

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release
September 9, 2008

Contact: Lenore Ostrowsky
(202) 376-7700

CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION TO EXAMINE MINORITY UNDERREPRESENTATION IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH UNDERGRADUATE DISCIPLINES

Washington, DC – The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights will be holding a briefing on Friday, September 12, 2008, to examine the reasons that talented minority students leave science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) disciplines in disproportionate numbers before graduation. Among the views expected to be addressed is the “mismatch” theory. It seeks to explain the disproportion by comparing entering academic credentials of minorities with those of the majority of STEM students and positing that appropriate placements would result in a higher rate of graduation in STEM disciplines. “Mismatch” describes the effect of placing students in an academic setting where academic standards are significantly higher or more rigorous than the students' prior academic preparation. Other experts will critique this theory and discuss successful STEM programs for minorities within selective universities and K-12 schools, including programs undertaken by corporations such as IBM.

The panelists include: Dr. Richard Tapia, University Professor and Maxfield-Oshman Professor in Engineering at Rice University, dissertation director of many successful minority doctoral recipients in STEM, and recipient of the National Science Foundation Presidential Award for Excellence in STEM Mentoring; Richard Sander, Professor of Law at UCLA, well-known for research on the systemic effects of racial preferences in law schools and law firms; Hazel O’Leary, former Secretary of the Department of Energy and President of Fisk University, which produces high numbers of STEM graduates; Robin Willner, Vice President of IBM Global Community Initiatives, which oversees a \$75 million global achievement program; Rogers Elliott, Professor Emeritus, Dartmouth College, author of Litigating Intelligence and a major study of STEM students in Ivy League colleges; and Thomas Fortmann, Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and former engineer and executive at BBN Technologies, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

When: Friday, September 12, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.

Where: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 624 9th St. NW, Room 540, Washington DC

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chairman Abigail Thernstrom, and Commissioners Todd Gaziano, Gail Heriot, Peter N. Kirsanow, Arlan D. Melendez, Ashley L. Taylor, Jr., and Michael Yaki. Martin Dannenfelser is the Staff Director. Commission meetings are open to the general public.