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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

IMPLEMENTING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION:

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION OFFICERS

IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The current debate in affirmative action is centered around understanding affirmative action, assessing the need for affirmative action, and implementing affirmative action in American society. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the Affirmative Action Officers' role and identifies institutional factors that contribute to program effectiveness. Three questions are addressed: (1) What are the institutional factors that influence (support) the attainment of affirmative action program goals?; (2) What are the barriers perceived to impede the duties of the Affirmative Action Officer?; and (3) What strategies promote the effectiveness of Affirmative Action Officers in higher education?

The study synthesizes quantitative and qualitative styles of social research to study the critical role of the Affirmative Action Officer in higher education. A small

sample of Affirmative Action Officers was interviewed to identify their specific functions, duties and responsibilities. Affirmative Action Officers in colleges and universities were randomly selected to participate in a nationwide survey. Regression analysis was used to study the impact of institutional support, institutional barriers and proactive strategies on the implementation of affirmative action in higher education.

The results indicate that institutional support is important to the attainment of program goals. Race and gender are significant predictors for the institutional factors perceived to support affirmative action programs. Lack of presidential support, lack of training and development, lack of institutional value and commitment, faculty resistance, and budget constraints are barriers to effectiveness for Affirmative Action Officers. Race and staff size are significant predictors for the barriers perceived to interfere with the Affirmative Action Officer's duties. Identifying strategies to search committees, influencing institutional policy, coordinating corrective action, and reviewing personnel operations are essential strategies perceived to increase the effectiveness of the Affirmative Action Officer. Institutional support, barriers to effectiveness, dual roles and affirmative action

experience are significant predictors for the implementation of proactive affirmative action strategies.

Advocacy in affirmative action requires that the Affirmative Action Officer be regarded as a key administrative leader. When implementing affirmative action, institutional support and commitment are essential.