



## **THE MOVE ON WOMEN CONTINUES: College and University Admissions**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Last week the DOJ published a document that lays out a plan for “investigating and suing universities over affirmative action admissions policies deemed to discriminate against white applicants.” (New York Times: Aug 3, 2017). Let us examine how a redress of Affirmative Action will affect women.

### **AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DEFINED**

John F. Kennedy (1961), through Executive Order 10925, established the Equal Opportunity Commission. The term Affirmative Action was created and used to ensure that applicants for employment were considered without regard to race, creed, color or national origin. Although legislative measures were taken in order to increase the employment pool of individuals who were underrepresented in the job market, it was not until Lyndon Johnson (1965), through Executive Order 11246, that mandated Government contractors to have an Affirmative Action plan in their contracts for the employment of minorities. In 1967 President Johnson amended EO 11246 to include women as members of the protected underrepresented group.

### **AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN PRINCIPLE**

Historically, discriminatory practices that have favored white males have prevailed in academia but the introduction of Affirmative Action Programs at Colleges and Universities have attempted to redress these in the Admissions process. These programs extended their reach and mindfully recruited minorities and women to institutions of higher education, including elite colleges and universities. Minorities are defined as those students who come from communities that are not part of the established power structure. It is those who are historically underrepresented in higher education and more than likely First Generation College students. The criteria of Affirmative Action has broadened over time to include various contexts such as race, ethnic group, and social economic class and in college admissions this traditionally includes African Americans, Latino and Native Americans. In some programs such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, women of all ethnicities and races are either under or unrepresented with African Americans and Latinos as the most

underrepresented of all women. In some institutions special efforts have also been made to include students with abilities/disabilities and those identified as LGBTQ.

#### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN PRACTICE

Special Admissions programs give minorities and women an opportunity to be considered for public colleges, private colleges and universities, elite colleges and Ivy League schools; institutions that have traditionally been the domain of white males. In Ivy League schools, white males were given admissions preference compared to others. Even today, although elite schools receive more applications from more qualified women, these schools are using a loop hole which exempts them from the Title IX ban on sex discrimination. If all qualified women were accepted, these schools' gender ratio would be 60:40 (Washington Post: July 30, 2015). Special Admissions programs create a climate where students from different underrepresented ethnic and gender groups are recruited, welcomed, nurtured and shepherded through the college application, matriculation and admissions processes. Special college admissions programs designed to target the special needs of underrepresented students provide additional support, which includes tutoring, counseling, goal setting, guidance, course selection, financial aid applications and direction to pursue graduate study programs. It is through these programs that women and minority students are valued not only for their academic achievement but for their contributions to community and given special consideration in the admissions evaluation process.

#### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BENEFITS TO WOMEN

Women of all races and ethnicities benefit from Affirmative Action programs; in fact, research shows that white women have been the greatest beneficiaries of Affirmative Action programs. According to the Huffington Post (January 2016), women are more likely to graduate with bachelor's degrees and attend graduate school than men, women outnumber men on many college campuses, and women are highly represented in medical schools and law schools in contrast to their numbers 30 years ago. Although women are more represented, white women seem to benefit more than minority women. As early as 1995, white women held the larger proportion of managerial jobs, more than Latinos and African Americans (Cal Senate Government Organization Committee (1995)) and the Department of Labor Report (1995) revealed that 6 million women had advances on their job that would not have been possible without Affirmative Action. While some women are benefitting, minority women are still underrepresented.

#### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION CASE STUDY

The following three women attended an Ivy League school and were helped by Affirmative Action programs that provided a "women friendly" culture and a more conducive environment for women and minorities to succeed. **Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor** self-identifies as a triple minority when she entered Princeton University in 1976 soon after Princeton started to admit women. Sotomayor talks about her "self-doubts" coming from a culture of poverty that contrasted to Princeton's academic culture of privilege. It is through programs, services and mentors that help minorities that she received the encouragement to continue, complete her studies and achieve her future success. **Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan**,

although more economically privileged, was also able to attend Princeton University. Justice Kagan and Sotomayor are in the Supreme Court and are able to favorably rule on very important legislation that attempts to level the playing field for women and minorities. **Former First Lady Michele Obama** has talked about her experiences as a “first generation college student” and her “lack of confidence and self-doubts.” She was discouraged by high school teachers from attending Princeton University but she still pursued her dream and with encouragement and support she graduated from Princeton. Justice Kagan and Sotomayor are in the Supreme Court and are able to favorably rule on very important legislation that attempts to provide equity for women and minorities. Michele Obama prides herself as an Affirmative Action beneficiary at Princeton and Harvard and as the First Lady she provided great leadership that impacted women and children. Obama’s initiatives, specifically The Let Girls Learn program has increased educational opportunities, access, and success for young girls in the US and globally. The Career-Life program is providing policy driven initiatives that help eliminate the obstacles women face in terms of advancement and retention in STEM careers. If Sotomayor, Kagan and Obama had not themselves been provided increased educational opportunities, today’s women, girls, and minorities would not be reaping the protections and benefits of legislation and special initiatives because these women would not be in the position to act on behalf of women, girls and minorities.

#### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION and STEM

The STEM program initiated by President Obama (2011) created a pathway for more Americans to pursue careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. The program has increased the number of math and science teachers with an historic 25,000 engineers graduating yearly since Obama first started his term. STEM has raised the number of engineering and technology graduates, but women’s involvement still lags in these fields. Although girls in elementary, middle and high school take courses in math and science in the same numbers as boys, somehow women’s college participation in these majors declines. Lesser numbers of women graduate from college in STEM than their male counterparts. This is in strong contrast to the similarities in girls’ high school participation in Math and Science courses. Men continue to outnumber women in Science and Engineering, Physics, and Computer Science with women receiving only 20% of total bachelor’s degrees awarded in those fields. Women representation declines further in STEM at the graduate level and more of a decline occurs in the workplace. Despite Affirmative Action, Diversity and Inclusion programs there are still great disparities with women and among women. Even with all the “help” of programs such as Women in Science and Engineering (WISE), women are still underrepresented and minority women are greatly underrepresented in the fields of STEM. While college special admissions programs in STEM have inspired many women to pursue careers in Science and Technology at the Baccalaureate level, higher paying jobs are available to those who have graduate degrees; and some of the highest ranking schools in the nation in STEM programs reflect disparity in their number of advanced degree graduates. For example, in 2016 29% of Master’s in Engineering degrees were awarded to women at MIT and only 26% at Princeton. In Computer and Information Science, approximately 79% of male workers have PhD’s whereas only 15% of women have PhD’s. Of the 15%, we observe that only 60 were African American women while Latino and Native Americans were not reported because they were identified as too low to

report ( AAUW:2010). According to **Forbes Magazine (2016)**, the six top paying jobs of the **future** are in the fields of Science, Engineering, Technology and Statistics and other Science and Mathematics based occupations. At the moment, minority women comprise less than 1 in 10 of the employed scientists and engineers (National Science Foundation: National Girls Collaborative Project (2016). As the job market moves toward a demand for science based occupations, without the help of Special Programs, women will continue to lag in advanced degree preparation for these lucrative employment opportunities.

#### AFFIRMATIVE ACTION THREATENED

Attorney General Jeff Session's and the Trump Administration's hard line against diversity in college and universities college admissions will affect women and minorities, especially minority women. With this move, the administration has stated, that women and other minority groups are getting special treatment in college admissions. The Nation's 50 year effort at leveling the playing field shows that women and minorities except some Asians, are still underrepresented in colleges and universities and are unrepresented in some professions. Through Affirmative Action programs, not enough has been done to increase the participation of women and minorities in the future of America's economic workforce. **What about legacy programs?** Do Sessions and the Trump Administration consider legacy programs a form of affirmative action? The long established practice of giving preferential treatment in admissions to those applicants who are children of alumni is common but not considered controversial. It is presumed that if the alum has given money to the university, their children should get preferential admissions to the respective college or university. The more direct alum ancestors, the greater the chance of admissions regardless of test scores, academic performance or community standing. There has always been affirmative action for the elite. In a 2011 Chronicle of Higher Education study, legacy applicants at colleges and universities are given preferential points. Legacy program applicants in Colleges and Universities have a 23.3% advantage over non legacy applicants (whether male or female). When Affirmative Action is criticized, legacy is never mentioned as a common practice and is not considered a controversial point of contention. College grants, graduate fellowship programs and special support programs motivate women to study nontraditional programs and prepare women to enter fields that have been exclusively reserved for white men. A reduction or nullification of these programs will create a backward movement for women and minorities. Admission programs look at SAT scores, GPA, high school curriculum and recommendations, extracurricular activities and a combination of factors such as grades, and more personal qualities, such as leadership, family background, socioeconomic factors and race. These are all what traditionally college admissions programs use to make admission decisions but these are more in alignment with white male abilities, strengths and interests. Therefore the evaluation is based on very fixed male centered variables; but under Affirmative Action, Diversity and Inclusion programs multiple measures are employed in the individual evaluation which place value on other activities which are more specific to certain populations such as women and communities of color.

## CALL TO ACTION

- Resist the Sessions/ Trump plan to directly and indirectly halt all programs that benefit women and minorities in College Recruitment, Admissions and Retention.
- Resist plans to end academic enhancement, enrichment and programs that promote college undergraduate and graduate education support, thereby placing women “at risk” of non-completion; causing women to continue to be underrepresented in Science and Technology disciplines.
- Support and encourage women to pursue advanced degrees and participate in special training programs in Science and Technology. These skills prepare women for the future top-paying careers.
- Resist Sessions’ actions that negatively affect promotional programs for women and minorities and continue the “feminization of poverty.” The facts are evident. Women are underrepresented in the top professional career making academic programs. Future economic growth for women rests on the ability to master careers in Science and Technology.
- Assist the women’s movement by improving the learning process for all students. Women in professional schools contribute to understanding the perils and the disparity on women and families. Women seek to correct these disparities by participating in the conversations as equal partners and professionals in their respective fields in Science and Technology and other disciplines.
- Focus on expanding the opportunities for women through completion of higher education and narrowing the gap of women’s participation in STEM programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. Women must be prepared for the workforce of the future. Women need Special programs that assist them in overcoming barriers to academic preparation for economic success. Through college “equity” programs, women and underrepresented minorities are allowed to participate in higher education and prepare for economic success.