

Think tank study says N.C. admissions process biased

By ARCHIE T. CLARK II
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

RALEIGH - A study that asserts blacks receive preferential treatment at N.C. public universities is based on faulty analysis, university officials say.

The Center for Equal Opportunity, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank headed by former Reagan administration aide Linda Chavez, claims a comparison of Scholastic Achievement Test scores and grade point averages at the state's six largest colleges shows white scores are generally higher than those of blacks.

The study was based on only two criteria, SAT scores and grade point averages. Upon conclusion of the research, CEO determined that at none of the schools examined was the average black applicant who was admitted as qualified as the average white applicant who gained admittance. That indicates the black students are getting preferential admissions, Chavez said in a Raleigh press conference Monday.

Those criteria used is too lacking to make the conclusion that whites are being discriminated against, said admissions officials.

Jerry Lucido, UNC Chapel Hill's associate vice chancellor and director of admissions, said the CEO research does not reflect the in-depth approach that makes up the admission process.

"We take into account many

other things than just GPA and tests scores... If the student is the first to go to college in their family, that is factor we consider. Performance, leadership and the ability to overcome obstacles is also taken into account," Lucido said. "We have got to use a variety of factors to serve the state broadly."

Ironically, the CEO study results were released on the same day that a Wall Street Journal article noted the wide disparity in college attendance rates of blacks and whites.

The Journal, reporting U.S. Census data, noted that while 29 percent of white adults aged 25-29 had earned at least a bachelor's degree, 14 percent of blacks had degrees.

Meanwhile, according to the Journal, about equal percentages of blacks and whites - 85 percent - are graduating from high school.

Jennifer Day, chief of the Census Bureau's educational and social stratification branch, said high school graduations rates are equal because it is free, while the rising cost of college is a "huge barrier" for black students.

But Chavez contends racial discrimination in admissions is evident in six N.C. universities and has become a trend throughout the country.

In the CEO study, six UNC system schools were analyzed - N.C. State University, UNC Asheville, UNC Chapel Hill, UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, and

UNC Wilmington.

Chavez believes the universities should take a look at what is going on.

"On the average black students admitted to N.C. universities scored about 200 less than whites and had on the average had a grade point average of half a point less," she said.

Chavez said that in a perfect world the admissions process would not reflect the bias seen in the research. She believes that a completely level playing field for admissions would allow just as many blacks to attend colleges but not the institutions such as UNC and N.C. State.

Chavez admitted the study did not take into account all of the aspects that go into admitting students. However, she says to refute the data of the study would require the schools to analyze and reveal admission practices on their own.

Also, according to Chavez, African Americans are less likely to graduate from the most competitive schools in less than six years.

John Hood, president of the conservative Raleigh-based John Locke Foundation and supporter of the CEO, said the research is not meant to change the practices of the universities, but is actually an indictment on the N.C. public school system. The public school system all too often has failed to teach students, especially black kids, even basic skills by the eighth grade, he said.

Despite his criticism of the public schools, Hood said there is a bill that will be introduced in 1999 that will eliminate racial preference in N.C. public colleges. That measure will ultimately reduce African American enrollment in schools like UNC and N.C. State by 25 to 30 percent, but will cause a proportionate increase of African American students in other schools. Even UNC will eventually see a rise in the number of black students once they see the bar has been raised, Hood said.

"It is better to be a graduate of UNCG than a dropout from UNC Chapel Hill," Hood said.

N.C. State vice provost and director of admissions George Dixon believes the low graduation rate among blacks within six years may be based on another issue that was overlooked by the study - socioeconomic factors.

"Money definitely plays a role in the rate of graduation," Dixon said. "A student who has a job and is trying to support their education without getting student loans may take longer to graduate. They may also be more likely to drop out and continue their education at another institution."

Dixon says N.C. State could have provided the CEO with the financial records, but declined to use them, probably because their focus was on admissions and not on graduation rates.

To Lucido, if admissions were based only on GPA and test scores,

universities would run the risk of not representing all of North Carolina.

"The real danger would be to choose students with only two criteria," he said.


Lucido does not deny race is a factor when new applicants are accepted, however, he especially does not like the implication that unqualified applicants are accepted over qualified ones based on race.

"This could not be farther from the truth," he said. "We want our student body to represent all of North Carolina. We are proud of our African American outreach efforts. Many of our graduates have gone on to be successful contributors to the community. I am worried we would do anything to discourage the aspirations of minority students."

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New fire chief ready to fight all blazes

By HANNAH ROSE
for THE CHRONICLE

John W. Gist hasn't had much time to rest.

There's new technology to be implemented. Stations to man.

And of course many, many fires to fight - literally.

Last week, Gist, 44, was named the city's new fire chief, replacing Otis Cooper. Cooper resigned June 12 to lead Durham's fire department.

The 21-year-veteran says the response to his appointment has been overwhelmingly positive.

"I don't feel that the focus will be on me because I am African American, he said.

"I do feel that they will they will be watching because I am a native."

Gist, a Winston-Salem native, attended East Forsyth High and Winston Salem State University.

His vision for the fire department revolves around technology. He says the rapid growth the city has undergone makes it difficult for the fire department to keep up. The department was recently awarded a grant that will enable them to become completely automated. The first task, he said, was to eliminate the fear of computers within his 266-person staff.

Now that there is a comfort level, Gist feels the department is ready to explore the total capacity of the computer system they have on board.

"We're really not using the system to its capacity," he said. "The system will allow us to do navigating to crisis sites. It also helps us to locate waters sources and information about the building itself. On the internet side, it will allow us to communicate with the community at large."

Another big concern is manning requirements. OSHA requires that a certain number of firefighters be on hand to fight fires.

"I don't ever want to be caught in a situation where a resident's home is burning to the ground and we can't help at all until we have enough personnel on the scene," he said.

One of his first tasks will be a meeting with the city manager to assess the needs of the department.

One of the areas that has seen a great deal of growth is the city's south side. Gist pointed out that areas like these will be of concern because of they are highly populated.

"There are 1,300 businesses near the mall, said Gist "with a projection of growth for about seventy five more opening per year."

He is quick to point out again that the small unit station in that area has to cover a 8 mile radius - which could be a problem.

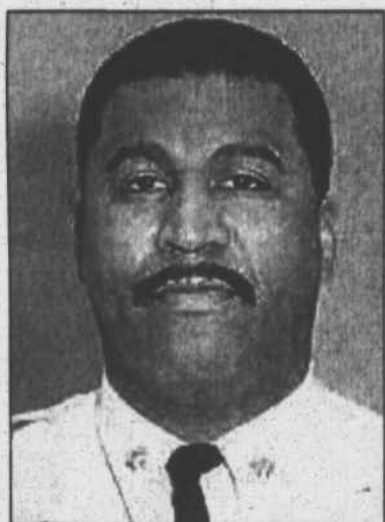
However, he has a lot of confidence in his current staff of firefighters. He says that most of

their personnel is hired without much experience. This allows for more accurate training.

"Some of the firefighters will pick up additional education, and certifications", said Gist. Gist recognizes the challenges that lie ahead of him and he accepts them readily.

He's always known that he wanted to be fire chief and felt that if it was not in Winston Salem that it would be somewhere.

"People who have visions of success put them into place early", said Gist. "This was my vision".



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