

Myths about Affirmative Action*

Myth: Affirmative action is a form of reverse discrimination.

Reality: Affirmative action does not mean giving preference to any group. In fact, affirmative action stands for just the opposite. Included in the concept of affirmative action is the idea that all individuals must be treated equally and that a position should be given to the candidate most qualified. However, a hiring committee must make a good faith effort to create a pool candidates which reflects the number of women and minorities who possess proper training for the position.

Myth: Affirmative action means establishing a quota system for women and minorities.

Reality: There is a difference between goals and quotas. Ideally, the percentage of women and minorities working in position should be similar to the percentage of women and minorities qualified for such positions. Affirmative action does not mean showing partiality but rather reaching out to candidates and treating them with fairness and equity.

Myth: Affirmative action means settling for second best.

Reality: Affirmative action is not synonymous with mediocrity or second best. However, the most qualified candidate may not always be the individual with the most impressive publication record or academic experience. The selection criteria may include; contribute to the cultural diversity and to add to the range of research and pedagogical interests.

Myth: The Pool of women and minorities in many disciplines is so small that it is virtually impossible to find any.

Reality: There are some fields in which women and minorities have not entered in large numbers, but there are no fields in which women and minorities have not been trained.

Myth: Once you hire an affirmative action candidate, you can never fire him or her.

Reality: the terms of employment are the same for women and minorities as they are for men and non-minorities. In fact, in terms of affirmative action principles, standards of achievement, job requirements, and job expectations should all be applied equally to all individuals.

Myth: To satisfy Affirmative action responsibilities all that needs to be done is to hire one or two women or minorities for dead-end jobs

Reality: This is called tokenism. Hiring women and minorities for positions which are terminal in terms of advancement does not satisfy the affirmative action goals. The same opportunities for employment and career advancement must exist for all individuals.

Myth: Affirmative action will result in lowering the standards and reputation of a department.

Reality: This will not happen if a qualified candidate is selected for a position. Diverse staff providing varying talents and points of view increases the effectiveness and vitality and can lead to an enhanced reputation.

Myth: Affirmative action and Equal Employment Opportunity are the same things.

Reality: Equal Employment Opportunity means that all individuals must be treated equally in the hiring process and in advancement once on the job. Each person is to be evaluated as an individual on his or her merits and not on a stereotypic conception of what members of specific groups are like. Affirmative action is a more proactive concept. It means that one will actively and aggressively seek to recruit women and minorities by making a positive and continuous effort in their recruitment, employment, retention, and promotion.

Myth: Affirmative action means applying a double standard: one for white males and a somewhat lower one for women and minorities.

Reality: Double standards are inconsistent with the principles and spirit of affirmative action. One standard should be applied to all candidates. This myth, of course, implies that women and minorities are inherently less qualified than white males.

* As taken from The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

<http://www.uwec.edu/affirm/Affirmative/myth.htm>