

**PROFESSORS, SOCIAL CLASS, AND
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: A PILOT STUDY**

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and

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ABSTRACT

A popular input measure of bureaucratic success is whether the demographic characteristics of an organization's personnel reflect those of the community. Does the bureaucracy employ, for example, ethnic minorities and women in roughly the same proportion as their respective percentages of the citizenry? Given several recent court decisions and public referenda limiting the use of race and gender considerations in placements and promotions, some writers now propose that measures of diversity include socioeconomic status (SES). This study shows that the parental SES of teaching faculty at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) is far higher than the public's. Based on these findings and related literature, the present discussion offers: 1) a rationale for why UIUC, and eventually perhaps many other universities, should use social class considerations in an affirmative action plan to recruit and hire new faculty, 2) suggestions for implementing such a class-based hiring program, and 3) rebuttals for anticipated criticisms of this proposal.

INTRODUCTION¹

There have been surprisingly few studies about the socioeconomic status (SES)² of university faculty. This is puzzling because the doctorate is a research degree³ and most college instructors hold this rank. Given all their training, one would expect professors to have developed a substantial literature on their own class origins.

No existing research classifies faculty according to common SES scales. Nor have any studies compared the professoriate's social class origins against the public's. Lipset and Ladd (1979) authored one of the few reports about faculty class background. Using findings from a 1977 nationwide survey, Lipset and Ladd (1979:29) grouped their responses according to eleven SES categories they devised, including: college, university teacher/administrator, owner, large business, white collar, and skilled worker. They assumed that because there had been a substantial rise in college attendance in the post-war years, there would be a comparable increase in the percentage of faculty from "less privileged origins" (Lipset and Ladd, 1979 :30). Instead, they found "that the expanding profession has been recruiting from more privileged sectors" (Lipset and Ladd, 1979: 30). They observed:

a greatly expanded professoriate is drawing from wealthier, rather than from less privileged, family origins. Only when we recognize the increasing desirability of scholarly work do we begin to understand its attraction for the more privileged, whose backgrounds give them an advantage in the competition for admission to the best graduate departments and ultimately thereby to the professoriate (Lipset and Ladd, 1979: 31).

Lipset and Ladd also asked their respondents to indicate their parents' educational achievements. After reviewing these data, they surmised, "academics are the offspring of a disproportionately well-educated group of parents, at least on the paternal side" (Lipset and Ladd, 1979: 29).

Using parental educational attainment as a proxy for social class, Boatsman and Antony (1995) studied trends in the SES backgrounds of university faculty. Their findings were similar to Lipset and Ladd's. That is, they reported that faculty members are still disproportionately drawn from better educated families.

Finally, based on a ten-level SES scale closely resembling that of Lipset and Ladd, Stetar and Finkelstein (1997) reported that the professoriate's class background has changed little since 1977. From their analysis they (289-290) concluded, "Although the socioeconomic backgrounds of students changed significantly in the seventies and eighties to reflect a more pluralistic society, it is evident that those of faculty remained highly consistent" (Stetar and Finkelstein (1997: 289-290). They further reported that according to 1989 survey data, approximately fifty percent of the parents of all university faculty had attended college, were college graduates, or had finished an advanced degree. This prompted them to conclude, "faculty are being drawn from the highest education cohorts in society . . ." (Stetar and Finkelstein (1997: 290). Hereafter, "lower SES faculty" and similar allusions refer to professors raised in lower and working class families, not the person's current socioeconomic status.

Given the considerable evidence showing a strong relationship between SES and educational attainment, and recent court decisions and public referenda, some writers now urge

that university affirmative action programs include social class considerations when selecting students (Morton, 1993; Fallon, 1996; Holmes, 1991; Kennedy, 1990; D'Sousa, 1991; Kahlenberg, 1996; Taylor, 1993; Harrison, 1992; Mikulak, 1990; and, Wilson, 1996, Zweig, 2000, among others). Interestingly, few authors have extended the same logic to university teachers (Boatsman and Antony, 1995; and Harrison, 1992).

The omission is especially curious given the extensive literature showing how formal and informal barriers discourage certain groups from entering the professions. As deLone (1979), Kahlenberg (1996), McDonough (1997), and others show, through various means, institutionalized schooling dissuades many lower and working class children from seeking higher education. Consider, for instance, how Scholastic Aptitude Test scores closely correlate with family income, meaning the offspring of high earning parents score significantly better on this standardized test (Kahlenberg, 1996). Eventually, these higher scores translate into greater interest in attending college and a much better chance of getting a scholarship. It is not surprising, therefore, that the earlier-cited literature reports that university faculty do not closely mirror the SES diversity of the general population.

THE PRESENT STUDY

This research has three goals: 1) providing a standard method for gauging which schools need SESAA (for “socioeconomic status-based affirmative action”), 2) justifying SESAA where an internal review shows it is needed, and 3) discussing the practicalities of implementing such a personnel plan.

Ours is a pilot project, in that we examine parental SES of faculty from one school, that is, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), to see whether SESAA is warranted

there. However, our methodology is generic, meaning it is applicable throughout higher learning, ranging from community colleges to the Ivy League; any school interested in assembling an SES diverse faculty could easily replicate our research.

Finally, both the arguments for SESAA and our suggestions for implementing it are broadly written. Thus, even if the present project reveals that UIUC does not need SESAA, our rationale is universal, so it is applicable wherever studies show the faculty lacks social class diversity.

DISCUSSION OUTLINE

The remainder of this paper has eight sections. We first discuss the evolution of case law and public initiatives relative to affirmative action based on race and gender. This part of the project shows how support for such policies has been eroding, while acceptance of class-based plans has been growing. We then describe the methodology used for gathering data used in the present analysis. In the third section, we present and discuss our research findings. The following section reviews and rebuts a common argument directed against class-based affirmative action programs, namely, that such a policy is unworkable because SES is too hard to define. The fifth section offers practical suggestions for implementing SESAA, while the next section addresses three general criticisms we anticipate will be leveled against our proposal. In the seventh section, we review how American institutions, especially universities, underplay the role of social class in shaping life outcomes. While race and gender have become integral to our understanding of prejudice and discrimination, inherited standing and unearned status are almost never mentioned. Finally, the conclusion comments on SESAA's place in democratic theory and

encourages public administration teachers and researchers to become leading advocates for SESAA throughout higher education.

THE LAW AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Levels of judicial scrutiny: Class-based affirmative action has different legal standing than race or gender-directed programs. Legal challenges to affirmative action usually rest on “equal protection” claims, either through the Fifth or Fourteenth Amendments, depending on whether a federal (5th Amendment) or state (14th Amendment) policy is involved. When reviewing equal protection claims based on race, class, or gender, courts use one of three tests. Each test applies different interpretational criteria to a government law or action. “Rational basis” is the first, and least strict, test. Here, a law or measure is presumed valid if founded in logic and not clearly violative of a constitutional principle. Courts applying this standard presume the law or action is constitutional and that they should not second-guess legislative or executive actions as long as either or both branches act reasonably and are not behaving in a clearly unconstitutional manner. Legal categorizations involving social class are reviewed using the rational basis test. (See, for instance, *James v. Valtierra*, 402 US 137 (1971) and *Harris v. McRae*, 448 US 297, 316-317 (1980)).

“Strict scrutiny” (or, as it is sometimes called, “the most rigid scrutiny” or “most searching examination”) is at the other pole. It is the most exacting standard and applies to all statutes or actions subjecting a class of individuals to either special treatment or consideration (*Adarand Constructors, INC v. Pena*, 115 S.Ct. 2097, 2108, 2111). Exceptional government actions or classifications are only justified where public officials show a “compelling interest”

for their decisions. Further, these decisional goals must be directed toward meeting particular objectives. They cannot be vague or over/under inclusive.

Courts hold all race-based classifications to strict scrutiny. Because of the nation's "lengthy and tragic" (*Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, 2755) history of racism and ethnic prejudice, all racial classifications are considered inherently suspect, meaning courts always closely examine the underlying rationale for such policies. Unless the government's act or action has a strong basis in fact, the rule or statute is rejected. Strict scrutiny is particularly demanding and few race-based classifications have withstood its application.

"Intermediate scrutiny" is the middle ground between rational basis and strict scrutiny. Laws or actions judged by this standard are not considered inherently suspect, but neither are they evaluated as leniently as under the rational basis test. With intermediate scrutiny, courts consider whether there is reasonable justification for the government's law or procedure; authorities must show their law or action furthers an important public policy. For example, gender classifications are evaluated through intermediate scrutiny. Thus, a state may prohibit fathers, but not mothers, from claiming an out-of-wedlock child's inheritance unless the man legitimates his offspring. (See Justice Powell's comments in *Parham v. Hughes*, 1979, 359-361. Also see Dykhouse, 1996; and, Kahlenberg, 1996, 262, note 121, Morton, 1101, note 52, *Johnson v. Transportation Agency, Santa Clara County* 480 U.S. 616, and *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, 2755, for more on using intermediate scrutiny to judge government classifications.)

The courts, the public, and race-based affirmative action: Initially, the Supreme Court cautiously addressed race-based affirmative action. In 1974, the justices sidestepped their first

opportunity to rule on minority preferences (*DeFunis v. Odegaard*). Marco DeFunis, a Caucasian, was denied admission to the University of Washington Law School because administrators there had set aside thirty-seven seats for minorities. DeFunis' law boards and junior and senior undergraduate grades were higher than thirty-six students admitted under the school's affirmative action plan. DeFunis sued the university saying he was the victim of racial discrimination. A state trial court ordered the law school to admit him. The university appealed and by the time the case reached the Supreme Court, DeFunis was in his last quarter of study. The justices refused to hear the case, saying, instead, that since DeFunis had almost finished his schooling, the question was moot.

In 1975, in *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, the Court rejected the UC-Davis campus medical school's use of racial quotas for determining admissions. Justice Powell wrote that while race could be a criterion for choosing among applicants, it could not be the only one. The Court's majority said the university's quota system violated the Fourteenth Amendment's protection against racial discrimination. Since Bakke was rejected through racial quotas, he was admitted to the medical school and eventually received his MD.

Because the justices issued several separate opinions in *Bakke*, it was unclear what evidentiary standard they used to evaluate the university's affirmative action plan. While *Bakke* and *DeFunis* left open the possibility of race being used in policy making, *Bakke* said it could not be the single standard.

Gradually, as the Court's composition changed, so did its support for race-based affirmative action. For instance, in *City of Richmond v. Cronson Company* (1989), the Court rejected a requirement that thirty percent of construction contracts be set-aside for minority

businesses. Before enacting the program, blacks got less than one percent of the city's contracts, although Richmond was fifty percent black. The Court reasoned that a Congressional finding of bias in the construction industry nationwide did not justify the same set-aside standards for every locale. Moreover, the Court held that despite Richmond's past history of racial discrimination, especially in its public schools, specific atonement was not justified. Instead, the Court held that all compensatory plans must be both industry and place-specific and use evidence relating to these criteria.

Increasingly, the Court has determined that race-based remedies are only acceptable where there is evidence of past discrimination affecting current citizens and that quotas will remedy this problem. Restitutive practices are only justified where there are identifiable victims. Amorphous, race-based remedies are unacceptable; no group warrants special treatment, whether for benefit or burden, simply due to ethnicity. Justice Scalia explained, "Under the Constitution there can be no such thing as either a creditor or a debtor race. We are just one race in the eyes of the government" (*Adarand v. Constructors, INC. v. Pena*, 115 S.Ct. 2097, 2101).

Cronson was also important because the Court did not apply strict scrutiny to this federally established racial classification. (See *Adarand v. Constructors, INC. v. Pena*, 115 S.Ct. 2097, 2110.) Presumably, intermediate scrutiny applied to all federal policies, while every state plan requires strict scrutiny. These different standards were deemed necessary because there is a history of individual states discriminating against citizens based on race. While not perfect, the federal government's record is much better on this account.

The Court's 1990 ruling in *Metro Broadcasting, Inc. v. FCC* reinforced the notion that all federal actions will be judged by intermediate scrutiny. *Metro Broadcasting* suggested that

quotas were justifiable where government officials sought ethnic diversity. Using intermediate scrutiny, the Court upheld a government program giving preferences to minorities in issuing broadcasting licenses. The Court accepted this practice because preferences would encourage program variety.

Just five years later, in *Adarand Constructors, INC. v. Peña* (1995), the Court reversed *Metro Broadcasting*. Congress had passed a law giving preference to minorities and “disadvantaged” applicants in gaining federal contracts. In *Adarand*, the Court held that “strict scrutiny must apply to all race-based remedies, whether state or federal. The Court ruled that unless the government shows its policy serves a compelling public interest, and only a narrowly fashioned action remedies the particular harm, the statute or affirmative action plan is rejected. Thus, *Adarand* abolished intermediate scrutiny for judging federal affirmative action plans. Now, all federal and state plans must meet the strict scrutiny standard.

In 1994, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decided *Hopwood v. Texas*. In the early 1990s, University of Texas Law School officials had established a quota system “for members of ‘minority groups’ or persons designated as ‘economically and/or educationally disadvantaged.’” The university set aside sixteen of the one hundred positions in the entering class for candidates from the special program” (941). In practice, the sixteen seats went to only African-Americans and Mexican Americans, “to the detriment of whites and nonpreferred minorities” (934). While “socioeconomic” background was supposedly integral to the quota system, it got little consideration (948). Following the strict scrutiny standard, the *Hopwood* court rejected the school’s racial quota system. The court held that there was no need for a remedy lacking

evidence of immediate past racial discrimination by the law school. In 1996, the Supreme Court declined to review *Hopwood* (*cert. denied*, 518 US 1033).

The judiciary's unwillingness to accept programs unless aimed at remedying proven discrimination has been compounded by public referenda eliminating race and gender-based preferences. In 1996, Californians adopted Proposition 209, which "Prohibits the state, local governments, districts, public universities, colleges, and schools, and other government instrumentalities from discriminating against or giving preferential treatment to any individual or group in public employment, public education, or public contracting on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin" (California Secretary of State – Proposition 209 at <http://www.ss.ca.gov/Vote96/html/BP/209.htm>). In 1997, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Proposition 209 (*Coalition for Economic Equity v. Wilson*, 110 F.3d 1431). In 1998, Washington state voters passed a similar referendum. In 2000, Florida outlawed preferential treatment for minorities in contracting, hiring, and state university admissions. The plan was part of Governor Jeb Bush's "One Florida" proposal.

Replacing Race-Based Affirmative Action with Class-Based Plans: Several writers have questioned whether *Adarand* (1995) and like cases, with their insistence on strict scrutiny for all race-based diversity plans, mean the demise of racial preferences (Elmore, 1996; Rice and Mongkuo, 1998; and, Dykhous, 1996). Rosen (1995), for one, notes that five Supreme Court Justices have not upheld a racial classification against strict scrutiny since 1944. (See *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 and *Hirabayashi v. United States*, 320 U. S. 81, 63 S.Ct. 1375, 87 L.Ed. 1774 concerning curfews and relocations imposed on Japanese-Americans). Likewise, Kahlenberg (1996, 107) calls *Adarand* "ominous . . ." because it revealed, "that five members of

the Court [were] willing to explicitly overrule precedents on affirmative action, threatening pro-affirmative action decisions like *Bakke* . . .”

While race and gender-based affirmative action plans have faced growing opposition from the judiciary and public, statements by legislators, various popular commentators, and both conservative and liberal judges suggest that class-based affirmative action may be the only remaining legal means of using public policy to encourage diversity. Gewirtz (1995), for example, thinks “strict scrutiny” is such a hard standard that preference advocates should consider other methods. Kahlenberg (1996, 107) makes the same point this way:

As a simple legal matter, then, there is a strong argument that even those who support affirmative action need to look, rather urgently, for different remedies. Rather than turning to new theories to support racial preferences, in the vain hope of convincing a majority of justices on the Supreme Court, supporters of affirmative action need to seriously consider programs based on class. For while almost any race-based preference is today vulnerable to attack by the Supreme Court, the Court is almost sure to uphold the constitutionality of class-based affirmative action programs.

Justification for this class-based argument extends at least back to *DeFunis*. While the *DeFunis* Court would not sanction racial quotas, Justice Douglas suggested that class considerations are appropriate. He wrote:

A black applicant who pulled himself out of the ghetto into a junior college may thereby demonstrate a level of motivation, perseverance, and ability that would lead a fair minded admissions committee to conclude that he shows more promise for law study than the son of a rich alumnus who achieved better grades at Harvard. That applicant would be

offered admission not because he is black but because as an individual he has shown he has the potential while the Harvard man may have taken less advantage of the vastly superior opportunities offered him (416 U.S. 312, 331).

In *City of Richmond v. Cronson* (1989), Justice Scalia, one of the most conservative Court members ever, offered outright support for class-based affirmative action. He said there are “many permissible ways” to “undo the effects of past discrimination’ . . . that do not involve classification by race” (903). Moreover, he reasoned “since blacks have been disproportionately disadvantaged by racial discrimination, any race-neutral remedial program aimed at the disadvantaged *as such* will have a disproportionately beneficial impact on blacks. Only such a program, and not one that operates on the basis of race, is in accord with the letter and spirit of our Constitution” (emphasis in original, 488 U.S. 469, 528).

The reasoning in *Hopwood* (1995) further supports class-based preferences. The *Hopwood* court agreed that schools could use an economically and/or educationally disadvantaged standard when granting acceptances. The court observed, “Schools may even consider factors such as whether an applicant’s parents attended college or the applicant’s economic and social background” (946). Elsewhere, the *Hopwood* court said it would not reject schools using SES considerations, even if this resulted in a disproportionate number of minorities being accepted. The court stated, “We recognize that the use of some factors such as economic or educational background of one’s parents may be somewhat correlated with race. This correlation, however, will not render the use of the factor unconstitutional if it is not adopted for the purposes of discriminating on the basis of race” (947). Hence, while a minority applicant would not receive favorable consideration simply because she is Hispanic, she could garner the

committee's support because her parents never finished eighth grade and are migrant farm workers.

As noted, the affirmative action plan for granting federal contracts reviewed in *Adarand* included class considerations. Specifically, the law required preferences for disadvantaged applicants (Rice and Mongkuo, 1998). While the Court rejected race-based preferences, it did not overrule the class-based criterion.

Finally, the courts have strong practical reasons for accepting class-based affirmative action plans. Such policies would be well insulated against challenge because of the legal havoc their rejection would cause among existing practices. That is, if a socioeconomic status or class-based affirmative action plan were judged unconstitutional, the decision could become precedent for testing countless other forms of discrimination against the lower SES, ranging from the death penalty, to property tax assessment uniformity, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Therefore, barring a constitutional amendment, most commentators agree that the judiciary will never recognize socioeconomic status as a suspect classification. As Taylor notes, class-based affirmative action plans are "legally unassailable" (1991).

The next section illustrates how social class can be operationalized in an SES-based plan for recruiting and hiring university professors.

METHODS

This project tests whether the SES background of teaching faculty at UIUC reflects that of the state and nation. UIUC is a land grant Research 1 institution with 36,738 students (27,889 undergraduate and 8,849 in graduate and professional schools). We studied this faculty for several reasons. First, it was convenient. The first author teaches at a branch campus and the

second author is affiliated with a nearby university. Second, because this project was funded out of pocket, UIUC provided a relatively inexpensive way to gather the necessary data. Finally, we reasoned that if we could devise a generic procedure applicable at this site, by definition, our methods could be used in deciding whether SESAA is warranted at other colleges or universities.

The socioeconomic status of UIUC faculty was measured by the occupations and highest educational levels achieved by the respondents' parents. Data for this study were gathered through a survey distributed to one-third (754) of the 2,263 UIUC teaching faculty. Addressees were randomly selected from a list of potential respondents provided by UIUC personnel; that is, the 754 survey recipients were randomly drawn from a registry of current UIUC teaching faculty. Our large sample size assured we could precisely gauge the distribution of class background variables within this population.

SES was defined using the Nam-Powers-Terrie (NPT) scale (Nam and Powers, 1983; Mutchler and Poston, 1983; and, Powers, 1981). NPT is a frequently used and longstanding occupational status measure based on median educational and income levels of various Census Bureau (CB) job classifications (lawyer, physician, beautician, carpenter, and so forth). Each faculty respondent was classified according to 1990 CB figures and his or her parents' 1990 NPT scores.⁴ NPT was also judged the best means of measuring *relative* faculty SES standing because researchers have calculated a national distribution of social class scores using this scale; NPT is the only class-based measure with national comparison figures.⁵

In particular, after each Census, researchers analyze the various occupations listed on the government surveys and generate an NPT percentage ranking of professions based on the median income and educational levels of people in each job category. Thus, NPT runs from one to

ninety-nine. The greater the score, the higher the SES. For examples, farm workers, launderers and ironers, and cooks are scored below ten, boilermakers and heating, air conditioning, and refrigerator mechanics rank in the fifties, while physicians, lawyers, and civil engineers appear in the nineties.

To compare the sample against the national SES, the various occupational categories were aggregated in ten unit sets: Group 1) 1-10, Group 2) 11-19, Group 3) 20-29, etc. In 1990, approximately seven percent of American occupations ranked in the highest decile and about five percent were in the bottom decile (see Graph 1).

The survey included questions about parental schooling because NPT does not index housewives or homemakers. Fifty-five percent of the respondents classified their mothers this way. To capture the effects of maternal SES, the questionnaire included an item about each parent's highest educational attainment. Therefore, parental schooling was treated as a supplemental SES measure to compensate for considerable information lost due to the many faculty mothers not working outside the home.

These education data were classified according to the six groupings listed in the 1990 U.S. Census. These were: 1) Less than High School, 2) High School Graduate, 3) Some College, 4) Associates' Degree, 5) College Graduate, and 6) M.A. or higher. The last group encompassed everyone with schooling beyond an undergraduate degree, including, for instance, M.A.s, Ph.D.s., lawyers, and M.D.s (Kominski and Adams, 1994, XVI).

Before 1992, the maximum education category was not finely calibrated in U.S. government publications. Previously, Bureau officials counted post-high-school education up through six years of college as the highest range (Kominski and Adams, 1994, XII). Besides not

identifying whether the person completed an advanced degree, this was misleading because if students took six or more years to finish college, they were still included in the highest education category, even if they were not yet graduated (Kominski and Adams, 1994, XIII).

Given this problem and the fact that Americans have made great strides in education, (Adams, 1997, 1), in 1992, census takers started asking people to specify their post high school credentials (Kominski and Adams, 1994, V). This expanded classification system now provides a better picture of advanced educational achievement for all Americans.

The CB's new coding procedure means the present study conservatively compares UIUC faculty parents against the public. That is, if a UIUC faculty's father completed a master's degree in the 1950s, it was less common than had he finished it in 1990. Therefore, if these faculty have significantly more education than the most recent census data, this understates the true relative schooling of the UIUC parents, considering: 1) these forebears were graduated long before CB collected more precise schooling figures, and 2) educational attainment nationwide has been growing steadily.

Ideally, we would have compared parental schooling with the public's, according to higher educational attainment by household. Thus, if the mother had a doctorate and the father was a high school graduate, the family would be classified "Ph.D.," assuming the child had access to at least one parent with a doctorate.

Unfortunately, we could only make a highest-by-household comparison for the national population, not the state. The U.S. data were acquired from a special computer run conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The unit of analysis was children 5-to-

17-years-old by parental education. Thus, if there was at least one child in the household within this age range, NCES had information on higher educational attainment by parent.

Because NCES does not isolate higher education attainment by household for individual states, for the Illinois statewide comparison, all UIUC responses – one each for both parents – were matched against the educational attainment for all state residents 25-years-of-age and older. This roughly doubled the sample size, versus the national comparison.

The initial questionnaire was pre-tested three times at a nearby community college. The final survey was distributed in three waves, a first mailing and two follow-ups. Completed questionnaires were returned through intercampus mail to a central collection point. The response rate was 75 percent (754 surveys mailed with 567 returned).

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) goodness of fit statistic was used to judge whether the UIUC sample is representative of the state and national populations for parental SES and education. Chi-square was used to show the observed versus the expected values for the ten SES groupings and the six education classifications. The chi-square findings were graphed to emphasize the difference between the sample and the respective populations. The findings are presented according to how the faculty distribution would have looked were it representative of the public (the *expected* values) versus the actual distribution (the *observed* values).

FINDINGS

Graph 1 presents the results of comparing the sample parental NPT SES ($n = 821$)⁶ against the national NPT SES ($n = 122, 473, 499$). Over half (51.6 percent) the faculty are in the two highest categories, while about twenty-two percent (21.8 percent) of the nation falls there, a

2.4:1 ratio. The differences are even more extreme for the lowest categories. Less than two percent (1.9 percent) of the faculty sample falls in the two lowest classifications, versus more than thirteen percent (13.4 percent) for the national population, about a 7:1 ratio. The KS statistic is significant beyond .001.

While these findings are not surprising given the earlier-cited research, the present project precisely shows how unrepresentative the UIUC faculty is compared to the nation. While this school draws from a wide pool of students, obviously its faculty does not reflect the country's social class diversity.

The findings for educational achievement are about equally divergent. Graph 2 shows the UIUC ($n = 567$) versus national comparisons ($n = 51, 283, 636$) for highest education by household. The differences are most pronounced in the highest category. Over one-third of faculty parents had more than an undergraduate degree, while only about 10 percent of Americans had this much schooling. The K-S statistic is significant beyond .001.

Graph 3 compares UIUC parental education ($n = 1,133$)⁷ against the state's schooling ($n = 7,293, 930$). The UIUC parental schooling somewhat better reflects the statewide achievement, which is not surprising, since Illinois schooling exceeds the national average and the sample was not separated by higher educational attainment per household. Still, the UIUC figures for schooling-beyond-an-undergraduate-degree exceed the state's by approximately three to one. The KS statistic is significant beyond .001.

In sum, this research shows that UIUC faculty members are highly unrepresentative for SES and educational attainment. The sample is especially heavily weighted toward the two highest occupational categories, and over half (54 percent) the respondents said that at least one

parent had an undergraduate or graduate degree, versus 27 percent for the nation. These education discrepancies would have been more pronounced had we controlled for age. Thus, UIUC would be justified in using SESAA to diversify its faculty; the university should recruit and hire more lower SES candidates to be representative.

As stated earlier, this is a pilot study and should be replicated elsewhere, as the results may vary by school. However, the present findings and those of Boatsman and Antony (1995), Stetar and Finkelstein (1997), Kahlenberg (1996), Lipset and Ladd (1979), Mikulak (1990), deLone (1979) and others suggest nearly all universities will report findings similar to those listed herein. If so, this means it would be reasonable for most schools to recruit more lower SES faculty into their ranks and thereby achieve a more representative professoriate. Certainly UIUC officials have good reason for implementing SESAA. And as the earlier discussion shows, this program would be well grounded in constitutional law.

DEFINING SOCIAL CLASS

Some critics say SESAA programs are unwieldy because social class is too hard to define. (See, for example, Malamud, 1996.) This criticism ignores two practical concerns. First, as the preceding pages demonstrate, class *can* be operationalized and the results used to determine whether a school, here UIUC, should include SES in its personnel selection criteria. Innumerable other researchers have operationalized class in their investigations. Furthermore, those saying class is undefinable seemingly assume that other personal qualities, such as race and disability, are easy to specify for research and policy purposes.

Second, and related, is the argument that complaints about defining class ignore a fundamental principal of administration. Namely, executive branch employees constantly

interpret statutes and directives; seldom, if ever, are laws and policy statements so precisely delineated that administrators can avoid using their own discretion in applying these standards.

Consider, for example, how highway officials must decide whether a turn is dangerous enough for a warning sign, or how social service agency workers have to establish whether a child should be removed from its parents' supervision, and for how long. Likewise, police officers create thresholds for speeding offenses, such as how far above the limit someone must go before being ticketed, and so on, ad infinitum. If anything, administrators already make countless SES-based determinations, such as who qualifies for Head Start, financial aid, housing subsidies, and food stamps. America has a long and practical history of class-based programs, even if we do not call them that. SESAA simply says universities should establish and enforce procedures designed to attract and hire more lower SES faculty. SESAA has numerous precedents.

IMPLEMENTING SESAA

In practice, all SESAA programs will probably share one or more of the following concerns. First, the affirmative action criteria commonly listed in job announcements should be changed to attract more lower SES job applicants. Frequently, colleges advertise job openings this way: “In its commitment to diversity and equity, Such-and-Such State University seeks applications from women, minorities, and persons with disabilities.” This advertisement could be expanded to read, “. . . applications from women, minorities, *individuals whose parents were of lower socioeconomic status*, and persons with disabilities.” Of course, the italicized words would appear as normal print in the position announcement.

Second, how SESAA is applied will depend on individual program needs. That is, because SES representativeness will vary by school and academic field, faculty will first have to establish individual hiring objectives. Current standing would be documented by having each department survey its faculty asking them about their parent’s SES, perhaps with the questionnaire employed here (available upon request from the authors). These data would be used in deciding how to weight each job applicant’s SES. For instance, if most professors in a ten-member public administration department are from families with Nam-Powers-Terrie scores in, say, the 80s and 90s, then for its next several hires, this program should recruit and appoint several applicants from lower SES backgrounds, particularly the bottom two categories. This practice would be especially effective at integrating the nation’s most prestigious schools, where lower SES faculty are probably very underrepresented.

Third, once the application deadline has passed, all candidates should receive a questionnaire asking about their parents’ primary occupations and highest education levels, again

possibly using the UIUC survey. These SES questions could be added to current affirmative action surveys asking prospective employees about their ethnic backgrounds.

Fourth, all schools should adopt strict record keeping requirements for both present faculty and future job applicants. This would allow researchers, auditors, the courts, and legislators, among others, to hold school officials accountable for implementing class-based diversity programs. Requiring periodic reviews would show how and how well each school administers its SESAA. Furthermore, publicizing this information would allow universities to share ideas about effectively implementing and overseeing such programs. Eventually, faculty and school officials could share their findings and policy implementation suggestions through national conferences and professional publications.

In summary, all administrative programs, whatever their goals, will require a certain making-it-up-as-you-go in the beginning; it is impossible to identify and remedy every possible problem in the space allotted here. Administrative start-up costs cannot be avoided, and are no excuse for inaction. In the initial stages, each school will make numerous important choices about implementing SESAA. For example, UIUC might condense its NPT classifications into four categories, say, “80 and above”, “50-79”, “21-49”, and “20 and below”. Using this standard, school officials should devote extra attention to recruiting more professors from the two lowest NPT categories. As with any new administrative policy, eventually, precedent-setting decisions will give way to smoother program functioning – SESAA will become institutionalized, and, therefore, integral to personnel selection.

SESAA is an instance of the little laboratories argument supporting federalism. Namely, because seldom is there one national standard, individual states and their subunits can

experiment with various policy options. If one jurisdiction finds an especially effective way of addressing a public problem, other governments can emulate that solution. In its early years, SESAA will operate this way. As various schools diversify their faculty along SES lines, lessons learned at one campus can be tried elsewhere. If experience is any guide, this should significantly lower the number of reinvented wheels.⁸

DEFENDING SESAA

Although it is impossible to anticipate every criticism that will be lodged against the theory underlying the present proposition, at least three are predictable and should be reviewed, if only briefly. First, affirmative action programs are commonly disparaged because they supposedly undermine qualifications and merit. Critics question whether the applicants are meritorious (See, for example, D'Sousa, 1991). Such concerns are not applicable to SESAA. Most university teaching positions require terminal degrees. By definition, lower SES candidates will have a demonstrated competence in their respective fields simply by meeting the rigorous demands associated with certification. Anyone who finishes all the courses, examinations, and the dissertation required of a doctorate, should be considered, almost by definition, as a worthy job candidate. Moreover, given all the obstacles that generally discourage such accomplishments, one might even argue that a lower SES person who completes a terminal degree has already demonstrated more than his or her fair share of merit.

Second, some critics will say it is understandable that the professoriate is disproportionately higher SES. They will argue that, predictably, plumbers' children are more likely to become plumbers, welders' children are more likely to become welders, and so forth. It follows, therefore, that children of professional parents naturally gravitate toward college

teaching careers. Such reasoning contradicts a major rationale for affirmative action. Namely, SESAA both acknowledges and breaks the earlier-noted formal and informal barriers that discourage lower SES people from succeeding in academics and eventually entering this profession.

One should also weigh the “Let them be plumbers” comment against Lipset and Ladd’s earlier cited observation: “Only when we recognize the increasing desirability of scholarly work do we begin to understand its attraction for the more privileged . . .” Common logic would suggest that compared to their higher class counterparts, lower SES children should be *more* inclined to become professors. Certainly lower SES faculty understand both the “desirability of scholarly work” and why it is called “*working class*” (Dews and Law, 1995; and Ryan and Shackrey, 1984).

In short, it is not necessarily true that lower SES individuals are inherently less interested in becoming college teachers. Instead, underrepresentation of lower SES populations within academics shows how the school and other social sorting systems dissuade too many people with this upbringing from becoming professors (Boatsman and Antony, 1995; and “Teaching Inequality,” 1989), much as was happening, until recently, with women and minorities. By creating more role models and advocates for lower SES students, SESAA could increase the number of lower SES people interested in becoming college-teachers (Dews and Law, 1995; and Ryan and Shackrey, 1984). By implementing SESAA, schools are not only formally acknowledging the problem of lower SES underrepresentation within the professoriate, but they are also showing that they want to remedy this deficiency. Classism might be the toughest “ism” to fight, since so much of American ideology rests on the legitimacy of unequally distributed

wealth and life chances, notwithstanding our supposed support for equal justice under law and everyone being created equal.

Finally, some will say SESAA is wrong because it, like other affirmative action plans, is social engineering or government intervention (See, for example, Tummala, 1999 and *Hopwood v. State of Texas*, 950). This argument ignores how existing governmental actions protect unearned advantages accruing to children of the wealthier classes. These offspring, by nothing more than chance, start life's race far ahead of their peers (Zweig, 2000).⁹ Including SES considerations in university personnel decisions is no more social engineering or government intervention than what exists – we already have social class-based affirmative action, only now children of the higher SES are the beneficiaries. SESAA inverts the policy focus, so the lower classes gain from the intercession.

THE NEGLECT OF SOCIAL CLASS

ISSUES IN ACADEMICS

Lipsitz (1997) has argued that American culture seems unwilling to acknowledge the pervasive effects of SES. He explains: “The existence and importance of gender and race are recognized, reinforced, and represented repeatedly in political and journalistic discourse as well as in advertising and entertainment. But social class is another matter” (Lipsitz, 1997: 10). Lipsitz (1997: 20) says this problem extends to the university, where social class is mostly “eras[ed]” from the curriculum. This omission causes students to overlook prospective policy options, or, what Lipsitz calls social possibilities. Zweig (2000, 106-107) also call attention to upper-class entitlements. “Eventually, this ignorance makes students oblivious to “potential political alternatives” (Ryan, 1989, 169), such as policies directed against classism. So, while

there is considerable research about how social class affects most facets of American life, students learn little about this literature; social class is “the great unmentionable of American politics” (Raskin, 1996: 42). Freedman (1998: 15A) calls class, “the social fault line that our nation pretends does not exist”.

SESAA confronts this neglect of class issues. Besides showing that universities are committed to counteracting oligarchical tendencies within the professoriate, perhaps it can provoke more academics, whatever their class backgrounds, to publicize social stratification issues, both inside and outside the university. In adopting SESAA, institutions of higher learning lend their considerable prestige to the need for recognizing the role of SES in everyday life. With SESAA, academics could no longer be accused of neglecting classism, which might foster: 1) university centers specializing in SES issues and interests, including supporting more courses focusing on the role of SES in individual academic fields, 2) more class-oriented national conferences, 3) establishing SES subsections within existing professional organizations, and 4) a long overdue pride in their family roots among lower class academics and accompanying efforts at actively mentoring students with similar backgrounds (Dews and Law, 1995; and Ryan and Shackrey, 1984).

CONCLUSION

Individual universities know little if anything about the social class backgrounds of their faculty. Despite their reputation for liberalism, academics have demonstrated little interest in including SES concerns in affirmative action programs to diversify the professoriate along social class lines, notwithstanding the legal and political trends noted in the preceding discussion concerning *Hopwood*, *Adarand*, etc.

In his famous analysis of who exercises political power, Dahl (1961) studied a series of public votes. He measured influence according to which groups most affected the outcomes. He concluded that New Haven, Connecticut, the city he was studying, was not run by a single elite, but, instead, by competing groups. Supposedly, Dahl's evidence helped contradict Mills's (1959) earlier argument that a small group, *The Power Elite*, as he called it, ran the United States; Dahl's findings and those of other pluralists protected American democratic theory from its harshest Cold War critics.

There have been at least two particularly insightful criticisms of Dahl's pluralism, the logic of which applies to the shortage of research about the professorate's social background. First, Bachrach and Baratz (1963) argue that people also exercise political power by preventing an issue from coming to a vote. Keeping an item off the agenda may be just as important as winning the decision. The paucity of studies about the professorate says a lot about the power of American ideology to distract people from considering social issues that should otherwise be apparent. Even faculty from working class families do not publish much on this subject, with rare exceptions like Dews and Law, (1995) and Ryan and Shackrey (1984). While women and minorities are concerned with the faculty's gender and racial composition, professors from lower status families have not made similar demands for greater representation. There is room for considerable growth in class-awareness/acknowledgment among academics.

Second, concerning the work of Dahl and others, Schattschneider (1960, 35) notes, "the flaw in the pluralist [group theory] heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent." If other universities report similar findings about the social class backgrounds of their faculty, and the research cited herein suggests most will, then Schattschneider's criticism of

pluralism also applies to the academy. And if we want universities to be universal, as the name promises, we should expand the chorus' membership to include more faculty members from lower class backgrounds. The present project offers a practical methodology for achieving this goal, and perhaps academic public administration, with its rich history of concern for social equity (Frederickson, 1990; Pops and Pavlik, 1991), will become a leading advocate for SESAA throughout higher learning.

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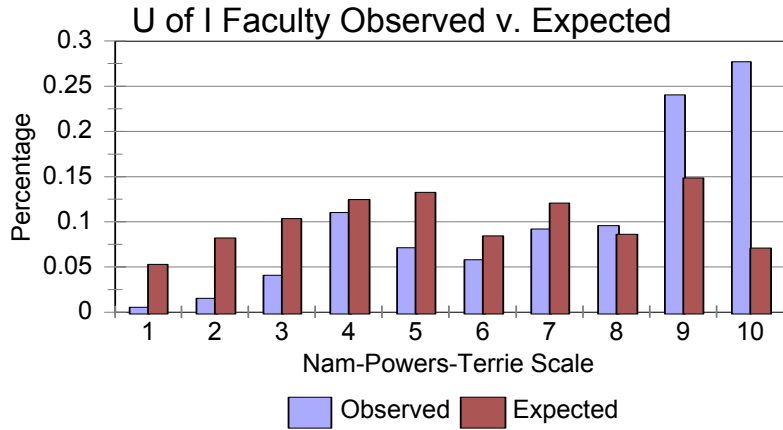
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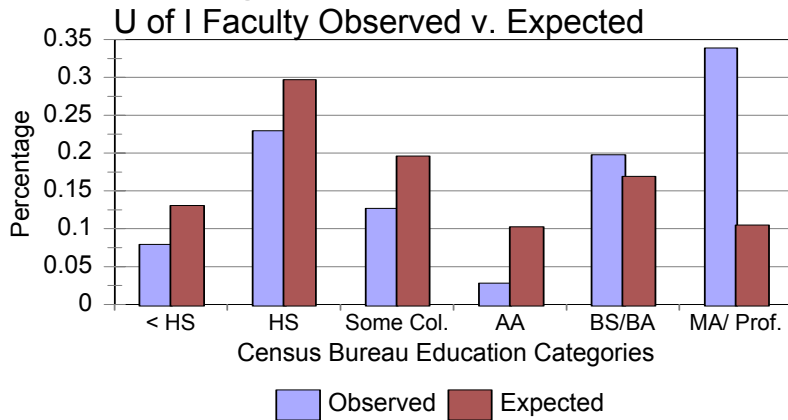
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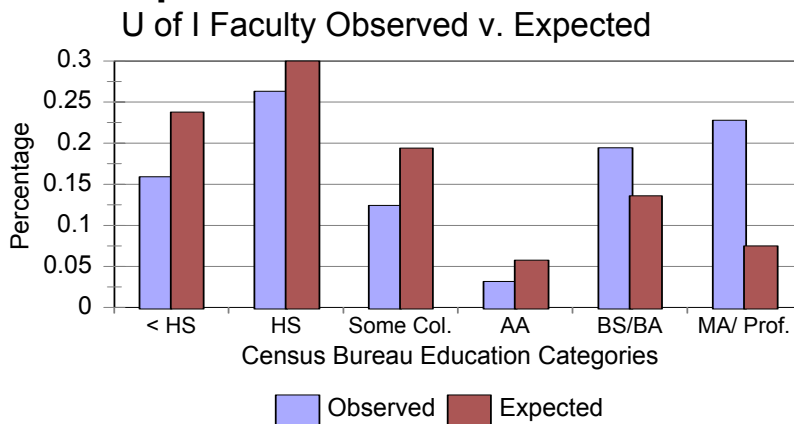
Graph 1: National Socioeconomic Status



Graph 2: Highest National Education



Graph 3: Statewide Education



ENDNOTES

¹ Elsie Bilderback and Madolyn Kimberly assisted with this project.

² While “social class”, “socioeconomic status”, and “class” have slightly different meanings, to avoid overusing one term, and becoming monotonous, this project uses these three descriptors interchangeably. The meaning of each reference will be clear based on the context of its use. In most cases, the reference is to Nam-Powers-Terrie’s SES scale described under “Methods”. In the generic discussions about class, the reference is to more general notions about stratification and the distribution of wealth commonly referenced in the literature, or to how individual researchers operationalize the term.

³ Likewise, faculty with other terminal degrees, such as law, conduct research and publish papers in their respective fields.

⁴ Charles Nam provided a copy of the 1990 scale.

⁵ Mark Fossett, Department of Sociology, Texas A & M University, provided these national figures.

⁶ The 821 *n* refers to the parental occupation of all respondents. Because NPT does not index “housewives” and “homemakers”, the *n* for this table is not roughly twice the sample size (two observations each for every respondent). The 821 refers to all mothers and fathers working *outside the home*.

⁷ This *n* is based on each respondent listing educational attainment for both his or her mother and father.

⁸ In part, this is an underlying theme for the annual meetings of the National Conference on Teaching Public Administration, where panelists discuss successful ways of teaching various PA topics and encourage other instructors to try the same or similar procedures in their own classes.

⁹ According to Phillips (1993, 192): “In 1973, 56 percent of the total wealth held by persons aged thirty-five to thirty-nine was given them by their parents. By 1986 the figure for thirty-five to thirty-nine-year-old baby boomers

had risen to 86 percent.” An article in the July 12, 1992 *Parade* summarized a *Federal Reserve Bulletin* as follows: “America’s 934,000 richest households have a net worth higher than that of its 84 million poorest households. Just 1% of its households own 37% of America’s total net worth – the largest concentration of wealth in the fewest hands of any industrialized nation.” The article further notes, “Clinton’s advisors have urged their candidate to seize this issue. They [Clinton’s advisors] note that many of the millionaires inherited their money – they didn’t earn it.” (Also, see Gale and Scholz, 1994.)