THE CHANGING CURRICULUM ORIENTATIONS OF STUDENTS AT BLACK LAND GRANT COLLEGES: A Shift-Share Approach

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Using data published by the U.S. Office of Education, shift-share analysis is used to examine changes in the number and proportion of bachelor's degrees awarded in seven curriculum areas in the historically black and the historically white land grant colleges in the South between 1967 and 1977. Our guiding hypothesis suggested that recent pressure brought by the federal government to enhance programs at black land grant colleges coupled with the opening-up of a wide spectrum of traditionally white occupations would result in a broadening of the areas of study pursued by students at the black land grant colleges. Results show that, in general, students are pursuing a wider range of curriculums in the black land grant schools than in the past. Especially notable are increases in business, engineering, and the social sciences, while the number of education degrees has declined dramatically.

As the land grant system of higher education in the United States enters the 1980s, the historically black land grant colleges (BLGs) in the South are at a critical crossroads in their development. Once an integral part in training and preparing southern blacks for occupational and social roles in the larger society, they have seen their favored role erode in recent years as increasing numbers of academically talented and highly motivated blacks opt for other college careers. Further, as the federal government brings increasing pressure to "remove the last vestiges of racial segregation" in public higher education, the BLGs find themselves caught between the legal mandate to attract more white students and faculty on the one hand, and the desire to preserve a cultural environment and heritage that is uniquely black on the other.

As the black land grant schools strive to redefine their role and find a viable place in the mosaic of American higher education, it may be instruc-
tive to examine some recent changes in the career/curriculum orientations of students enrolled in these institutions. It is a well-documented fact that until quite recently the BLGs served primarily as teachers colleges for southern blacks, since school teaching was the one career path that was always open to blacks as a way up and out of unfavorable socioeconomic circumstances (Falk et al., 1981). However, during the past 15 years, the normative and structural changes brought about by the civil rights movement, affirmative action policies, and other government programs have begun to remove many of the barriers and restrictions that once prevented both admittance to, and advancement in, a broad spectrum of historically white occupations. Although disproportionate numbers of students in the BLGs still major in education (Thomas, 1980), the demand for well-trained minorities in business, industry, and the government has resulted in increasing numbers of blacks pursuing other areas of study.

Certainly, if the black land grant colleges hope to continue to play an important role in training future generations of blacks, they will have to refocus their educational programs and adjust their curriculums to prepare their graduates for an expanding range of job opportunities. A good yardstick by which to assess curriculum changes at the BLGs is to compare the areas in which students receive degrees at the BLGs to the areas in which students at the historically white southern land grant universities (WLGs) receive degrees. While both the BLGs and the WLGs were founded on the same educational principles and ostensibly have to fulfill similar legal mandates, historical circumstances and the economic and political realities of life in the South resulted in these "theoretically" common principles and mandates being operationalized in different ways. The traditional BLG emphasis on training schoolteachers, for instance, is one example of how the land grant philosophy was tailored to meet the social and economic needs of a particular segment of society. Nevertheless, given an expanding occupational opportunity structure for blacks in the South and recent attempts by the federal government to pressure southern states into upgrading their historically black colleges, we might expect to see a general decline in the relative importance (e.g., concentration of students) in education and educationally related curriculums at the BLGs and the growth of areas of study that lead to well-paying, high status jobs throughout the economy (e.g., engineering, business, etc.).

To examine the validity of this assumption, changes in the number and proportion of bachelor's degrees awarded in seven broad curriculum areas in BLGs and WLGs between 1967 and 1977 will be examined. The 10-year period between 1967 and 1977 was chosen for several reasons. First, it was during this period that serious attention was directed toward eliminating inequalities in public higher education in the South. Second, during this decade the demand for schoolteachers declined greatly, forcing the BLGs to prepare