AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: COSTS, BENEFITS, AND IMPLEMENTATION

RaJade M. Berry*

ABSTRACT. This article discusses the costs and benefits of implementing affirmative action programs in higher education. Based on a national survey of institutions of higher education, the author addresses the following questions: What factors impede the ability of the affirmative action officer to achieve program results? What is the effect of staff size, budget, and race on perceived implementation barriers? This study finds that increased impediments to affirmative action program efficacy are greatly affected by program resources and race.

INTRODUCTION

For more than four decades, social equity policies in America have continued to face legal, administrative, and political challenges. Responding to concerns for social equity and calls for action from the government, many laws and initiatives were specifically designed to provide equal opportunity and mobility for traditionally disadvantaged groups (i.e., minorities, women, and the disabled). Equal employment opportunity initiatives consist of statements that prohibit discrimination and support programs that investigate individual discrimination complaints. Political power and legal protection for these “protected groups” have evolved as a result of a three-tier process: equal employment laws, affirmative action laws and programs, and diversification programs (Klingner & Nalbandian, 1998). While these laws and initiatives may be similar in nature, each serves a purpose in

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diversifying American’s workforce and educational institutions. Equal employment laws protect “protected groups” from discriminatory treatment regarding hiring, promoting, and working conditions. Because individual victims of employer discrimination found it difficult to file complaints, the utility of the equal employment policy was limited to organizational pronouncements prohibiting discrimination and complaint processing (Kellough, 1998). Affirmative action programs expand educational and employment opportunities for “protected groups” by actively recruiting them into the organization. Organizations are then able to develop workforce diversification programs to focus on several areas (i.e., recruitment and retention, job design, education and training, benefits and rewards, and performance measurement and improvement) and encourage organizational change in its mission, culture, policies, practices and productivity – all of which are vital to long-term organizational survival and effectiveness (Klingner & Nalbandian, 1998).

While in theory, this three-tier system promotes social equity and eliminates discriminatory barriers to achieving a representative balance in education, employment, and contracting, some aspects of this system raises problems in society because these social values may conflict with the principle of equal treatment for all American citizens (Birch, 1993). Klingner and Nalbandian (1998) point out that the public personnel management system in the United States is one that reflects competition among traditional values such as political responsiveness, organizational efficiency, individual rights and social equity, and emergent anti-government values (i.e., individual accountability, limited and decentralized government, and community responsibility for social services). When jobs are scarce, competing values become evident because some policies are viewed as favorable based on their contribution to social equity or unfavorable based on their denial of individual rights for non-minorities, in particular.

This article discusses the societal costs and benefits of implementing affirmative action in higher education and questions whether the outcome of affirmation action can be determined given the significant implementation challenges that currently exist in higher education. Also, this research considers how program resources and race might influence factors that impede the role of the affirmative action officer.
THE CHALLENGES OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Affirmative action refers to a set of public policies and specific initiatives designed to eradicate institutional racism and discrimination. Over the years, affirmative action policy transformed from a series of presidential executive orders, civil rights laws, and governmental programs into specific practices used to increase opportunities for minorities and women (Marable, 1996). The term “affirmative action” suggests that institutions promote specific, results-oriented practices to ensure that barriers to employment, education, and contracting will be eliminated for minorities and women and other members of protected groups.

Using “narrowly tailored” affirmative plans that specify affirmative measures to challenge conventional institutional policies and procedures, public and private educational institutions adopt “narrowly tailored” affirmative action programs and use affirmative measures to diversify its workplace and student body (Williams, 1992). In a “narrowly tailored” plan, the affirmative action officer promotes the following affirmative action program activities: a) establishes long-term and short-term goals and timetables to correct patterns of underutilization for qualified protected groups; b) designs a recruitment program to attract qualified members of protected groups into underrepresented departments; c) revises personnel procedures to eliminate discriminatory practices affecting members of protected groups; d) initiates measures to ensure that qualified applicants are included with the selection pool; e) provides career advancement training to employees locked in dead-end jobs; f) establishes a system that regularly monitors the effectiveness of the affirmative action program; g) establishes procedures that regularly adjust ineffective affirmative action strategies; and h) promotes program goals to assure full participation in educational and employment opportunities for all groups (U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1995). In theory, these institutional initiatives lead to a representative diverse workforce and student body.

Since the late eighties, special interest groups, political officials and the public have called on presidential leadership to downgrade or dismantle affirmative action programs. Whereas affirmative action policy means that positive (affirmative) steps should be taken to ensure equal employment and educational opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged groups, in recent years the practical implementation of affirmative action is thought to have taken on a new meaning in the form
of unjustified set-asides and preferential treatment (Crosby and Cordova, 1996). Critics of affirmative action challenge the fairness and appropriateness of procedural issues and argue that affirmative action policy encourages reverse discriminatory practices (Glazer, 1988). For some, affirmative action is thought of as political rights claimed for cultural minorities and is seen as “costly to members of the majority who may be passed over in spite of having better qualifications than some members of the minority who are appointed or accepted” (Birch, 1993, pp. 126-127). However, and, this is a crucial and too-often-overlooked caveat, the premise of affirmative action has always rested upon the notion that all members of the “protected group” who are considered for employment or admission are, at minimum, qualified. The practical implementation of affirmative action in higher education continues to be challenged and these challenges raise questions of fairness and cause resentment in society.

Deciding “how to do a personnel function” and “what value to favor or what system to use” is critical in a democratic society because each policy may conflict with the principle of equal treatment for all citizens and these decisions may lead to further conflict over the appropriateness of strategies used by public administrators to achieve productivity and fairness (Birch, 1993; Klingner & Nalbandian, 1998). In the public sector, we will continue to question whether the societal benefits of affirmative action outweigh the costs. In many arenas, all stakeholders ponder whether diversity is the economic stimulus that will increase productivity, ensure effective service delivery and create organizational flexibility. Even when discussions regarding the mutual benefits of an integrated workforce serve to quell political objections to affirmative action, in some institutions, the primary diversity objective will continue to be minimum compliance with affirmative action goals. Gilbert and Ivancevich, (1999) point out that these politically correct discussions often result in a superficial commitment to diversity whereby the institution demonstrates its support to valuing differences by advertising its “affirmative action/equal employer” pledge and revising its mission statement. They point out that the institutional focus is on maintaining statistical parity instead of capitalizing on its diverse workplace. All too often, this type of organizational apathy leads to an underutilization of demographic groups soon to comprise the demographic majority in the United States (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 1999).
In order to engage the higher education community to advance social policy, special attention must be focused on the barriers to implementation that prohibit institutional change (Plein, Williams & Hardwick, 2000). One approach is to continue the rhetoric that describes affirmative action as good for America and reaffirms higher education’s commitment to the principles of social equity policy. Yet another approach could be to promote the mutual benefits of obtaining and maintaining diversity by addressing institutional impediments to the practical implementation of affirmative action. In choosing the later approach, Klingner and Nalbandian (1998) assert that we must acknowledge that there is significant conflict among competing values in our society and recognize that the “political pressures for representativeness and economic pressures for enhanced productivity help to shape our diversity efforts” (p. 174). Institutional reactions to these pressures, however, greatly affect the implementation of programs that focus on advancing social equity. Encouraging institutions of higher education to embrace affirmative action because of the mutual benefits of inclusion may be shortsighted, if we fail to acknowledge that institutional barriers greatly impede progress in diversifying institutions.

The objective of affirmative action programs is to promote social equity and eliminate discriminatory barriers while encouraging institutions to strive for a representative balance in education, employment, and contracting. However, affirmative action program goals continue to be misrepresented as “quotas.” Claims that affirmative action programs foster preferential treatment and prevent meritorious decision-making have abated public opinion and political support for affirmative action policy. Klingner and Nalbandian (1998) point out that Americans oppose preferential employment rules in general, yet favor improved educational and employment opportunity for qualified individuals, in practice. Within the last decade, political pressure to dismantle or downgrade affirmative action programs called for a White House review of affirmative action. Under the Clinton administration, institutions were directed to “mend, not “end” affirmative action programs. The outcome of the presidential review, as noted by McClain and Stewart (1999, p. 140), instructed affirmative action officers to avoid using quotas and required colleges and universities to: (1) use flexible race-conscious measures; (2) utilize race-neutral options to remedy organizational problems; (3) ensure that affirmative action programs did not limit the educational and employment opportunities for non-
minorities; and (4) implement affirmative action programs only as long as needed.

Colleges and universities across the nation have been progressive in developing and sustaining affirmative action programs. Most institutions are more diverse now than they were several decades ago. By appropriately utilizing an affirmative action plan, most institutions have successfully identified goals and timetables to establish recruitment and hiring guidelines. While affirmative action programs continue to exist in higher education, more recent affirmative action challenges are the result of implementation problems. Given the legal challenges and social discourse over the setting of affirmative action goals, many in the academic community continue to pose these familiar questions regarding the implementation process:

- How do we establish estimates for the availability of women and minority candidates?
- How do we set hiring goals and at what levels? Should they be seen as minimum or maximum goals?
- Since there is the tendency for hiring goals to be set on an institution-wide rather than departmental basis, how do departments define their responsibilities in meeting these institutional goals?
- What kind of advertising and/or recruitment practices should be used for available positions?
- What are the criteria for evaluating women and minority candidates?
- Should women and minority candidates be “played off” against each other in the hiring competition?
- How do we determine the institutional objective and conscientious nature of the institution, with respect to goal attainment and performance monitoring?
- How do we know whether there is positive leadership – that is, persuasion and pressure – from chief academic officers for departments and programs to hire women and minorities?
- How do we know whether campus officers for affirmative action/equal opportunity have the sufficient funding, staff, and power to be effective?
- To what extent, if any, does government inefficiency, ineptitude, and/or lack of will fail to enforce compliance? (Menges & Exum, 1983, p. 129).

Although the answers to each of the questions continue to affect the use of affirmative measures to expand educational and employment opportunities for protected groups, affirmative action goals should be thought of as key objectives that establish diversity as the institutional priority and identify the underutilization of protected groups in specific departments or divisions within the college or university (Lessow-Hurley, 1989). So much of the affirmative action debate has been focused on affirmative action obligations (Bruno, 1995), while neglecting two more important questions: Is affirmative action good social policy for America, and what, if any, factors contribute to the failure of affirmative action programs? Due to the complexity involved in formulating, implementing, and enforcing affirmative action, it is no wonder that the policy has failed to achieve the desired results (McCombs, 1989). Significant inequities continue to exist in the academe and call to question whether the benefits of affirmative action continue to outweigh the costs.

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EFFICACY**

One of the most profound benefits of affirmative action is the notion that institutions will commit resources to implement the affirmative action plan and successfully achieve proportional representation among the workforce and student body. As part of the “good faith” institutional efforts, affirmative action plans are developed to enable the institution to discover the educational and employment opportunities offered to minorities and women. The most effective affirmative action plans, as noted by Pratkanis and Turner (1996, pp. 112-113), include the following analyses: (1) a work force analysis which determines the percentage of women and minorities employed at the institution and within each job title; (2) an availability analysis to assess the number of qualified women and minorities available within a specific geographic region or occupational market; (3) a utilization analysis to determine the underrepresentation of minorities and women at the institution and within job titles; and (4) a specific, results-oriented approach to reduce the discrepancy should an underutilization exist. Objectively, the affirmative action plan should be viewed as a “good faith effort” to identify barriers to equal employment opportunity, and then be used to either eliminate or
substantively mitigate these barriers. The development of an affirmative action plan, however, is a necessary but rarely sufficient means of achieving institutional goals.

In addition to the disclosure provided by the affirmative action plan, most institutions typically hire an affirmative action specialist to serve as the institutional liaison for affirmative action initiatives. Having a specialist devoted to achieving the desired results offers a substantial benefit to the academic community. As the bureaucrat responsible for implementing public policy, we assume that affirmative action officer sets the stage for achieving affirmative action results at the institution. He or she closely monitors the personnel policies and practices, ensures the prompt removal of institutional barriers, and promotes programs that provide greater access to educational and employment opportunities for minorities and women. In some programs, the affirmative action officer plays a greater role in the decision making process – hiring decisions, program monitoring, policy compliance – than others. At the point where policy is translated into practice, the affirmative action officer provides a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of the policy: he/she is typically the “street-level bureaucrat” who deals directly with the public while coping with ambiguous institutional goals and limited resources for program implementation.

The most effective affirmative action programs, a distinction noted by Hitt and Keats (1984), reduce discrimination, balance costs and benefits, and comply with federal regulations. In seemingly diverse educational communities, minorities and women have benefited from affirmative measures and institutions have benefited from the diverse people, ideas, and perspectives on campus. In addition, diversity efforts have resulted in value added perspectives in the policy and decision-making processes of government – “including those who are different has enriched and strengthened what government is as well as what government does” (Broadnax, 2000, p. 67). Despite everything, some argue that affirmative action is viewed as costly to majority members who thought they were better qualified for the post (or deserved admissions) and were passed over for minority members who were appointed (or offered admissions) (Birch, 1993). For this reason, claims that affirmative action programs promote reverse discrimination continue to challenge the social value of affirmative action policy.

Affirmative action has been problematic for higher education and it has failed to achieve the desired results due to the complexity involved in
formulating, implementing, and enforcing affirmative action goals (McCombs, 1989). The courts have also been divided on the question of affirmative action. For the most part, they have distinguished between so-called de jure discrimination – i.e., that mandated by law – and de facto - i.e., that arising from societal practices (Cann, 1995). Courts have generally considered only discrimination resulting from de jure discrimination as amenable to legal redress. Cases previously brought before the courts focused on discrimination in education where school districts were all white or all black, and in the workplace where disproportionately minorities were kept out of skilled labor jobs. However, claims of reverse discrimination, ineffective affirmative action policy, and growing support for dismantling affirmative action programs have fueled de jure challenges to question the constitutionality of affirmative action measures in employment and education. The distributional and constitutional legal disputes involving admission decisions, hiring decisions, and promotional decisions challenge the nation’s pursuit of social equity, using affirmative action as the remedy.

FACTORS IMPEDING IMPLEMENTATION

The higher education system in America assumes a unique responsibility for preparing individuals for the challenges they will face when they enter the job market. The Carnegie Foundation (1990, p. xiii) contends that colleges and universities have an “important obligation not only to celebrate diversity but also to define larger, more inspired goals, and in so doing serve as a model for the nation and the world.” Affirmative action programs in higher education require institutions to project the number of minorities and women to be hired over a specific period of time, set numerical goals to gauge their progress, and conduct employment searches, hirings, and promotions in a nondiscriminatory manner (Washington & Harvey, 1989). An affirmative action approach that focuses solely on decisions made in personnel and admissions fails to make affirmative action an integral part of the planning process (Stetson, 1984).

Colleges and universities have been left with substantial autonomy to promote their own goals (Rourke, 1984), and those who receive federal funds must develop affirmative action programs that demonstrate the institution’s ‘good faith effort’ to meet the program goal (Menges & Exum, 1983). Institutions unwilling to incorporate affirmative action into their standard operating procedures run the risk of losing federal and
state dollars in the form of student financial aid, state budget allocations, and contract awards. Regardless of the commitment for affirmative action demonstrated at the federal and state levels, the college or university leadership must become firmly committed to the goals and objectives of the affirmative action program (McCombs, 1989).

On many college and university campuses, affirmative action officers are faced with insurmountable challenges that often affect their own ability to implement effective programs. The support of the executive leadership as well as the support of the academic community affects his/her ability to achieve affirmative action outcomes, even when the role of the affirmative action officer is solely limited to monitoring employment data and investigating complaints. If the affirmative action officer is not recognized as a key administrative leader, he/she is powerless and rendered incapable of influencing institutional policies and decisions before they are adopted. While the intent of the affirmative action officer is to promote programs that encourage full participation of all members of the academic community, he/she cannot offer rewards or sanctions to those who support or oppose the institutional objectives of affirmative action. Clearly, institutional barriers emerge as significant factors that impede the role of the affirmative action officer in higher education.

At the point where policy is translated into practice, affirmative action officers provide a crucial role in planning: they are typically the “street-level bureaucrats” who deal directly with the public while coping with ambiguous institutional goals and limited resources for program implementation. Although institutional support is crucial to the success of affirmative action, affirmative action officers are faced with political and administrative behaviors that impede program implementation. In their role, affirmative action officers must challenge conventional institutional policies and can sometimes bear the sole responsibility for ensuring that institutional procedures promote social equity.

The following section offers an analysis of the factors that impede the implementation of affirmative action programs, followed by an analysis of the influence of race, staff size, and budget on institutional barriers perceived to affect program efficacy.
RESEARCH QUESTION

Research conducted by Romero (1991, p. 59) suggests that in order for the affirmative action officer to be an effective leader, the following conditions must apply: (1) the affirmative action position must be high in the organizational chart and the individual must report directly to the president of the institution; (2) the affirmative action officer can gain greater legitimacy for the role, particularly in the eyes of the faculty and academic administrators by having a doctorate; (3) the affirmative action officer should have experiences and professional qualifications needed for preparing and implementing an affirmative action plan; and (4) the affirmative action officer should have knowledge of the institution in which he/she is employed. As an employee of the institution, the affirmative action officer must demonstrate considerable skill, knowledge, and ability for establishing, implementing, and sustaining an effective affirmative action program.

Similar research conducted by Hitt and Keats (1984) found that factors such as a commitment from higher education, a receptive attitude on the part of key university personnel, credibility of affirmative action programs and officers, resources provided for affirmative action, and formal and/or informal grievance procedures were strong predictors for affirmative action program effectiveness. Affirmative action officers have reported that other factors, such as staff size and the budget allocation also affect their ability to effectively implement affirmative action programs, given the magnitude and scope of the policy objectives (Berry, 1999). Previous research by Clemons (1981) indicated that the most significant problem faced by minority affirmative action officers is frustration, because they generally are not given sufficient support to get the maximum out of the law. For white affirmative action officers, according to Clemons, the problems are quite different – the interference of government compliance officers, excessive paperwork, unnecessary detailing of affirmative action goals and timetables, and the examination of personnel records are perceived as counterproductive to their role. Clemons pointed out that there is little hope for effectiveness when affirmative action officers lack rapport or an “old boy” relationship with managers in the institution. Thus, in the attempt to understand the factors that impede the duties of the affirmative action officers, one must examine program resources dedicated to affirmative action as well as the significance of race.
The research question, “What are the factors that interfere with the ability of the affirmative action officer to achieve program efficacy?” focuses on the challenge of implementing affirmative action when the societal benefits are perceived as low and the institutional costs are perceived as high. Examining political and administrative limits placed upon the affirmative action officer helps to construct a leadership model that identifies the strategies and behaviors of the affirmative action officer when he/she must assume the sole responsibility for achieving social equity through affirmative measures.

**METHOD AND DATA**

As part of a cross-sectional study, the survey data were collected under the auspices of the National Center for Public Productivity at Rutgers University. Of the more than 3,700 colleges and universities in the United States, 500 affirmative action officers were randomly selected to participate in the study and were mailed the Survey on Affirmative Action Officers in Higher Education, in the fall of 1998. 120 affirmative action officers responded to the survey (a response rate of 24%). Public institutions were over-represented in the study, relative to their distribution among colleges and universities in the United States (survey respondents, 67%; study population, 43%).

The survey consisted of six sections that explored the role of the Affirmative Action Officer at institutions of higher education. The first two sections consisted of a list of qualities that correlate with effective leadership and identified essential program activities. The following three sections identified factors that support programs, barriers that impede the duties of affirmative action officers and strategies that increase the effectiveness of affirmative action officers. The final section consisted of individual and institutional demographic information.

In the section of the survey that focused on the barriers to effectiveness, the researcher asked survey respondents to indicate their perception of the degree of impediment for each of the nineteen factors as they relate to his/her ability to achieve program results. Barriers to effectiveness include a broad range of institutional factors, such as the institutional value placed on affirmative action, resource constraints, support for affirmative action, and attitudes toward affirmative action and program officers that influence affirmative action efficacy.
Using a Likert scale of one through five, with one (1) meaning “no impediment,” two (2) meaning “low impediment,” three (3) meaning “medium impediment,” four (4) meaning “high impediment,” and five (5) meaning “very high impediment,” survey respondents were asked to indicate their perception regarding the list of barriers to effectiveness.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the frequency distribution of the barriers to effectiveness identified by affirmative action officers. The results confirm that more than half of the affirmative action officers indicate that the lack of presidential support for affirmative action initiatives is a very high impediment to their effectiveness. Additionally, at least half of all respondents believe that the “lack of support for additional training and development in affirmative action”, “lack of peer relationship with executive officers”, “lack of institutional value placed on affirmative action”, “lack of affirmative action staff”, “budget constraints”, “subtle faculty resistance to affirmative action”, “blatant faculty resistance to affirmative action”, and “lack of commitment to department/unit leaders” highly impede their ability to implement effective affirmative action programs. These results confirm that the role of the affirmative action officer and his/her ability to achieve policy objectives can be greatly affected by the institutional level of commitment and resources dedicated to affirmative action.

To develop the barriers to effectiveness model, an index was created using the list of factors identified in Table 1. With respect to the barriers to effectiveness index, the higher the numerical code, the higher the degree of impediment perceived by the affirmative action officer. When adding the values respondents identified on the 19 items, the possible totals range from 19 to 95, with 95 representing the highest and 19 representing the lowest degree of impediment indicated by the respondent. The index served as the dependent variable in the barriers to effectiveness model. In addition to the independent variables, staff size and affirmative action budget, a dummy variable (racem) was used in the model.

The regression model in Table 2 was used to predict institutional barriers that influence the efficacy of affirmative action programs. Predictors employed in the regression model are (1) the barriers to
TABLE 1  
Frequency Distribution of Factors that Impede the Affirmative Action Officer’s Duties by Degree of Impediment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to Effectiveness</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignment of additional responsibilities outside the realm of Affirmative Action (AA)</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overload of campus-wide committee work</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racist attitudes toward the AA Officer</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of peer relationship with faculty</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support for additional training and development in AA Officer</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of experience as an AA Officer</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of peer relationship with executive officers</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment of dual role and responsibility</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of institutional value placed on AA</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of AA staff</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of presidential support for AA initiatives</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support for AA from the collective bargaining unit</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget constraints</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexist attitudes toward the AA Officer</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtle faculty resistance to AA</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blatant faculty resistance to AA</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of commitment from department/unit leaders</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of peer relationship with directors/supervisors</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community service as some criteria for reappointment</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
effectiveness index, (2) number of affirmative action staff, (3) affirmative action budget allocation, and (4) minority/majority status of
the affirmative action officer.1 In the sample, the affirmative action staff
allocation ranges from 1 to 50, because there are some institutions where
the affirmative action is the only person assigned to implement
affirmative action program goals. The mean for affirmative action staff
was 2.43. Similar to the variability among staff assigned to affirmative
action, budget allocations differ as well. The budget allocation ranged
between no dollars and $150,000 with an average budget allocation of
$11,482.93, demonstrating the institutional support to implement
affirmative action programs. Table 2 reveals significant connections
between institutional barriers and affirmative action staff, program
budget and the minority status of the affirmative action officer, with the
most potent predictor of higher degrees of impediment identified as the
affirmative action budget.

| TABLE 2 |
| Regression Equation to Predict Barriers to Effectiveness for
Affirmative Action Officers |
| B | Beta | t |
| Number of AA Staff | -0.724 | -0.180 | -1.979* |
| AA Program Budget | 1.730E-04 | 0.225 | 2.495** |
| RaceM | 6.873 | 0.180 | 1.987** |
| (Constant) | 55.214 | | |
| R² | 0.099 | | |
| F | 4.253* | | |
| Significance *p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01 |

DISCUSSION

This article discusses the societal costs and benefits of implementing
affirmative action in higher education and examines the institutional
factors that negatively affect the ability of the affirmative action officer
to implement sound strategies to promote equal opportunity for all
members of the academic community. While institutional resources
allocated to promote affirmative action initiatives may vary across the
country, this article focuses specifically on the relationship between
institutional barriers perceived to hinder performance and the
institutional resources appropriated to achieve results. Using the effectiveness to barriers model, regression was employed to test the hypothesis from a national sample of affirmative action officers in higher education. Results from the model reveal that race, money, and staff size significantly influence the institutional barriers that impede the role of the affirmative action officer. Specifically, the finding suggests that when compared with whites, minorities are more likely to report that institutional barriers interfere more so with their ability to achieve program results; as the size of the affirmative action staff increases, the effect of institutional barriers decrease; and as the affirmative action budget grows, perceived institutional barriers grow as well.

Minority affirmative action officers are more likely to perceive that institutional barriers interfere with their role, when compared with others. This finding supports the perspective shared by Clemons (1981) and Hitt and Keats (1984) emphasizing that the credibility of the affirmative action officer is extremely important and the inability of the campus community to recognize minority affirmative action officers as key administrative leaders prevents affirmative action from being established as an institutional priority. High visibility and determined leadership are the most important elements for effective affirmative action programs (Washington & Harvey, 1989).

As the duties of the affirmative action officer expand to include other dimensions of discrimination, the role of the affirmative action officer is further complicated and diminished. In what is becoming the norm, affirmative action programs are staffed by an affirmative action officer and support staff. On smaller campuses, the affirmative action officer may hold a dual position, e.g., he/she may also be the dean of students. When affirmative action officers are required to investigate complaints, accept additional responsibilities outside the realm of affirmative action, and serve as the institutional liaison for affirmation action, developing proactive strategies to make affirmative action an integral part of the planning process is unrealistic yet essential (Stetson, 1984; Washington & Harvey, 1984).

Pratkanis and Turner (1996) assert that effective affirmative action programs develop reward systems to reinforce the attainment of affirmative action goals and allocate essential resources to maintain program activities. Yet, we see from the findings in this study that more money does not necessarily reduce the effect that institutional barriers have on the ability of the affirmative action officers to attain program
results. For some, affirmative action may be viewed as steep approach, yet the benefits of an affirmative action program that has been fully integrated into mission of the institution continue to outweigh the costs. This form of integration suggests that individuals who direct and chair administrative and academic departments, respectively, are held accountable for meeting the goals of affirmative action, using both sanctions and rewards to bring about the desired change for higher education. In the end, society will benefit from affirmative action because both the public and private sector will be able to recruit and attract a wider range of talented applicants, develop closer community ties with a more diverse customer base, and reduce staff turnover and absenteeism.

The thrust of affirmative action too often focuses on one aspect, increasing the numbers of minorities and women. Instead, the role of the affirmative action officer should focus on promulgating affirmative action as a productivity activity. By utilizing program evaluation strategies, the productivity approach determines the effect of program activities on program outcomes first, and then, using performance measurement, ties the budgeting and strategic planning process to program outcomes (Berman, 1998). Affirmative action officers are recognized as key administrative leaders and are in the position to hold individuals within the institution (e.g., executive officers, deans, department chairs, administrative directors) accountable for the achievement of affirmative action program goals. Implemented correctly, fully integrated affirmative action programs could simultaneously improve organizational climate and increase productivity (Skedsvold & Mann, 1996).

NOTES

1. The “racem” variable is a dummy variable, which was created by recoding the racial/ethnic variable (where 1 = minority, 0 = white).

REFERENCES


