

## A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM AT STONY BROOK

Vera Rony, March, 1999

The Stony Brook Affirmative Action (A/A) Program was established in response to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 11246 of September, 1965, requiring federal contractors to adopt programs to achieve equal employment objectives for groups underrepresented because of race, religion, color, sex, or national origin. The University embarked on its A/A program in the spirit later recommended by the American Association of University Professors:

The Committee believes that the further improvement of quality in higher education and the elimination of discrimination due to race or sex are not at odds with each other, but at one. What is sought in the idea of affirmative action is essentially the revision of standards and practices to assure that institutions are in fact drawing from the largest market place of human resources in staffing their faculties, and a critical review of appointment and advancement criteria to insure that they do not inadvertently foreclose consideration of the best qualified persons by untested presuppositions which operate to exclude women and minorities. ["Affirmative Action in Higher Education: A Report by the AAUP Council Commission on Discrimination" AAUP Bulletin, Summer, 1973]

Initiated in September, 1969, the Stony Brook A/A program was not only the first in the SUNY system, it was also the most comprehensive and creative, and the most participatory in its organizational structure.

While developing systematic methods to find and recruit faculty from the covered constituencies, the University came to recognize that significant increases in the numbers of minorities and women depended upon increasing the then meager pool of available candidates; this, in turn, depended upon an increase in the ~~no less meager pool of minority and women~~ graduate students. The Stony Brook incentive program for motivating and recruiting promising college seniors for graduate study was unique in the SUNY system. To encourage departments in this A/A recruiting process, the Dean of Graduate Studies offered additional student funding to departments that succeeded in these efforts. The A/A office gave assistance by organizing recruiting trips to the City College of New York, famous for the diversity and talent of its student body. Such outstanding Stony Brook faculty members as Nobel Laureate Chen Ning Yang contacted their colleagues at City to arrange meetings with promising minority and women seniors, urging them to consider graduate study at Stony Brook. Recruiting trips to other colleges were also arranged and funded. While these strenuous efforts did not produce an overnight change in the gender and ethnicity of our graduate student body, they did produce the first harbingers of a new inclusiveness in the University's approach to graduate education.

To offer equal opportunity access to professional positions at Stony Brook, the A/A office

established a Skills Bank, enrolling minorities and women from the New York metropolitan area who offered a wide array of talents and experience to the University. The equal opportunity search for high-level administrative positions, pursued at the national level, resulted in the appointment of two University Vice Presidents, a Provost (selected from the faculty), and a Director of Human Resources. These were path-breaking achievements in the early years of affirmative action.

In its efforts to further diversity and to relate to the problems of the community, the Stony Brook A/A program obtained a federal grant for a pilot project to teach typing skills to minority women in an impoverished farmworkers community; University jobs would reward successful completion of the program. Of the 40 enrollees, 12 completed the program (about the usual retention rate) and became University employees, contributing to the diversity of the workplace while greatly enhancing the quality of their lives. Unfortunately, changing policies in Washington made it impossible to build on this initiative.

Although the pursuit of equal opportunity in the undergraduate realm was the province of the AIM program, the A/A staff saw an area of need and opportunity: the encouragement of minority students to enter the sciences, where they were seriously under-represented. By recruiting concerned faculty to meet with, mentor, and, where necessary, tutor students who had interest and ability but lacked confidence, the A/A staff opened doors to new futures for a number of minority students.

*Vera Rony*  
This entire program was overseen by the Assistant Executive Vice President for Affirmative Action, ~~assisted by two staff members~~, but its policies were developed and implemented by Area Committees representing all sectors of the University. Corresponding to the areas of Vice Presidential responsibility, the Area Committees represented the ~~Main~~<sup>West</sup> Campus faculty and staff, the Administrative Services, and the Health Sciences faculty and staff. These Area Committees elected representatives to the President's Committee, which exercised oversight over the conduct of the A/A program as a whole and developed policies to meet new challenges. Together with the chief A/A officer, this Committee reported to the University President and to state and federal officials.

Although the University's A/A reporting system was developed several years before the 1973 recommendations of the AAUP, it is consonant with those recommendations, as well as the requirements of the federal government. Stony Brook's A/A goals for each department were "nothing more or less than an expectation of what .... will result under conditions of non-discrimination...in light of the proportion of those within the field of eligibility and recruitment who are women or members of minority groups." [AAUP Council Report, Ibid] To document this hiring process, each department of the University reported the current ratio of women and minorities for each employment category, together with the eligibility pools, the hiring goals it sought to achieve, and its time table for doing so. In addition to fulfilling the University's obligation to the federal government, these reports provided the area EEO Committees with the detailed information required to evaluate recruiting efforts and hiring decisions, enabling them to interact responsibly with those engaged in the hiring process.

The ~~excellence of the~~ Stony Brook A/A program has won wide recognition. The Assistant Vice President for A/A, ~~Vera Rony~~, has been invited to speak to many local groups, including the American Association of University Women, the Long Island Coalition of Business Women, the Smithhaven Ministries, Stony Brook Rotary, et. al.. She was also invited as a consultant on EEO matters at SUNY- Binghamton, SUNY- Albany, and Molloy and Southhampton Colleges. A frequent consultant to SUNY A/A Director, Eugene Kratz, Ms. Rony was a featured speaker at the Empire State Higher Education Affirmative Action Convocation held in May, 1975, which brought together for the first time the A/A personnel from the public and private campuses of New York State. Her address was carried by The State University News of summer, 1975.