

**U.S. Ocean Commission on Ocean Policy
Southeast Regional Meeting
Charleston, South Carolina**

Public Comment

Submitted by:

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Good afternoon commission members and thank you for providing this opportunity. The comment I have is regarding minority participation in marine careers. It is based on my 15 years of experience with minority serving institutions as a student, professional staff, and faculty member.

As we heard from Dr. Gilligan yesterday, we need minority role models in communities and in mentoring positions to encourage minority students to enter these fields. In the subsequent discussion, Dr. Muller-Karger asked, "What happens to minority students in marine science programs?" I can only answer that from my experience. My fellow classmates (minorities except for two of us) are almost all working for federal agencies, NOAA, EPA, Fish and Wildlife, and others.

While we acknowledge that more role models are needed, the current emphasis by federal agencies to hire minorities to show how diverse we are undermines the potential for any other efforts such as MSI grants and minority scholarship programs to achieve this objective. Once the recipients of these short-term programs are trained and qualified to enter into a role-model position such as teaching, research, or Sea Grant extension at an MSI, they are hired by a federal agency. This isn't to say that the federal government shouldn't hire minorities, and I'm not saying that positions aren't available at MSIs, but the fiscal reality is that salaries at MSIs aren't competitive with those offered by federal agencies. So, while our right hand is saying "where are the role models, we must create role models" our left hand is removing the role models to support our agency statistics. What's needed to ensure role models in the community, is a way to make it economically feasible to work in minority communities and at MSIs.

More minorities at ocean-related agencies won't solve the problem. This top down approach of getting minorities into marine-related careers undermines any chance we have for successfully changing the face of the marine science and coastal resource management communities. Face it (and no offense meant to my own agency or any other federal agency) feds are not generally positioned to be community-level role models; kids don't want to grow up to be mid-level bureaucrats.

I know the issue is much more complex than this single symptom, and perhaps it's one that Dr. Orbach or some other cultural anthropologist can better answer. But I strongly encourage this commission, as you "think boldly" about ways to resolve the many issues you're confronted with, to consider mechanisms to reverse the current approach to getting minorities into marine fields and replace it with a bottom-up recruiting approach. Fellowships, partnerships, and funding to make salaries at MSIs and in local and state resource management agencies as attractive as federal positions are essential to place and keep minority marine scientists and managers in their communities as role models, rather than in DC or Silver Spring as statistics. Building this foundation at the local and state level, and not undermining it with top-down hiring strategies is one important step in what will be the long process of resolving this issue.

Finally, as I mentioned to Dr. Kitsos and a few others yesterday, I do have a list of some minority marine scientists from my alma maters. These people have also been involved in many regional (Caribbean) efforts with regard to coastal/ocean governance, research, and education. I'm sure they can provide the commission with valuable input not only on minorities in marine careers, but the other areas you're addressing as well.

Thank you.

This statement reflects my own personal views and opinions and does not reflect or represent the views of my employer (NOAA).

Potential Panelists for the Caribbean/Puerto Rico Commission Meeting

in the U.S. Virgin Islands:
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Dr. Ragster is a marine scientist, and former director of the Eastern Caribbean Center at UVI. She served as the secretariat for the Consortium of Caribbean Universities in Natural Resource Management, an organization of 16 universities from around the region who actively promoted the incorporation of natural resources sciences and management into university curricula. She has been actively involved in a number of regional efforts addressing ocean/coastal governance issues.

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Prof. Watlington is a physical oceanographer and former physics professor and associate director of the Eastern Caribbean Center. He has been very active in promoting and involving minority students in marine scientific research.

Mr. Mark Sabino, Port Director
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Mr. Sabino is the current port director for the Ports Authority, and a former dive instructor/field programs supervisor with the University. A former U.S. Navy Seal, Mr. Sabino is very active in youth marine science education programs through the university and various NGOs in the VI.

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Can be contacted through Dr. Valdes; although retired, still very active in marine science education in PR and the Caribbean.