

# Race Relations on College Campuses

by Mary Beth Owen

"Almost 30 years after the Civil Rights movement placed top priority for higher education on improving race relations, ugly racist incidents, student isolation, and insensitivity continue to plague colleges and universities across the country." (*Racial Issues on Campus: How Students View Them*, Report by the Southern Regional Education Board, 1990)

These are the types of problems faced by minority students who attend predominantly white colleges. Several important questions demand attention concerning this issue:

Why, after implementing many different strategies to increase minority participation on college campuses, has there been so little improvement?

What effective strategies can be employed to increase and encourage minority participation in higher education?

Why, 30 years after the Civil Rights movement began and after some 20 years since significant desegregation of colleges and universities began, are the issues and problems of minority students still so prevalent?

What can or will higher education facilities do to address or eliminate the problems on campus faced by students who are in the racial minority?

Frequently, administrative strategies and programs designed to deal with and eliminate these types of problems go astray. They seem to fail because they are developed or implemented without the consideration of how the students, those directly affected by the problem, view and understand the problem. Students' perceptions about the problem of minority participation in higher education can provide additional insight and may suggest new avenues of inquiry that could reduce racial incidents and racist practices on America's campuses.

A recent survey by the Southern Regional Education Board survey attempts to answer the questions, "How do students' perceptions, attitudes, and opinions about race and racism affect their interaction with one another and with their institution?" and "What are we doing to encourage or discourage minority participation—perhaps without even be-

ing aware of it?"

Based on average responses of all students, the typical survey participant was between 19 and 22 years of age, was attending college full-time, self-reported a GPA in the 3.0 range, and financed his or her education through a combination of loans, grants and scholarships.

The responses to the survey indicate that though colleges and universities of historically white student bodies appear to have addressed issues of discriminatory practices, many discrepancies in this attempts remain. Although this survey was given to students attending much larger campuses than Meredith, the survey can be used as a tool for examining racial issues here. How many black students attend Meredith College? How many black professors teach here? How many administrative staff members help set policies for the campus? You can count the number of black students on both hands without using all the digits and there are as many black professors and administrators as there were when the college

opened.

Assuming that a racial imbalance exists, can the student body make an impact on this imbalance at Meredith?

Survey comments from black students attending predominantly white schools:

52% said they would choose the same school if they had to make the choice again

31% felt they are "a real part of the school spirit here"

Only 28% found that admissions counselors had described accurately the types of experiences they had encountered.

43% agreed that "the administration on this campus makes a genuine effort to recruit black students."

32% agreed that "the administration has made a special effort to help black students belong."

Barely 20% agreed that institutions make a sincere effort to recruit and retain black faculty members and administrators.

Merely 23% agreed that counseling and advising services are especially sensitive to the needs of black students.

Nearly 95% said more consideration should be given to black student interests.

40% agreed that the campus is "as integrated as students want it to be"

Less than 40% agreed that white students play an active role in helping black students adjust to the campus.

## Student Opinion: Racial Balance at Meredith

Please complete this survey and put it in the Herald drop box beside the Cate Center box office window on or before Friday, February 8, 1991. Results will be tabulated and printed in the February 11 issue of the Herald.

Please circle your answers.

Your classification: Fr So Jr Sr

Your race: Black (African-American) White Other

1. Have you ever been treated unfairly because of your race?

Yes No Don't know

At Meredith?

Yes No Don't know

2. Have you ever been in a situation where you were the racial minority?

Yes No Don't know

At Meredith?

Yes No Don't know

If yes, did you feel uncomfortable, alienated, or threatened?

Yes No Don't know

3. Is understanding racial issues important to you?

Yes No Don't know

Why or why not?

4. Do you believe that there are racial tensions on this campus?

Yes No Don't know

Why or why not?

5. Do you believe that recruiting black and other minority students should be emphasized at Meredith?

Yes No Don't know

Why or why not?

6. Do you believe that recruiting black and other minority professors should be emphasized at Meredith?

Yes No Don't know

Why or why not?

7. Do you believe that recruiting black administrators should be emphasized at Meredith?

Yes No Don't know

Why or why not?

8. Do you believe that the number of courses in black history offered at Meredith is adequate?

Yes No Don't know

Why or why not?

9. Do you believe that a course in black history should be required of Meredith College graduates?

Yes No Don't know

Why or why not?

10. Do you believe that there is a racial imbalance at Meredith?

Yes No Don't know

11. If you answered yes to Question 10, do you believe that the racial imbalance causes any problems at Meredith?

Yes No Don't know

If yes, can you offer any suggestions to rectify the problem?

12. Do you believe that minority students attending Meredith have different needs from other students?

Yes No Don't know

If yes, what do you believe those needs are?

13. Do you believe that Meredith meets the needs of its minority students?

Yes No Don't know

Why or why not?

14. Would you participate in activities designed to increase the minority student and staff population at Meredith College?

Yes No Don't know

Thank you for your participation.