



ADVANCING SCIENCE, SERVING SOCIETY



4 October, 2004

Media Contacts:

Ginger Pinholster, AAAS, 202-326-6421, [gpinhols@aaas.org](mailto:gpinhols@aaas.org);  
Crawford Bunkley, NACME, 713-656-6238, [cbunkley@nacme.org](mailto:cbunkley@nacme.org); or  
Theresa Bourgeois, RPI, 518-276-2840 or 518-892-6103, [bourgt@rpi.edu](mailto:bourgt@rpi.edu)

### **STANDING OUR GROUND:**

*New Report Offers Guidance for Enhancing Diversity in Science and Engineering,  
As Attacks on Minority Recruitment Threaten U.S. Competitiveness*

More than a year after the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the value of diversity in higher education but struck down formulaic or points-based approaches to undergraduate admissions, a new report attempts to clear up the confusion created by the dual rulings.

*Standing Our Ground: A Guidebook for STEM Educators in the Post-Michigan Era* -- released today by AAAS, the world's largest general science society, and NACME, the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering -- clarifies legally defensible options for protecting diversity in science and engineering programs.

"In the particular context of science and engineering, this country's under-utilization of its human resources is a problem of critical proportion that will, if ignored, seriously impinge on the national and economic security interests of this country," the report concludes.

*Standing Our Ground* proposes eight "design principles" for increasing the participation of minorities in science and engineering. Most importantly, the report urges campus leaders to specify diversity goals within their institutional missions, noting the lack of legal guidance from the U.S. Administration, and by the intimidation tactics of special interest groups.

"Without specific intent and legal guidance, minority recruitment, enrollment, and support is inhibited," said AAAS President Shirley Ann Jackson, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and a report contributor. "The need to promote educational and workforce diversity is critical to America's future competitiveness on the global stage. Without a strong science and engineering workforce our economic and national security interests are at risk."

The Phase III (Hart-Rudman) Report of the U.S. Commission on National Security, issued only months before the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, asserted that the "failure to manage properly science, technology and education for the common good over the next quarter century" is "a greater threat to U.S. national security over the next quarter century than any potential conventional war that we might imagine."

In fact, said John Brooks Slaughter, president and chief executive officer of NACME, "Improving minority participation at all levels of higher education, especially in scientific and engineering disciplines, is critical for America. In this time of momentous global advances in science and technology, our country can no longer afford to have a sizable and growing portion of its population underrepresented in these increasingly important fields."

*Standing Our Ground*, emerging from a recent think-tank sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, provides legal guidance on two Michigan rulings that affirmed the importance of a diverse learning environment, but struck down the use of race as a quantitative "plus factor" in undergraduate admissions decisions. The mixed *Grutter* and *Gratz* messages, issued in June 2003, triggered confusion among academic, non-profit, and federal institutions seeking to extend the benefits of education to all.

Historically, the U.S. federal government has helped institutions to navigate such rulings, by providing legal interpretations, usually through the Justice Department. Yet, the report notes, “It has been over a year since the Michigan cases, and even the Office of Civil Rights remains silent,” except for two reports on “race-neutral alternatives,” the effectiveness of which have been questioned by analysts.

At the same time, “Universities have been subjected to a campaign of intimidation so that a bunker mentality now prevails, despite the fact that targeted recruitment is still perfectly legal,” said report co-author Shirley M. Malcom, director of Education & Human Resources at AAAS. Since the Michigan rulings, two advocacy groups -- the Center for Equal Opportunities and the American Civil Rights Institute -- have questioned an array of minority recruitment and other intervention programs. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (19 March, 2004), these two groups have sent some 1,000 letters to colleges since last summer, threatening to file complaints with the U.S. Office for Civil Rights. Further, the National Association of Scholars said 23 March this year that it was sending letters to “selective public colleges” in 20 states, demanding details on “university policies, practices, or procedures, formal or informal, relating to the use of racial and ethnic considerations in admissions to or eligibility for any undergraduate, graduate, or professional school program, activity, or benefit.”

How can program administrators protect diversity goals in the post-Michigan era? *Standing Our Ground* features a “legal primer” to help guide university counsels in interpreting the *Grutter* and *Gratz* rulings. It also describes eight “design principles” that may serve as a checklist for faculty and administrators alike. In summary, the report notes, “There is no cookie-cutter approach” that will work in all settings. Instead, explains report co-author Daryl E. Chubin, director of the AAAS Center for Advancing Science & Engineering Capacity, “We propose that universities take a program-by-program approach, and be mindful that ‘race-neutral alternatives’ are not required; they simply must be considered.”

Specifically, *Standing Our Ground* provides guidelines or design principles for developing legally defensible programs focused on the preparation of minorities, women, and persons with disabilities for careers in science, mathematics, and engineering. Most importantly, the guidelines urge university leaders to ensure that diversity efforts fit within a broader mandate. “Universities need to take on a strong leadership role that unambiguously states a commitment to diversity in their mission statements,” the AAAS-NACME report concludes. Planners also are urged, for example, to specify program goals and target populations; to define the program’s character so that any consideration of race is “not mechanical, but flexible;” to conduct evaluation and research on outcomes; and to pursue diverse faculty recruitment and retention. Campus leaders must be “willing to take risks in order to realize the rewards inherent in a more diverse campus or organization,” the report notes.

Chubin adds: “*Standing Our Ground* provides practical advice on the problems of bringing minorities into science and engineering fields, offering strategies that go beyond holistic evaluation in admissions while preserving the university’s right to recruit and serve a diverse student population.”

The report is available at [www.aaas.org/standingourground](http://www.aaas.org/standingourground).

Since 1974, the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering, Inc. (NACME) has provided leadership and support for the national effort to increase the representation of successful African American, American Indian and Latino men and women in engineering and technology, math- and science-based careers. For more information about NACME, log onto [www.nacme.org](http://www.nacme.org).

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is the world’s largest general scientific society, and publisher of the journal, *Science* ([www.sciencemag.org](http://www.sciencemag.org)). AAAS was founded in 1848, and includes some 262 affiliated societies and academies of science, serving 10 million individuals. *Science* has the largest paid circulation of any peer-reviewed general science journal in the world, with an estimated total readership of one million. The non-profit AAAS ([www.aaas.org](http://www.aaas.org)) is open to all and fulfills its mission to “advance science and serve society” through initiatives in science policy; international programs; science education; and more. For the latest research news, log onto EurekAlert!, [www.eurekaalert.org](http://www.eurekaalert.org), the premier science-news Web site, a service of AAAS.

# # #