Minority job-seekers don’t fare as well

Survey analysis finds that the difference in hiring rates between whites and minorities is increasing

By Ted Pease

The Kerner Commission’s findings have been repeated so often that many of us can recite them by heart: “The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man’s world,” the 1968 report said, criticizing “a press that repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the paternalism, the indifference of white America.”

Eradicating that became a priority for the ASNE in 1978, and how to do it — aside from education — seemed simple enough: get more minority writers, reporters, photojournalists and editors into America’s newsrooms.

But this year, as ASNE’s former goal of achieving racial “parity” in the newsroom by 2000 falls far short, here comes more bad news on the diversity front: Back in 1968, editors complained that, “We can’t find qualified Negroes.”

Today, more and more minority J-school grads seem to be unwanted.

That’s one finding of a research team from the University of Georgia, whose analysis of hiring patterns of recent journalism school graduates shows that race is a predictor of whether eager young journalists can land a newspaper job. White students are finding jobs easier to come by than minority grads with comparable credentials, the study says.

Lee B. Becker and his colleagues Edmund Lauf and Wilson Lowrey find “strong evidence that race and ethnicity are associated with lower levels of employment among journalism/mass communication graduates.”

Since 1987, Becker, of the University of Georgia’s journalism school, has directed an annual journalism employment survey of new J-school grads. The new analysis of how minority graduates have fared looks at 10 years of the survey data.

Just as affirmative action efforts across the country are being scaled back because they’re seen as no longer needed, things seem to be getting worse in terms of entry-level placement of minority journalists. “Minority status appears to be becoming ... increasingly negative in its contribution to the hiring outcome,” the researchers report.

The study finds an employment gap between whites and minority journalism graduates that is worsening. When factors like grades, internship experience, the quality of the journalism program and other variables are held constant, the study finds that although gender doesn’t seem to affect whether a new graduate gets a job offer (actually, women do slightly better), race does.

The effect is worst among black graduates, the Becker team found. Hispanics also had a tougher time getting jobs than whites, while Asian-Americans seem least affected by the race factor.

Though couched in careful academic language, the Becker report’s message seems clear: Intentional or not, racism still appears to be alive and well in entry-level hiring practices at U.S. newspapers.

That conclusion is borne out by ASNE’s own hiring and retention figures. About four percent of newsroom staff were minorities in 1978, when news-