

Roundtable: Baily-Iddrisu

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University Policies that Increase and/or Decrease Access for African-American Women Seeking Advanced Degrees

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The policies of most universities show a lack of dedication in addressing the needs of their non-traditional graduate students, particularly African-American women seeking advanced degrees. As African-American women return to the academy to pursue doctoral degrees, universities must address the issues facing women in general and African-American women in particular. The double-jeopardy that African-American women encounter in terms of race and sex is viewed by some Black feminists as a reason for conducting research specifically on Black women and their role contributions to American society (Brown, 2001).

The policies of local universities, both private and public show a lack of dedication in addressing the needs of their nontraditional graduate students who are classified as nontraditional because they are usually female, over 30 years in age and a member of an ethnic minority group. I found that these policies address the needs of the traditional graduate students, who have recently finished their undergraduate studies, and are single, childless and for whom the university is their full-time commitment. This paper seeks to examine how university policies serve to increase or decrease African-American women's access to higher education.

Many university policies serve to increase or decrease access for African-American women pursuing an advanced degree. Many of these universities are beginning to address those issues of access as their student populations' increase based on the growing number of African-American women who are enrolling in the graduate and post-graduate programs they offer. Despite the fact that there are more female college students than males, women continue to be critically under-represented in the higher education hierarchy. For African-American women, the numbers are dismal (Jones, 2001). Black women in pursuit of doctoral degrees face a plethora of obstacles. They usually operate in a system, which is largely unsupportive. They face the problem of having their chosen research areas marginalized and demeaned. These actions usually lead to a hostile and alienating environment where Black women's development as doctoral students is hindered (Woods, 2001).

The literature shows that there are many changes taking place at universities across the country. Viewing Black women as a separate research group, apart from the category of women and Blacks, widens the agenda simultaneously. Viewing Black women as a separate entity or including issues of race, gender, class, and color, does not crowd or dilute the research agenda nor does it skew the focus from Blacks, women, or Whites. It merely enriches the research picture.

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