial aid awards elsewhere; 2) receipt of financial scholarships based on merit at other schools; and 3) a change in choice of academic programs.

Richard A. Williamson, Director of Admissions at the law school echoed many of these same sentiments in a recent interview with *The Advocate*. In an interview with *Advocate* reporter Harry Shubin, Williamson stressed that in spite of the College's efforts to recruit minority students, these efforts have met with less than outstanding success. The lack of any significant amount of financial aid was one of the three reasons given by Williamson. Two other reasons given by Williamson why he would not attend the College if he were a black student are: 1) the lack of a black community; and 2) the reputation of the school.

William Spong, Dean of the law school, said he was very disappointed that the law school had not been more successful in recruiting minority students. He also attributed much of the blame on the lack of financial aid. Dean Spong said that if he had more money available, however, he would be more than happy to increase financial aid awards to make them more competitive with awards given by other schools.

All interested parties concede that the affirmative action plan has met with very little success. At the undergraduate level, according to Narrative '82, "With the appointment of a full-time minority recruiter in the Admissions Office, the College is hopeful that it can increase the number of Blacks who apply for admission, are accepted for admission and who choose to enroll."

The law school has no plans for any significant change in its present recruitment philosophy, and is hopeful that the current procedures will meet with greater success in the future.

by Greg Mitchell