

The Status of Minorities and Women In Colorado's Higher Education Institutions

Lauren Saenz (Lauren.saenz@colorado.edu)
for The Piton Foundation

August 2008

370 17th Street, Suite 5300, Denver, Colorado 80202, 303-825-6246, www.piton.org

Executive Summary

This November, voters in Colorado will consider Amendment 46, a ballot initiative that proposes to amend the state constitution to ban government-sponsored race and gender preferences in the state. Specifically, the amendment says: “the state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.”¹ This amendment would prohibit all public institutions of higher education in Colorado from administering any programs or policies that typically fall under the umbrella of “affirmative action.”

Identical anti-affirmative action initiatives were passed in California in 1996 (Proposition 209), Washington in 1998 (Initiative 200), and, most recently, in Michigan in 2006 (Proposition 2). Many institutions of higher education in these states have altered their policies and practices to comply with these new laws, and doing so has affected the diversity of their student bodies and workforces. Research points to two main areas where the initiatives have had the greatest impact: student enrollment, including enrollment in specific programs, and faculty hiring. The purpose of this report is to assess the state of Colorado's public higher education system in each of these areas. When appropriate and available, data from California and Washington are presented to facilitate comparisons of enrollment and hiring patterns. All data presented in this report are publicly available.

In the research, key findings emerged in the areas of recent progress, need for greater progress, and potential impact on progress.

Recent Progress

- Women are making significant progress in Colorado's public higher education system. They enroll in undergraduate education at higher rates than men (55%) and graduate with a higher percentage of degrees (63% of Associates and 55% of Bachelors). The difference is even more pronounced within specific underrepresented minority (URM) student populations.¹

¹ In Colorado's system of higher education, members of underrepresented minority (URM) groups include Blacks, Hispanics/Latinos, and American Indians/Alaskan Natives. This means that their presence on campus is disproportionately less than their percentage of the overall population in Colorado. Asians or Pacific Islanders are not included in URM counts because they are generally overrepresented among higher education students and faculty.

- In general, enrollment in community colleges and four-year state colleges has kept pace with Colorado's demographic shifts. About 24% of community college students in 2007 were underrepresented minorities, very close to the 25% of high school graduates who also were URM. Three of the five state colleges had percentages of underrepresented minorities near 25% or above.
- The University of Colorado system has slowly increased the percentage of underrepresented minorities in its undergraduate programs over the last seven years, from 10% to 12%. Since 2001, the percentage of annual URM faculty hires also has increased, from 2% to 8%.
- Overall, the proportion of URM students in graduate programs has grown slightly. This growth also occurred in California and Washington, though both states experienced a significant dip in URM graduate student enrollment following the enactment of their ballot initiatives.

Need for Greater Progress

- In general, enrollment at Colorado's four-year research universities has not kept pace with demographic shifts in the state.² Seven percent fewer URM students enroll in these universities than graduate from high school.³ The University of California system had a larger gap between URM student enrollment and high school graduates, which widened further after the passage of Prop 209. The Cal system's gap grew from 20% prior to passage to 24% immediately following the passage of Prop 209. The gap has not closed in the 10 years since; in 2006, the gap was still 24%.
- The percentage of underrepresented minority students who comprise graduating classes in eighth grade, 12th grade, community- and four-year colleges and graduate schools declines at virtually each stage. The opposite is true for white students.
- While faculty diversity continues to increase, Colorado's institutions of higher education don't yet reflect the state's demographic composition. About 41% of the faculty are white men and 35% are white women. Only 3% are men from underrepresented minorities and 4% are minority women.⁴

Potential Impact on Progress

- If Colorado's research universities follow a path similar to California and Washington, the gap between the percentage of URM students enrolling in their institutions and the percentage graduating from high school is likely to grow with passage of Amendment 46. The progress occurring in some of these institutions could possibly be reversed.

² University of Colorado, Colorado State University, University of Northern Colorado, and Colorado School of Mines.

³ These data apply only to freshmen who enroll immediately after graduation from high school

⁴ 12% of faculty are non-resident aliens or have an unknown race or ethnicity.