

MINORITIES IN GEOLOGY: A WORKSHOP convened by

Henry H. Woodard
Department of Geology
Beloit College
Beloit, Wisconsin 5351

A workshop designed to consider the lack of representation of minorities in undergraduate earth science programs was convened in the O'Hare Hilton Hotel on 3-4 March 1990. Twelve Keck Consortium members, representing eleven of the twelve departments in the Consortium, were present. Four resource persons with a broad background in minority matters joined the Consortium faculty members in an extensive discussion of why there were so few minorities in the geosciences and what actions the Keck Consortium might take to help increase minority participation in the profession of geology.

We first discussed the problem and some of the historical reasons for this under-representation in the geosciences. These ranged from the lack of early student exposure, to the lack of geoscience departments in minority colleges, to the ultimate lack of minority role models at the professional level.

The group then explored what might be done by the Keck Consortium to increase minority representation at the undergraduate level. Many good suggestions came to the fore, including the general observation that the Consortium should try to intervene in the minority educational track at an early stage. Considerable agreement developed toward the early intervention idea. The advantages of this approach were emphasized by all of our resource persons. After considering the numbers of minorities at various educational levels, it became clear that the Consortium could most effectively use its expertise in a program designed for the High School level. At the same time we recognized that individual departments might well wish to actively pursue a variety of local activities that might also help alleviate the lack of minorities in their own departments.

The Keck Representatives present were requested to test their individual department's interest in a two-pronged program. The first effort would be directed at sophomore and junior minority students in High Schools. The program would introduce approximately 15 students during a six-week summer period into the excitement of studying geology in a field setting. The current program at Colorado College (not now designed as just a minority program) was used as a possible example for such a program.

For those students who showed interest and capability in this first phase (approximately one-half of the original group), there would be a follow-up experience arranged for the following summer. This second experience would be more "research" oriented and might include activities such as: 1) research assistant with an individual faculty member in the Consortium, 2) assistant member of a regular Consortium research project, and 3) member of a special program, designed to introduce students into research activities, chiefly those involving field-oriented problems.

The second prong of the program would be aimed at teachers of minority students at the High School and possibly Junior College levels. This program would develop four-week earth science summer institutes. These would be designed to use field and/or laboratory based "research approaches" which could be used at their respective schools upon their return.

In summary, the members of the workshop decided to target minority students at the High School sophomore and junior level for special, field-oriented programs, leading ultimately to research participation. We would also establish summer institutes for teachers of minority students. The Keck Representatives agreed to take these ideas back to their respective departments in order to test other faculty interest in these programs. As convener of the workshop, I agreed to bring the matter back to the Keck Representatives at our April meeting at Smith College. If the response to these ideas is favorable, the Representatives will discuss the construction of a funding proposal to be submitted to the National Science Foundation.