African American Administrators and Staff

Dianne Wright, Janice D. Taylor,
Charlotte Burrell, and Gregory Stewart

Abstract

This article explores the issues of African American participation in the administrative ranks of the academy. The authors find that African Americans tend to hold positions that are marginal in academic organizations, lacking power and influence, and that not much has changed over recent decades. Forces influencing this condition are explored, and examples are given of innovative institutional strategies for increasing leadership opportunities for African American administrators.

It is interesting to be writing this article some twenty-five years after it was proposed as a dissertation topic by more than one of us—to no avail. That was during the mid-1970s when topics of this nature were constantly being called into question from a scholarly perspective. Since that time, entire volumes have been written on the topic of African American participation in academic administration. What is more interesting, however, is that today not much has changed. Just a little over a decade ago, Wilson (1994) was still describing African American participation, in any substantial numbers, in America's majority institutions as a relatively recent and scarce phenomenon.

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Historically Black Colleges and Universities–collectively known as HBCUs–were the primary educational institutions that afforded African Americans higher education opportunities, both as students and as professionals. As such, HBCUs played a unique role in the education of African Americans that had not been experienced by any other ethnic group. This history is deserving of separate elaboration to augment the evolution of African Americans in higher education (see article in this volume by Harper and Harper).

Prior to World War II, African American faculty and administrators were deliberately excluded by law, custom, or tradition from predominantly White universities (Myers 2002). Court decisions such as *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* laid a foundation for legal segregation of educational opportunity. Changing this discriminatory tradition required a series of world events, policy changes and lawsuits that unfolded during the twentieth century.

The Impact of Legislation and the Courts

The G.I. Bill of 1945 enabled hundreds of thousands of veterans, including thousands of African American veterans, many of whom were the first in their families, to attend college independent of scholarship or previous educational achievement. African American professionals' awareness of administrative opportunities at predominantly White colleges and universities increased as a result of greater access to higher education.

In 1954, in *Brown v. Board of Education* of Topeka, Kansas, the U.S. Supreme Court held that there was a compelling social need for racial interaction in public schools (McDowell 1999). Consequently, the United States Supreme Court launched a social revolution that profoundly affected higher education (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1982), when this landmark court decision struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine.

Yet another evolution in minority access to higher education began in 1964 with Title VI of the Civil Right Act which outlawed discrimination on the basis of color, race, or national origin. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act thus served to prohibit several types of discrimination in colleges and universities (i.e., in student recruitment, admissions, and financial aid). Title VII, under the same act, barred discrimination in employment.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued Executive Order 11246, and later Executive Order 11375, requiring all federal contractors to take affirmative action to end discrimination. Affirmative action policy had a set of specific and result-oriented procedures to which organizations receiving federal funding were required to apply in good-faith effort. Both of these executive orders were designed to guarantee that organizations provide equal opportunity in employment for minority group members and women. For the first time, an Executive Order outlawed discrimination in all federally-financed employment (Chamberlain 1989).

Despite these efforts, many higher education institutions were reluctant to admit Black students and to recruit Black administrators and staff. Consequently, the *Adams v. Richardson* case was filed in 1970 against the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) by the National Association for Advancement of the Colored People (NAACP). This case alleged that HEW had failed to implement and enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which was designed to eliminate racial discrimination in higher education (Moore and Wagstaff 1974; McDowell 1999; Wilson 1994). In fact, in 1969, prompted by Adams v. Richardson, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) ruled that twelve states—called 'Adams states' (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia)—were operating illegal, segregated, dual systems of higher education (McDowell 1999). Between the late 70s and early 80s the number of African Americans in higher education administrative positions increased in eleven of the then nineteen Adams State—Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, and West Virginia. African American

participation, however, was more tenuous than permanent during this period of expansion (Moore and Wagstaff 1974).

Despite its good intentions, affirmative action faced challenges. These challenges resulted in two competing ideologies: affirmative action and meritocracy. Generally, those who support meritocratic principles of hiring believe that positions should be awarded to individuals on the basis of merit and justified by such qualifications as ability and experience (Brown 1994). In Brown's (1994) report, meritocrates argue that, regardless of race or sex, the opportunity to compete for administrative positions should be the same for all applicants. The view also contended that access was already available to all groups under the merit system and that giving preferential treatment to African Americans and women, among others, amounted to "reverse discrimination" directed toward White males.

Proponents of affirmative action agreed, in part, with those who espouse meritocracy. However, they defined the problem and the solution quite differently. Because of historical inequality in administrative employment, advocates of affirmative action believed that "inequality of opportunity overrode equally of opportunities" (Brown 1994).

Many African American administrators were appointed as directors of special services or TRIO programs or directors of affirmative action. And, a large majority of these positions were funded through external sources or soft money. Further, as late as the mid-1980s, half of the African American professionals, including administrators and staff were in HBCUs. The latter served to make their presence in main-stream academe somewhat less impressive (Wilson 1994). Worse yet, by 1981 the number of African American administrators had peaked and began to decline.

Still worse, the situation today is much like what Moore and Wagstaff documented in their 1974 study findings on Black educators in White colleges; that is "the greatest number of Black administrators continue to be coordinators and directors of special programs and projects with unusual and prestigious-sounding titles, but which mean very little in terms of job authority and decision-making power." Then as now, few Black administrators are to be found at the helm of predominantly White public two-year and four-year colleges. Some notable exceptions include Adam Herbert at Indiana University and Dennis Gallon at Florida's Palm Beach Community College in Florida. Also, despite changes initiated by the laws, Blacks continue to face resistance in colleges and universities as far as salaries and promotions are concerned.

A study conducted by Brown (1997) supports the findings of Moore and Wagstaff's 1974 study. Brown states that "since the late 1960s, there has been a substantial increase in the number of senior-level African American administrators at traditionally White institutions." However, he contends that this increase conveys false perceptions of opportunities availed to African Americans. Additionally, this increased visibility may lead one to believe that the goal of racial parity in higher education has been achieved. But, as we all know, this is clearly not the case.

Gender: the Double Curse

Lindsay (1994) stated that, "women of color are at double jeopardy in the workplace. Discrimination based on either" racism or sexism or both "inhibits career options for women of color." There is a significant amount of literature on the historical and occupational experiences of African American women that warrants a separate discussion on African American women administrators in addition to a general discussion of African American administrators.

Prior to the late 1960s, African American women held teaching and administration positions only at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Moore and Wagstaff 1974). History credits Lucy Diggs Slow as the first formally trained African American woman dean. Slow was appointed Dean of Women at Howard University in 1922. Under Slow's leadership, several tasks were undertaken by the National Association of Women to develop standards of practice and promote leadership opportunities for African American women administrators. In the 1930s, Slow was a visible and vocal participant at the National Association of Deans meeting, addressing issues of racism and sexism at both historically Black and predominantly White colleges and universities.

Lucy Diggs Slow, the National Association of Colored Women, and the National Association of Deans and Advisors of Women in Colored Schools, also played an important role in the development and support of African American women administrators during this era that experienced sexist practices, similar to their male counterparts, at predominantly White colleges and universities (Perkins 1996). The *Adams v. Richardson* court decision of 1970 as well as the 1972 Amendments to the Higher Education Act opened up more administrative opportunities in higher education for African American women.

In 1985, there were 43,698 (thirty-five percent) women who were full-time executives, managers or administrators in higher education (Allan-Brown 1998). Of these women administrators, eighty-six percent were White, non-Hispanic, and ten percent were African American. Presently, the total number of full-time women executives, managers, or administrators in higher education is 391,487. African American women hold five percent of all executive, administrative, and managerial positions held by women in higher education and five percent of other types of professional positions held by women in higher education (Holmes 2004, 84; Corrigan 2002, 86). Again, however, most often these women are serving as directors of Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity, minority affairs, special services, financial aid or student counseling. In this regard, Allan-Brown (1998), describes African American women administrators as an endangered species, while Ortiz (1998) describes them as victims of double jeopardy. They are endangered species and victims of double jeopardy in the sense that their access to administrative and staff positions is impeded by both racial and gender discrimination. Thus, in spite of the civil rights movement, Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity legislation, and the feminist movement, sexism and racism in higher education continue to impact African American women's professional development and achievement.

Contemporary Perspectives

Since the late 1960s, there has been some increase in the number of senior level African American administrators at traditionally White institutions (Brown 1997). However, even with the small measure of progress made since the 1970s, discrimination continues to hinder the achievement of African American administrators in higher education. The latter has occurred in spite of the civil right movement and affirmative action. Further, these small increases are thought by some to convey a false perception—a perception that leads one to believe that racial equalization as a goal of higher education has been achieved.

The application of affirmative action and its role in higher education continues to plague colleges and universities in the United States. Individuals committed to using such methods for obtaining fairer treatment for African Americans are forced to defend themselves against charges that they are enemies of merit and other historical standards of qualification (Bridges 1996). However, many of these historical standards of qualification have been applied discriminately, especially when directed toward African Americans. Many "qualified" African Americans are denied access and opportunities to prove the merit of their work in higher education.

Also, African American administrators continue to be primarily in student services roles or as "assistant to" instead of in academic positions with titles of department chair, dean, provost, assistant or associate. And, while there are more African American administrators in traditionally White institutions than ever before, they still tend to be in positions that lack power and authority.

In a recent study conducted at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. titled "Roles and Activities of Senior African American Administrators at Majority Institutions," it was found that eighty percent of the senior-level administrative positions held by African Americans, in the more than two hundred traditionally White institutions contacted, were in student or multicultural and minority affairs (Adams 2001). The remaining twenty percent include vice presidents for academic affairs, human resources, research and technology, and graduate studies, and deans of schools of liberal arts and education. In the four decades since affirmative action was introduced into higher education, out of 3,800 degree-granting organizations, only a little over fifty African Americans have become visible as presidents of historically White institutions. In 2003, African Americans comprised 6.3 percent of all college presidents (Holmes 2004, 84; Corrigan 2002, 86).

Further, once White institutions fill their quotas of African Americans, they may cease to look further and are more inclined to say that African American administrators cannot be found rather than provide them with additional opportunities for administrative or staff employment.

Some argue that the small number of African American administrators and staff in colleges and universities is attributed to the decline in graduate enrollment, which is

the pool from which any higher education administrators and professional staff are drawn. Business and private industry also claim some of the best African American graduates by offering them more money and better working conditions than colleges and universities are willing to pay. The longevity of many African Americans at predominantly White institutions is oftentimes shorter than that of African American administrators employed at HBCUs. The former is viewed to be the result of a lack of advancement opportunities or "because of the tenuous nature of their positions" (Hoskins 1978).

To address these issues, the University of Central Florida (a member of the Coalition of Metropolitan Universities), Daytona Beach Community College, and Brevard Community College, developed a consortium project known as the Leadership Enhancement Program (LEP) with funding from the Florida State Department of Education. This initiative is designed for women and ethnic minority men who are currently employed by an institution in the consortium, and its intent is to provide opportunities for participants to gain skills and experiences that will enhance their career progression. Administered through the University of Central Florida's Office of Diversity Initiatives, the overall goal of LEP is to develop a cadre of higher education professionals who can be tapped for leadership positions when opportunities become available (King, Barnes, and Hitt 1999).

Similarly, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte has recently developed a "Minority Presence Plan" which states that "UNC Charlotte embraces the notion of diversity and its importance to the educational experience." The UNC plan further states that, "To achieve the highest goals of the Minority Presence Plan to provide education in an environment that respects and represents a diversity of backgrounds and ideas, the University will...recruit and retain a faculty and administration that represents and respects a diversity of backgrounds and ideas." Although the outcomes of this plan are under study, many such institutional efforts underway provide insights into how many metropolitan institutions such as the ones highlighted here are attempting to achieve equity in a post affirmative action era.

According to Christiansen (et al. 1989), "success in academia depends on not only what you know but also who you know for support, guidance, and advocacy." The informal network, however, can also be a double-edged sword. To its benefit, it has subtlety propelled several African Americans into key administrative positions. However, it is still a process where merit for African Americans is often secondary to luck and sponsorship. Secondly, this system does not address equity issues associated with African American employment at predominantly White colleges and universities. In fact, it can actually assist predominantly White colleges and universities with maintaining practices that continue to create barriers for people of color. Further, gaining access to these positions through informal networks is no easy task. Several studies indicate that African American women, in particular, experience greater feelings of exclusion from peer collaborations and mentoring opportunities (Singh, Robinson, and Williams-Green 1995; Bridges 1996; Benjamin 1997.). Other

observations regarding networking and African Americans make linkages between the low percentage of African Americans and the lack of "entry" into or comfort in the informal networks.

Conclusions

In summary, four conclusions about the current status of African American administrators in higher education can be drawn. First, American higher education still has a long way to go in terms of achieving parity in providing professional administrative opportunities for African Americans. Secondly, the real gains in employment opportunities for these professionals are due to minority affairs "types" of positions. Additionally, little has changed historically concerning the African American's struggle for respect and legitimacy in higher education, and lastly, the examination of the effects of gender as well as race is important to address in hiring and promotion practices in higher education.

References

Adams, R. L. 2001. Thirty years of Black "Firsts" in higher education. *The Black Collegian Magazine, Inc.* 30:1-7. Also available at www.black-collegian.mom/ issues30thAnn/ higherlearn2001-3oth.shtml (accessed June 12, 2003).

Allan-Brown, V. 1998. African American women faculty and administrators: Surviving the multiple barriers of discrimination. In *The multicultural campus: Strategies for transforming higher education*, eds. L. A. Valverde and L. A. Castenell, Jr. Walnut, CA: AltaMira Press.

Benjamin, L. 1997. *Black women in the academy: Promises and perils.* Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.

Bibliography Recourse Center. 2001. Available at www.africapubs.com/Apps/bios/ 1141 LaneyLucy.asp?Pic=none (accessed July 14, 2003).

Biggers, J. 2002. *Looking forward, reaching back: Black colleges in America.* Pacific Street Film Project. Available at www.psfp.com/hbcu.htm (accessed June 11, 2003).

Boyd, H., ed. 2000. *Autobiography of a people: Three centuries of African American history told by those who lived it.* 1st ed. New York: Doubleday.

Bridges, C. R. 1996. The characteristics of career achievement perceived by African American college administrators. *Journal of Black Studies* 26:748-767.

Brown, M. C. 1999. *The faces of science: African Americans in the sciences.* Available at www.princeton.edu/~mcbrown/display/charles-drew.html (accessed July 16, 2003).

Brown, S. V. 1994. The impasse on faculty diversity in higher education: A national agenda. In *Minorities in higher education*, eds. M. Justiz, R. Wilson, and Björk, 314-322. American Council of Education. Oryx Press.

Brown, W. A. 1997. Increasing power, not just numbers. *Black Issues in Higher Education* 14 (18): 1-3.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. 1982. The control of the campus: A report on the governance of higher education. Washington, DC: The Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching.

Chamberlain, M. 1989. *Women in academe: Progress and prospects.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Christiansen, M. D., L. Macagno-Shang, K. H. Staley, V. L. Stamler, and M. Johnson. 1989. Perceptions of the work environment and implications for women's career choice: A survey of university faculty women. *The Career Development Quarterly* 38:56-64.

Corrigan, M. E. 2002. *The American college president.* Washington, DC: ACE.

Elam, J. 1989. *Blacks in higher education: Overcoming the odds.* New York: University Press of America.

Gordon, J. N. 2000. *The color of teaching: Educational change and development series.* New York: Routledge Falmer.

Holmes, S. 2004. An overview of Africa American college presidents: A game of two steps forward, one step backward, and standing still. *Journal of Negro Education* (Winter): 84.

Hoskins, R. L. 1978. *Black administrators in higher education: Conditions and perceptions.* New York: Praeger.

King, V. G., B. Barnes, and J. C. Hitt. 1999. Diversity and the metropolitan university: Coming of age in the 21st century. *Metropolitan Universities* 9 (4) (Spring): 69-76.

Lindsay, B. 1994. African American women and Brown: A lingering twilight or emerging dawn. *Journal of Negro Education* 63 (3): 430-442.

McDowell, M. 1999. Caught in the middle: The continuing and often contradictory action. Available at www.case.org/currents/1999/January/mcdowell.cfm (accessed June 29, 2003).

Moore, Jr. W., and L. H. Wagstaff. 1974. *Black educators in White colleges.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Myers, A. 1999. Carver, George Washington. *Encarta Africana, Gateway to the World.* Available at www.africana.com/archive/article/tt_080.asp (accessed July 16, 2003).

Myers, L. W. 2002. *A broken silence: Voices of African American women in the academy.* Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Ortiz, F. I. 1998. Career patterns of people of color in academia. In *The multicultural campus: Strategies for transforming higher education*, eds. L. A. Valverde and L. A. Castenell, Jr., 121-136. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Perkins, L. 1996. Lucy Diggs Slow: Champion of the self-determination of African-American women in higher education. *Journal of Negro History* 91 (Spring-Winter): 1-4, 89-104.

Salley, C. 1993. *The Black 100: A ranking of the most influential African Americans, past and present.* Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group.

Singh, K., A. Robinson, and J. Williams-Green. 1995. Differences in perceptions of African American women and men faculty and administrators. *Journal of Negro Education* 64:401-408.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 1999. *Women of achievement: Written for the Fireside schools.* Academic Affairs Library. Available at http://docsouthunc.edu/brawley/brawley.html (accessed July 15, 2003).

Valverde, L. A., and L. A. Castenell, Jr., eds. 1998. *Multicultural campus. Strategies for transferring Higher Education.* Walnut, CA: AltaMira Press.

Wilson, R. 1989. Women of color in academic administration: Trends, progress, and barriers. *Sex Roles* 21:85-90.

Wilson, R. 1994. The participation of African Americans in American higher education. In *Minorities in Higher Education*, eds. M. Justiz, R. Wilson, and L. G. Björk, 195-209. Phoenix, AZ: The Oryx Press.

Yale University. 2001. Guide to the Ruth M. Harris papers. Yale University Library.

Author Information

Charlotte L. Burrell holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Akron, with a focus on Higher Education Policy. She currently serves as Assistant to the Dean, Summit College, at the University of Akron. Prior to her current appointment, she served as the Assistant to the Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning and as the Associate Director of Financial Aid at the University.

Gregory Stewart received his B.S in Social Work, Master's degree in Personnel Services and Counseling from Miami University, and Ph.D. in Student Personnel from Ohio University. He has had over 20 years of administrative experience in higher education, including serving as Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management at Northern Kentucky University. He has also served as a faculty member for social work, human services, and higher education administration. In addition, Dr. Stewart has published broadly in the area of diversity and higher education as well as developed and managed numerous research and service grants.

Janice D. Taylor is the Director for the Office of Multicultural Development at The University of Akron. Dr. Taylor received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology and her Master's in Higher Education Administration from Kent State University. She holds a Ph.D. in Counseling and Human Development Services, with a concentration in College Student Development, from the University of Georgia. Prior to coming to The University of Akron in 1999, Dr. Taylor was an Assistant Professor of Education at Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Taylor is currently recognized as an American College Personnel Association Emerging Scholar.

Dr. Dianne Wright earned a B.S. in Psychology, a M.S. in Counseling and Human Systems, and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from Florida State University. She served as Equal Opportunity Office staff for the Florida Board of Regents, State University System; Equity Coordinator for Florida's State Board of Community Colleges; and Budget and Policy Analyst for the Governor's Office in Florida. She also served as Special Advisor to the President for Social Justice at West Virginia University. Dr. Wright earned a tenured Associate Professorship of Higher Education Administration at the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, where she also served as Coordinator of the graduate program in Higher Education Administration and as the University's P-16 liaison.

Charlotte L. Burrell, Ed.D.
Assistant to the Dean, Summit College
The University of Akron
Summit College, Polsky 216
Akron, OH 44325-6001
E-mail: cburrel@uakron.edu
Telephone: 330-972-8852
Fax: 330-972-5300

Gregory Stewart, Ph.D.
Director of the Center for Access and Transition
The University of Cincinnati
4111A French Hall West
Cincinnati, Ohio 45221
E-mail: gregory.stewart@uc.edu
Telephone: 513-556-2244
Fax: 513-556-3087

Janice D. Taylor, Ph.D.
Director Multicultural Development
The University of Akron
Akron, OH 44325-1804
E-mail: jdtaylo@uakron.edu
Telephone: 330-972-8289
Fax: 330-972-7598

Dianne Wright, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Higher Education Administration,
Higher Education Leaders Program
Florida Atlantic University
College of Education
2912 College Ave
Davie, Florida 33314
E-mail: dwright@fau.edu
Telephone: 954-236-1080
Fax: 954-236-1050