

Minorities and Underrepresented Groups in International Affairs and the Foreign Policy Establishment

Executive Summary

Today, the demand from the government, business and education sectors for qualified personnel with international skills far outstrips the supply. To bring home the point, more than eighty federal agencies and offices rely, for example, on personnel with foreign language proficiency. According to a policy proposal issued by the American Council on Education (Hassen, P. F., McDonough, T., 2002), a March 2002 General Accounting Office study of the foreign language needs of five federal agencies found shortages of staff with needed foreign language skills. Indeed, it would appear that the personnel challenges confronting those agencies is a microcosm of sorts of a broader systemic shortage of personnel with foreign language and area skills required to meet security needs across the defense, intelligence, foreign policy, and commerce agencies. Compounding the problem, the apparently stark underrepresentation of minorities in the nation's foreign policy apparatus deprives America of a range of perspectives, inputs, and human resources to draw upon in meeting the challenges that we are called to confront in this new century. This paper considers the role of the nation's institutions of higher education in that regard and points to the urgent need for a diversified set of research activities to address and inform the issue. Without reliable data, it is difficult, if not impossible, to generate broadly applicable, solution-oriented human resource development strategies.

This paper articulates a research agenda to address the issue of minority underrepresentation in international affairs. It presents a synopsis of the problems posed by minority underrepresentation in international education at U.S. colleges and universities, and it points up as well as the ramifications for the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. It then examines, through a review of select and prominent literature, the types of research necessary to inform efforts to improve minority enrollment in international education programs, most importantly the development of data banks on emerging trends. If and when available, such information can be used to assess the nature of the relationship between minority enrollment in certain programs in higher education and minority underrepresentation in international affairs, to see if a correlation can be established as is presumed. However, given the inconsistency and scanty availability of data, formulating authoritative conclusions about the status of minorities in international affairs is at best difficult. Even though existing literature seems to suggest an apparent growing movement toward internationalization on many of the nation's campuses, including a small set of minority institutions, current research has yet to focus on the role of higher education in integrating minorities into the foreign policy establishment.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have established a relationship between ethnic politics and foreign policy (Challenor, 1977, White, 1981). Indeed, cultural heritage and ethnic ties have

played vital roles in the formulation and implementation of U.S. foreign policy from the time of its very foundation. However, in the case of underrepresented minorities, their influence on foreign policy has been limited, due largely to their relative absence from the ranks of the foreign policy apparatus. On that point, it should be noted that the foreign policy apparatus today encompasses a broader range of the institutions, agencies and departments due to the recent and well-documented trends toward globalization. The implications of minority underrepresentation can only be detrimental to minority interests and, as important, to the collective American interest in having representative foreign policy that reflects the will of the American people.

Two examples may help to illuminate the ramifications of this problem. First, it has been argued that U.S. policy toward Africa could, historically, have been more coherent had there been more African Americans represented in the upper echelon of the foreign policy apparatus (Morris, 1972). That is not to say that one must be of African descent to formulate sound policy toward African countries; but rather that lacking a diverse and interested range of viewpoints at the table where decisions are taken is bound to lead to disjointed, unrepresentative policy as we have seen in the past. The second example is our inability to respond as effectively to the challenges the nation faces in the wake of 9/11 as we might if we were able to tap the strategically valuable diversity that is the embodiment of American competitiveness and success. We have now begun to look inward to Americans of Arab and Central Asian heritage to serve as translators and interpreters to foreign policy experts on related politics and culture. We must tap these and other resources not just for the purposes of intelligence and translation, but, perhaps more important, for views and ideas on sound policy toward regions, countries, and cultures of the world that certain Americans have some affinity for and tend to have some personal knowledge of.

Significance of the Study

In his address to the 54th Annual meeting of NAFSA, the Association of International Educators, William H. Gray, President and Chief Executive Officer of the United Negro College Fund noted that of all the students who studied abroad during 1999, only 3.3 percent were African American, 5.2 percent were Latino, and 4.4 percent were Asian Americans. According to Gray, no black college ranked in the top 20 of colleges sending students to study abroad. Worse still, no college serving minority communities ranked in the top 50 of colleges with international programs. Although the figures for other disciplines in international education are not readily available, it is unlikely that minority or minority-serving institutions would fare any better.

In spite of the situation described above, there has been no systemic analysis exploring, for example, the possibility of a linkage between minority underrepresentation in the foreign policy establishment and the poor enrollment of minorities in international education programs (Akomolafe, 1993). One way of tackling the problem would be to inquire if an increase in enrollment may eventually alleviate the problem of minority underrepresentation in international affairs. Unfortunately, without a sound theoretical justification and the data to back it up, the assumption that it is obvious that such an increase would directly lead to a corresponding increase in minority representation in

international affairs might not be sound. The bottom line is that, since no study of this nature has ever been conducted, we are really still very much in the dark as to why minorities fare so poorly when it comes to enrolling in international education classes. For instance, could it be a systemic problem or is it just a matter of individual choice? How do we know for sure that when an incentive is attached, that a Native American student, for example, will choose a typical international studies program over a business or computer major? Only when we know why there are so few minorities in this field of study, can we begin to address the root cause of the problem, and we can only know why if we have data-supported conclusions.

Purpose and Goals of the Study

The purpose of this study is to stimulate an empirical analysis of minority underrepresentation in international affairs based on the collection and interpretation of data relating to minority enrollment in international education. We also advocate a close examination of minority representation at the professional level, especially with respect to data pertaining to graduates who are already actors in the foreign policy process. The challenge for this study is to help colleges and universities in their task by initiating a process that will eventually result in providing relevant information that may enhance their commitment to improving the status of minorities in international affairs. It is our hope that the analysis and application of information generated from this data will also be instrumental in improving in the long run the quality of our foreign policy-making.

Paucity of Literature on Minority Representation: A Systemic Problem

In conducting this study, we were particularly interested in extracting statistical data relating to enrollment trends. Apart from the fact that enrollment is the traditional measure of student access to higher education, it is also the basis of many of our colleges' *raison d'être*. Enrollment is the nerve center of colleges and universities all over the country. It is used to determine policies, manage and allocate budgets, determine what curriculum to embrace or discourage and sometimes even used to determine whether an institution can remain open or closed. Outside the college, enrollment figures have a significance that carries even more weight. The Education Department uses fall enrollment data in program planning and for setting funding allocation standards for such legislatively controlled programs as the College Work-Study Program, State Incentive Grants, Direct Loans to Students, Basic Education Opportunity Grants, and Supplemental Opportunity Grants. In addition, the Bureau of the Census, the National Science Foundation, and most state education agencies also depend heavily on enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for such uses as economic and financial planning, manpower forecasting, and policy formulation. Therefore, without substantive knowledge of enrollment trends of minorities in international education, the goal of formulating policies and strategies to increase their representation in international affairs becomes almost unattainable.

Observations

Constrained though we were by time and financial resources, our initial anxiety concerning the availability of good, hard data was quickly confirmed. It simply does not exist. The NCES, which is one of the nation's best and most expansive depositories of education statistics, falls short of expectation on our subject area. Although it provides a plethora of statistics on enrollments by different categories including, though not limited to, major, gender, and ethnicity, for the most part, that information does not distinguish between international education and other social science disciplines. The problem thus encountered is that there is no way of extrapolating from available statistics the level of minority participation in international education. And while NCES publications contain a great many statistics on enrollment, including degrees conferred, staff, faculty salaries, revenues, expenditures, etc., there is absolutely no way of determining the exact, or for that matter, the approximate, number of minorities enrolled in international education programs nationwide. There is not even a separate category for the different disciplines that comprise international education, as they are routinely lumped together in one category tagged "Social Sciences and History." Only foreign language programs have their own distinct category.

But while enrollment statistics of the sort we seek are virtually nonexistent, the Institute of International Education (IIE) seems to have had considerable success in compiling a wealth of statistical information on overseas study. However, the drawback, as we alluded to in the rationale for our definition of international education, is that it provides data on overseas study alone, to the total exclusion of the broader body information that we are in need and search of. As such, while valuable for evaluating one piece of the international education pie (i.e., study abroad), IIE's statistical data, as contained in the statistical publication *Open Doors*, do not provide a full sense of the challenge we confront.

The American Council on Education's (ACE) report on minorities in higher education contains statistical information that is unparalleled. It provides a wealth of data that documents trends in just about everything on minorities in higher education. Among others, issues such as high school completion, college enrollment, employment trends, graduation rates, degrees conferred are all detailed and statistically backed up (Harvey, 2001). But ACE also falls short in addressing the issue of international education. Just like the NCES, it lumps together all degrees in the social sciences leaving us with no way of determining how many of those degrees were conferred in disciplines related to international education. For example, we know that over the past two decades, annual gains have been made in the number of blacks enrolled in higher education, but we are completely in the dark as to how many of these students are enrolled specifically in international education programs.

The bottom line? New studies focusing exclusively on minorities must be carried out if we are to have the data that provide the guideposts for dealing with this critical national human resource issue.

Recommendations

Based on the above observations, it is recommended that a comprehensive study of minorities in international education be undertaken as a matter of urgency, to determine the number and characteristics of students that enroll in the various international education disciplines. The survey should cover students in underrepresented groups from both minority and majority institutions. Although it is plausible that some of the questions raised can be answered with a probability sample of representative institutions, it is highly recommended that a national survey be conducted, especially if the objective is to provide truly comprehensive data.

Conclusion

Limited by constraints of resource and time, this study cannot be considered as having benefited from a completely exhaustive review of literature on the status of minorities in international education. It can be said, however, that the study draws upon the leading sources on the subject matter at hand as well as interviews with recognized academics, professionals, and opinion leaders in the field. As argued for in the recommendations above, the challenge is to collect the data that is necessary to quantify and then address in an informed manner the underrepresentation of minorities in international education and in international affairs careers. This enterprise is advocated not just for its own sake, but for the substantive impact that it has had and will continue to have on the goal of having representative and, therefore, more effective, U.S. foreign policy.