

**IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIVERSITY INITIATIVES IN  
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY FIRE RESCUE**

**EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT**

BY: Nancy L. Couch

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue

Tampa, FL

An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy as part of the Executive Fire  
Officer Program

April 2002

## ABSTRACT

The problem was a lack of diversity within the applicant pool for the position of Fire Medic Trainee and Fire Medic 1, which resulted in an under representation of Women and Blacks in the department's overall hiring. This has further perpetuated a narrow margin of diversity in the uniformed ranks of Hillsborough County Fire Rescue (HCFR).

The purpose of the research was to determine what recruitment other departments found successful and recommend methods that could improve the diversity of the applicant pool at Hillsborough County Fire Rescue; thereby having a positive influence on the overall diversity of the department.

Historical and evaluative research was used to help determine the answers to the following questions:

1. What approach to improving/increasing diversity do other departments employ?
2. What approach does Hillsborough County Fire Rescue currently employ?
3. What methods can be implemented to improve the diversity of the applicant pool at Hillsborough County Fire Rescue?

The procedure involved a search and review of county and department records, fire service journals, research papers, and magazines; a telephone survey of numerous members of the department. A review of the recruitment practices employed by Hillsborough County Fire Rescue was compared to those used by other departments who participated in surveys. Data from the surveys was compiled and evaluated indicating that HCFR was far ahead of other departments in their recruiting program but still had an under utilization of women and black minority groups.

The literature and programs instituted by other departments and agencies were reviewed. Recommendations were made to expand the present recruiting efforts to include the development of non-certified entry-level position, partner with the school board or the community college to institute a high school dual enrollment program for Emergency Medical Technician and Fire Fighter certifications, and/or develop an inner-city explorer post.

Additionally, a recommendation to evaluate the HCFR's Task Readiness, the department's pass/fail physical agility test for new applicants. The test has never been validated and should be examined to ensure that it has not caused an adverse impact to female applicants.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Background and Significance.....	6
Literature Review.....	11
Procedures.....	15
Results.....	19
Discussion.....	27
Recommendations.....	29
References.....	31
Appendix A.....	34
Appendix B.....	35
Appendix C.....	36
Appendix D.....	37
Appendix E.....	38
Appendix F.....	39
Appendix G.....	40
Appendix H.....	41
Appendix I.....	42
Appendix J.....	44

## INTRODUCTION

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue (HCFR), a metro-sized department in west central Florida, employs 636 uniformed personnel. Of those, 7.4% are Female and 92.6% are Male. Blacks only represent 5.7% of the present workforce, 16.4% are Hispanic, 1.4% represent other minorities, and 76.5% are White (HCFR Diversity Report, March 2002). (Appendix A) Since 1999, two years after the merger of the Hillsborough County Emergency Medical Services with the Hillsborough County Fire Department, 117 new employees were hired out of the 659 applicants. There were 9 Females and 108 Males hired. Only 1 Black, 13 Hispanic, 6 other minorities, and 97 Whites were hired during this period (HCFR Personnel Records, 2002). (Appendix B) Of the 659 applicants, there were 68 Females, 591 Males, 17 Blacks, 96 Hispanics, 29 other minorities, 448 Whites, and 69 males of unknown origin (Hillsborough County Civil Service Records, 1999 – 2002). (Appendix C)

The problem is a lack of diversity within the applicant pool for the position of Fire Medic 1 and Fire Medic Trainee, which equates to an under representation of women and minorities in the overall hiring. The result perpetuates the significant absence of black and female diversity within Hillsborough County Fire Rescue (HCFR). This project seeks to answer three questions in hopes of determining a course of action for improving the diversity of the department:

1. What approach to improving/increasing diversity do other departments employ?
2. What approach does HCFR currently employ?
3. What methods can be implemented to improve the diversity of the applicant pool at HCFR?

In an effort to answer the posed research questions, the following types of research were employed: an evaluative and historical review of surveys, seeking effective recruitment measures

used by other departments, were completed by individuals who were in attendance at the National Fire Academy for Executive Development, Strategic Management of Change, Executive Leadership, Interpersonal Dynamics and Hazardous Materials during August 2001. Similar surveys of departments that border HCFR and draw from the same labor market, and surveys of departments within the State of Florida that serve a similar size population and have a like number of employees, were evaluated. Approximately 15.7% (100) of the existing uniformed employees were randomly surveyed to determine how they became interested in fire and emergency services as a career choice. Finally, a review of Fire Service journals, human resource periodicals, Websites, and county documents and policies was done. Conclusions were drawn from the plethora of information and recommendations formulated for presentation within this document.

## **Background and Significance**

### **Formation of Diversity Committee**

In May Of 2000, HCFR's Diversity Committee was formed at the direction of the Fire Chief citing three major reasons:

- A need for a proactive approach to recruitment
- A significant number of females have left the department since the merger of the county's Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services in 1997
- The pool of new applicants has been lacking in qualified females and other minority candidates

The Fire Chief gave the committee a general direction to explore how the department can do a better job recruiting, hiring, and promoting women, and minorities (HCFR Diversity

Committee Meeting minutes, May 2000). The committee forged ahead in constructing their mission and vision statements from those adopted by the Women Chief Fire Officer's and Women in the Fire Service organizations (<http://www.womenfireofficers.org> and <http://www.wfsi.org>). Following, is the HCFR Diversity Committee mission statement, "The mission of the HCFR Diversity Initiative Committee is to develop female and minority interest in the field of fire rescue as a career choice", and the vision statement reads: "The Diversity Initiative Committee envisions a Fire Rescue Service:

- That reflects the advancement of females and minorities,
- Where individuals are valued as leaders because of their knowledge, skills and abilities" (HCFR Diversity Committee Meeting Minutes, July 2000).

### **Position Vacancies**

As Hillsborough County has grown over the past ten years, the addition of Fire Rescue stations and personnel to staff them has not kept pace. In fact, only three new stations have been built and 64 newly funded positions added since 1990 but the population has steadily increased by 19.8% according to the 2000 U.S. Census Statistics (HCFR Growth Initiative Study, 2001). A Growth Initiative Study initiated by HCFR and presented to the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) resulted in the BOCC approving funds to construct and staff six new fire rescue stations over the next two years. A commitment was also made by the BOCC to develop a plan for funding nine additional stations beginning FY 2003 (Hillsborough County BOCC Meeting Minutes, September 5, 2001).

During the past two years, more than 100 personnel were hired to fill 32 newly funded positions and vacancies created by personnel leaving HCFR for a variety of reasons. Many of the vacancies were the result of recently employed personnel leaving to accept employment with

nearby departments that provided higher wages, fewer working hours and an earlier retirement option. The recent ratification of a new collective bargaining agreement between the Hillsborough County Firefighters and the County will hopefully remedy this “revolving door”, as the new agreement encompasses a reduced hour work week and increased wages of 14 ¾% over two years., This will make HCFR more competitive in the local fire department labor market (Collective Bargaining Agreement , January 2002).

Others vacancies were the result of employees pursuing new careers, retirement, and some were due to medical conditions that would not allow them to continue in a physically demanding field. Only four vacancies were the result of termination, two did not provide satisfactory performance during the probationary period, and two did not meet the position requirements for Fire Medic Trainee which mandates the employee obtain dual certification as a firefighter and a paramedic within one year of employment with HCFR (Hillsborough County Civil Service position requirements and HCFR Personnel Records, February 2002).

Since the merger of Hillsborough County EMS (HCEMS) and Hillsborough County Fire Department (HCFD) five years ago, the goal of Hillsborough County Fire Rescue has been to staff every responding unit (engine, ladder, heavy rescue, and the hazardous materials team) with Advanced Life Support (ALS) capability. To that end, two new entry-level positions were created, Fire Medic I and Fire Medic Trainee. Pre-merger, HCFD hired only firefighters and HCEMS hired only paramedics. The new HCFR positions were designed to fulfill staffing needs regardless of where a particular vacancy may exist on any given day and to enhance the level of service provided to the citizenry (HCFR Community Protection Plan, 2000).

The number of personnel required to staff the 15 additional stations authorized by the BOCC is more than 200. Over the next three to five years, nearly 10% (at least 65) of the



existing personnel (primarily Company Officers, Battalion Chiefs and Division Chiefs) will have reached eligibility to either retire or enter the Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP). In addition, by September of 2002, 42 new positions will be funded in order to staff for the 48-hour (reduced hours) workweek negotiated by the local bargaining unit. The sheer numbers of personnel that will need to be hired could have a positive impact to the overall diversity of HCFR if proper planning and actions in the recruiting and hiring processes are undertaken.

### **Under Utilization of Groups**

The future availability of vacant positions is especially important in light of 2001-2002, Hillsborough County Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Plan, which encompasses workforce and utilization analyses. The market availability (based on the 1990 U.S. Census Statistics) is compared to the department's participation rate for Black, Hispanic, Female, and other minorities, to arrive at a utilization figure. Based on these comparisons, the job groups that the uniformed personnel fall under show an under utilization of the Black and Female minority groups for the available labor market. As the result, a number required to obtain parity has been illustrated within the plan. Based on statistical figures as of September 30, 2001, fifteen Blacks and seventy Women would be considered as the established goal for fire rescue to achieve parity. These figures include promoted management and administrative positions within Fire Rescue (Hillsborough County EEO and Affirmative Action Plan, 2001-2002). Since September, five females have been hired, reducing the established goal for female parity to sixty-five (HCFR Personnel Records, March 2002). The labor statistics from the 1990 U.S. Census have been used because the labor statistics from the 2000 U. S. Census will not be released until 2003, according to Hillsborough County's Human Resource Personnel Analyst, Matthew Verghese.

### **Applicants and New Employees**

The screening process utilized by HCFR has historically eliminated at least two-thirds of the applicants. The process encompasses a rigorous criminal background and drivers license check, a written exam for both paramedic and firefighter/emt certified applicants, and a Task Readiness and/or mega code test if paramedic certified. Applicants who are successful in these preliminary screening steps will progress on to a panel interview consisting of members of the administrative staff (personnel, training & rescue divisions), the local bargaining unit, and representatives from the rank and file made up of Female, Black and other minority groups. The individuals recommended by the panel, move to the final interview with the Fire Chief. Once an offer of employment has been given, the candidate must successfully pass a physical exam, stress test and drug screen (HCFR Screening & Hiring Procedures, 2002).

New employees attend a 3 – 6 week orientation depending on their certifications and must complete a recruit manual with 18 accompanying computer-based tests on department policies and procedures and essential firefighting skills, and/or pass a medical oral board on the department medical protocols, and advanced life support pharmacology and physiology, within their one-year probationary period. The stringent requirements are believed to have resulted in enhanced quality and service to the citizens through better prepared, skilled, and trained employees (HCFR New Employee Requirements, 1999).

During the course of study outlined in the Executive Development class, organizational culture, labor relations and ethics were important topics covered. The implementation of a process that enables more diverse applicants to seek employment with HCFR lends itself to improving the culture, labor relations, and ethics of the organization.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to identify how other organizations view and address developing a diverse workforce, provide support and the reasoning for pursuing diversity, and to identify any potential obstacles. There have been several articles written in recent years regarding the hiring practices of organizations. For years, research has found that new college graduates gauge potential jobs and employers on such factors as opportunity for advancement, starting salary, and strong benefits packages. “A recent survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) in Bethlehem, Pa., shows that a good number of college students also look for their parents’ approval before accepting a job offer” (HR Magazine, January 2001, p 31). “Parental involvement is the hallmark of the Millennial Generation (also known as Generation Y), and a phenomenon that college recruiters and career counselors have been aware of and addressing for the past few years. As this generation begins to enter the workforce, employers also may need to look at ways to incorporate parents into their recruitment strategies” (HR Magazine, January 2001, p 31).

Data on average starting salaries for college graduates reveals a starting salary of \$37,268 for graduates of a four year college; however, starting salaries in computer and information system jobs average more than \$12,000 higher at \$49,853 ([www.Jobtrak.com](http://www.Jobtrak.com), January 2002). The significance of this information with relation to the starting salaries of HCFR can be crucial in emphasizing the 4-year commitment to obtain a bachelors degree compared to the 2-year commitment required to obtain dual certification as a firefighter-paramedic. Unless a student is interested in computer or information systems, it is more likely that they could earn better than a four-year college graduate, as a firefighter-paramedic with just two years of college.

The current starting salary for Fire Medic 1 is \$35,000 plus more than \$2,500 in deferred compensation and cafeteria benefits. Additional benefits include health and life insurance plans, tuition reimbursement, education incentives, a 75% Florida State retirement option after 25 years of service, 2-weeks paid vacation after one year, a planned wellness program and 17 additional shift days off beginning September 2002 (Collective Bargaining Agreement, October 2001). Before the recent contract negotiated by the local union and the county, HCFR was not as competitive in attracting and retaining employees. An additional incentive to seeking employment with HCFR is the tremendous potential for upward mobility as the new stations are built and officers retire.

The trend in the United States is for communities to reflect increasingly diversity in ethnicity, age distribution and lifestyle preferences.” “...The fire service must intensify the focus on the community and all who live there. As the community changes, so must the focus and understanding of the diversity of the populations that is being served. The fire service needs to start talking like the community talks, as that will be a key to who the community likes, supports and funds (Fire Chief, February 2001, p. 4).

Findings of a 1993 Equal Employment Opportunity study suggest that a lack of diversity becomes a vicious cycle, which breeds increased stereotypes and further intentional and unintentional barriers to entry (Gilbert & Stead, 1999). The ubiquitous response to the mere mention of the word diversity, is fear and resentment and a belief that standards will be lowered to allow “less qualified minorities and women” into the fire service (personal observations).

Hillsborough County BOCC and the Office of the County Administrator have adopted an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action Plan based on the basic premises of EEO and Affirmative Action. Diversity, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Affirmative

Action are three terms that are often used interchangeably, however, these terms have completely different meanings.

Diversity is about values and behavior that are unique to individuals and groups. It means to recognize and appreciate that individuals are different, and that their differences can be beneficial if they are valued, encouraged, supported, and well managed. ...Equal

Employment Opportunity, as provided for in federal and state laws, prohibits discrimination in all aspects of employment, based on an individual's age, sex, race, color, religion, national origin, disability or marital status. It mandates that all persons are entitled to the same opportunity for employment based on their qualifications and job related criteria.

...Affirmative action goes a step further than mere compliance with the law. It addresses the voluntary measures an employer may take to promote and ensure equitable employment opportunities for all employees and applicants for employment. ...Affirmative action includes measures for the recruitment, development, and retention of qualified employees and applicants from under utilized groups. The purpose of affirmative action is to overcome the effects of past or present discrimination and to remedy that under utilization.

...Affirmative action is not about preferences or quotas. Affirmative action means considering the race or gender of qualified candidates as just one of the many factors that determine merit. A person's merit is more than just a test score. It includes experience, character, obstacles overcome, and a wide range of abilities. Affirmative action enlarges the pool of qualified applicants to give everyone a fair chance. Under the law, a person must be qualified to benefit from affirmative action. An employer can set goals, not quotas. Quotas, the required hiring of a specific number of people of one race or gender, are illegal.

(Hillsborough County/BOCC, Human Resources Department Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Plan 2001-02, pp. 1-3).

The scope of this project was not intended to address the potential for adverse impact of any of the pre-employment screening steps but has become known after reviewing the literature and existing department statistics. This should be a consideration for a future study, especially since the Task Readiness is not a validated test. Figures for the pass/fail rate of female applicants reveal that nearly 2/3 of the 68 female applicants during the period 1999 to 2002, were eliminated from the process due to failing the Task Readiness. Likewise the pass/fail rates of the existing employees who must take the Task Readiness annually, indicate that the majority of those who fail are women (HCFR Training Division Records, 2002). This would suggest that the entry-level test should be validated based on job analysis conducted by an outside expert. Although policies appear to be neutral or applied equally to everyone, they do not necessarily create equal opportunity (*Many Faces, One Purpose*, FEMA/USFA, 1993, Introduction)

Eliminating a barrier that might be causing an adverse impact will protect the department from an EEO charge and the associated legal costs. However, “the organization has a responsibility to establish valid test standards and not lower testing standards. Lowering standards not only affects overall morale, but also cast shadows over certain employee groups, creating secondary issues” (EFO Paper, Roper, 1998, p.22).

As noted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA/USFA, 1993), female firefighters generally possess a lower center of gravity. While muscle mass and other anatomical differences create strength deficiencies in the upper body, many possess a great deal of strength in their lower bodies. The same can be said of shorter male candidates. If the purpose of an entry-level fitness test is to determine if a candidate is

physically sound and capable of performing job duties, the restricting methodology serves no valid purpose beyond creating disparity (EFO Paper, Iwanski, 1999, p.24).

“The lack of diversity among public safety employers is well noted through several high profile litigation cases and court ordered diversity compliance programs”. Historically, fire departments are much worse than police departments and when challenged, were unable to show that tests utilized adequately measured the ability to be a firefighter (EFO Paper, Iwanski, 1999, pp. 9-10).

## **PROCEDURES**

Research for this report was initiated during the August 6, 2001 – August 17, 2001 sessions at the National Fire Academy. One hundred twenty surveys were distributed among the students attending Strategic Management of Change, Executive Development, Executive Leadership, Interpersonal Communications, and Hazardous Materials. (Appendix H) The intent of the survey was to identify the current diversity of other departments, the diversity of any recent hiring activities, if the departments actively recruited women and minorities, what methods were used, and which ones proved most successful. Seventy-three (60.8%) of the surveys were returned.

An additional 13 surveys were distributed to the bordering departments and the departments within the State of Florida who serve like populations and employ a similar number of uniformed personnel. (Appendix I) Eight or 61.5% of those surveys were returned. Research papers were reviewed from the Executive Fire Officer Program files online through the National Fire Academy’s Learning Resource Center to obtain perspectives of other writers. Hillsborough County’s hiring and employment policies were also obtained, and a representative from

Hillsborough County Human Resource Office was interviewed regarding the county's EEO & Affirmative Action Plan. A random telephone survey of 100 of the department's uniformed personnel was conducted (Appendix J), and the number and diversity of applicants to HCFR from 1999 to March of 2002 was tabulated by hand at the Hillsborough County Civil Service Office, as those figures are not maintained during the normal course of business. Additional literature relating to the profession of fire and emergency services, as well as subjects having to do with Human Resources and Diversity were also reviewed for relevance to this project.

### **Definitions**

- Adverse Impact – A situation in which discrimination results from neutral employment policies and practices which are applied evenhandedly to all employees and applicants, but which have the effect of disproportionately excluding certain EEO groups. Adverse impact can be determined by the application of the adverse impact test formula, also known as the “80 percent rule.” Once adverse impact is established, the employer must justify the continued use of the procedure(s) causing the adverse impact a business necessity. It is not necessary to prove intent to discriminate to prove adverse impact (Hillsborough County EEO & Affirmative Action Plan, 2001-2002).
- Available Labor Market – The composition of the labor force (Community Labor Statistics) that has the requisite skills for a specific position, a class of positions or an EEO job category as determined by each agency (Hillsborough County EEO and Affirmative Action Plan 2001-2002).
- Board of County Commissioners – an elected governing board comprised of seven members.
- Enterprise Community (EC) – A federally designated area encompassing 12.8 square miles within the city limits of Tampa. The median income within the EC is below \$12,000 and the



highest rate of absenteeism and drop out from high school occurs in this area (NeXstep Business Alliance, January 2001).

- Fire Medic Trainee – an entry-level position with HCFR requiring either firefighter/emt or paramedic certification. Trainees must become certified as firefighter/paramedics within 2 years of employment (Hillsborough County Civil Service Position Requirements, January 2002).
- Fire Medic I – an entry-level position with HCFR requiring dual certification as a firefighter and a paramedic (Hillsborough County Civil Service Position Requirements, January 2002)
- Millennial Generation (also known as Generation Y) – Researchers for NACE have designated people born after 1980 as the millennial generation. (HR Magazine, January 2001, p 31).
- Parity – A situation in which the percentage of an EEO group within a given specific position, a class of position, or an EEO job category is equal to the corresponding percentage in the available labor market (Hillsborough County EEO & Affirmative Action Plan 2001-2002)
- Task Readiness – entry level and department-wide annual evaluation which consists of 9 timed exercises that are intended to be fire ground related: donning SCBA, raising, extending and lowering a 28” extension ladder, hanging a smoke ejector fan, climbing a ladder to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor window, hoisting and lowering a section of 2 ½” hose to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, carrying a shoulder load of 2 ½” hose up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor and back down, extending a charged 2 ½” handline a distance of 50’, moving 6 sections of rolled 2 ½” hose from the ground to a 4’ high bench and returning them to the ground, and dragging a 165# dummy a distance of 40’ (HCFR Training Division Documents, 1997)

- Under-utilization – A situation in which the percentage of an EEO group within a given specific position, a class of positions, or an EEO job category is lower than the corresponding percentage in the available labor market (Hillsborough County EEO & Affirmative Action Plan, 2001 – 2002).
- Utilization Analysis – A comparison of the actual employment by race, ethnic group, and gender with the relative availability based on the community labor statistics (1990 Census). In those instances where the utilization is less than the availability, there is an under utilization and appropriate goals and timetables for achieving the goals are established (Hillsborough County EEO & Affirmative Action Plan, 2001 – 2002).
- Workforce Analysis – A breakdown of the current work force in each of the eight EEO categories by Race and Gender as on a specific date (Hillsborough County EEO & Affirmative Action Plan, 2001 – 2002).

### **Limitations**

Several limitations and assumptions pose a threat to the validity of this research project. The first supposition is that the previously conducted research and articles written which address this topic are believed to be valid and accurate. Information that may have been included in this research could be skewed by the original author and offer a tainted view of the subject. Next, it is assumed that the information provided in the surveys was authentic, factual and theoretically sound; however, further limitations resulted from the design of the surveys, which included questions that could produce vague answers and could require individual subjective opinions. Of the initial surveys distributed at the National Fire Academy, 60.8% were returned. The total number of responses was 73 out of 120.

A second survey distributed to bordering departments and other like-size departments within the state had a return rate of 61.5% (8 out of 13 surveys returned). The return rate for both sets of surveys is greater than was expected. Graphs depicting the information obtained from the surveys are included as supporting documentation in appendices D-G.

Very few of those who responded were able to provide the number and diversity of applicants to their departments. Obtaining this information for HCFR was labor intensive, as well, tabulated by hand and subject to human error.

## **RESULTS**

The results of the research project primarily came from the comprehensive review of information received through the written surveys of departments regarding their recruiting and hiring efforts, and the literature.

### **Research Question One**

What approach to improving/increasing diversity do other departments employ?

The results of the initial surveys distributed at the National Fire Academy indicate that the majority of departments that responded (57.5%) do not employ any means of improving or increasing diversity; however, 32.8% did respond affirmatively, and the remaining responses were either left blank or did not know. Forty respondents (54.8%) did not feel that their departments attracted an adequate number of women and minorities, and only 16.4 % indicated that there is an aspect of their department's recruiting process that is particularly successful in attracting women and minority applicants. (Appendix D)

Of the 16.4% (thirteen) who believe their department's recruiting process is particularly successful, two did not elaborate, two simply stated, "A job announcement" and "Policy which

states that any qualified person may apply.” They also indicated that there were no barriers for minorities, and one indicated that physical ability is a barrier for women. Interestingly, the number of women employed with each of the two departments is one; one department does not employ any minorities, and the other only 10 out of a workforce of 100-200 personnel. This response is illustrative of individuals who have not yet grasped the importance of the concept of diversity, and portrays the internal culture of many departments, that create internal barriers.

The overwhelming response from the remaining respondents was active recruitment and mentoring, use of women and minority members to help with recruiting, development of relationships with community organizations, offer opportunities to practice the physical agility test, and develop and portray a reputation as a diverse and proactive department.

The secondary survey of the 13 Florida departments primarily revealed that five of the eight that responded, actively recruit for women and minorities. (Appendix E) Some of them simply provided their county or municipality’s Equal Opportunity Plan, while others outlined briefly what they do at the department level. Similarly, to the other surveys, participation in job and career fairs and visits to middle schools, high schools, colleges, community organizations, mentoring and educating the target groups on what is required to become a firefighter were listed.

Further research into programs available around the country through networking revealed a number of progressive agencies that are taking the lead in providing opportunities for female and minority youth groups to be exposed and educated at an early age. Locally, Sarasota County Technical Institute (SCTI) offers a High School Fire Fighting Academy. Students must be seniors, maintain a 2.5 grade point average, and be able to pass a physical agility test and a medical screening. They are required to attend 5 days weekly from 8:15 a.m. until 1:45 p.m.,

August through December. In January, they continue with their academic courses to meet high school graduation requirements. (Pamphlet, SCTI High School Fire Fighting Academy, 2002)

In Orange County, Florida, Orange County Fire Rescue has a similar partnership with Orange County Public Schools that prepares high school students seeking a career in the emergency service profession. The Tech-Prep Firefighter Program allows seniors to attend half-days at Mid Florida Tech through a dual enrollment agreement. Students that meet the state requirements are allowed to earn their Florida Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification, and are given hiring preference. Orange County also has a non-certified Firefighter Program which provides an opportunity for individuals who qualify to be paid a salary and placed in training classes to receive both the Florida EMT and Firefighter certifications. Additionally, in hopes of broadening the outlook into the Fire Service as a possible career, an Explorer Program was started in January of this year for youth ranging in age from 14 to 20 years old. (<http://www.OCFRD.com>, April 2002)

The Baltimore City Fire Cadet program earned an award in 2000 for their effectiveness in youth employment and development. This was also collaboration among three agencies, the Baltimore City Fire Department, Baltimore City Public School System, and the Office of Employment Development. Since winning the PEPNet Award in 2000, the Baltimore City school system has implemented the Walbrook High School Uniform Service Academy. "The Fire and EMS Academy at Walbrook is based on the Fire Cadet Program curriculum and 400 students participate. Additionally, the Fire Cadet program model has been started in Ohio, Arizona and Michigan and has been adopted as the "National Program" of the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters" (PEPNet '00 Profiles, 10 Effective Youth Initiatives, p.1).

During attendance at the recent International Association of Fire Chiefs Conference in August 2001, participation in a Diversity Workshop that was conducted by the Chief of the Colorado Springs Fire Department (CSFD) and a representative of the Urban League of the Pikes Peak Region, Inc.(ULPPR), produced information on yet another partnership between two agencies. The Urban League Firefighter Candidate Recruitment Program has as their goal, "... to recruit, counsel, mentor and teach 40 African American participants so that they shall apply for and successfully pass the written, physical abilities and oral board components of the entrance level examination for Firefighter Candidate with the Colorado Springs Fire Department." The program requirements include mentoring/coaching sessions conducted by CSFD and the completion of the EMT certification, for which a scholarship is available (ULPPR Informational Flyer, August 2001).

### **Research Question Two**

What approach does Hillsborough County Fire Rescue currently employ?

Since March of 2000, attempts to reach the target groups have been made by advertising in specialized publications such as the Sentinel, The Weekly Challenger, and Women in Fire Suppression Newsletters, and on the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters Website. Additionally, the Diversity Committee previously mentioned, was formed in May of 2000. The committee developed a strategy to meet their mission to develop female and minority interest in the field of fire rescue as a career choice. As many of the survey respondents have suggested, efforts are already being made to reach the target groups through the use of female and minority members of the department at job & career fairs, speaking engagements with high schools, Boys & Girls Clubs, local Girl Scout Troops, and the current Fire Academy,

EMT & Paramedic students at the local community colleges (HCFR Diversity Committee Activity Report, December 2001).

The development of a recruiting video featuring the diverse faces of HCFR, is underway with the assistance of the Hillsborough County's government channel, HTV 22. The plan is to run the video as a Public Service Announcement (PSA) on HTV 22, and during future engagements with schools, civic organizations, and job fairs. A pamphlet for distribution throughout the community is also underway. Recently, a news article which was placed on the front page of the Tampa Tribune Metro section featured the department's only black female whose rank is Battalion Chief, and a television news story is scheduled to run soon which features one of our white female Fire Medics. Other articles are planned for placement in the specialty publications describing the profession, the requirements, benefits, and how to get started.

In addition to educating the youth in the schools, a meeting to inform all the Department Heads of Guidance for the Hillsborough County High Schools was conducted in January. At the beginning of the 2002/2003 school year, another information session is planned with all of the Career Specialists who direct and guide students in their career choices at the High Schools (HCFR Diversity Committee Activity Report, March 2002).

Early in the development of the Diversity Committee's strategy, a desire to hold a week-end or week-long event for the target youth was expressed; however, funding and logistical constraints caused the committee to table the idea. Eventually, through networking with other government and business agencies, a partnership was formed between HCFR and the Youth Opportunity (YO) Movement to engage in an 8-week youth summer program. The YO/HCFR

Fire Medic Summer Academy was born and will be held for the second year this June (HCFR Committee Meeting minutes, May 2001 & November 2001).

YO is funded through a federal grant from the Department of Labor and is administered by five agencies: The School District of Hillsborough County, YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Urban League of Greater Tampa/Hillsborough, and Neighborhood Community Development Centers. Their primary goal is to provide youth, age 14 – 21, who reside in the Enterprise Zone with career development opportunities. YO has provided the funding to purchase complete sets of bunker gear, books, uniforms, refreshments, lunches, and transportation for the cadets. HCFR is providing the guidance and instructors to deliver the State of Florida's Firefighter I curriculum, which includes the 40 hour First Responder training and culminates with a live structure burn. The equipment and fire apparatus necessary for the program are also provided by HCFR (YO/HCFR Planning Meeting, February 2001).

The summer academy is open to members of YO who are at least 17 years old, maintain a C average in school or possess a High School Diploma or GED, and pass a medical physical. Cadets are required to maintain minimum scores throughout the program, adhere to the attendance policy, and participate in daily physical training (YO/HCFR Fire Medic Summer Academy Policy & Procedures, November 2001).

Last year 22 youth entered the program, nineteen completed the First Responder training, eleven were successful in completing the entire program, three attended but did not participate in the live burn, two were unsuccessful, one was removed from the program due to a medical condition that would prevent him from safely participating, and one left to enter the military. Of the eleven who completed the program, four were old enough to take the state's Firefighter I Certification exam; however, were not successful. Each of them has indicated their desire to



retake the test and pursue a career in fire rescue (Youth Opportunity Report on summer 2001 Fire Rescue Participants, February 2002).

This year, the number of students will be limited to seventeen and memos of understanding will be completed by each cadet and a parent, outlining the requirements, especially the need to study and do assignments between classes. A definitive discipline policy has been developed, which is hoped to alleviate some of the disruptions experienced during the first year. Parents will be brought in for an orientation and invited back on two different Saturdays so they may observe the progress of their children. Last year, a stipend was paid to each cadet on a weekly basis that was equivalent to \$5.00 per hour. Many of the youth viewed the program as a summer job, rather than a career development opportunity. This year, the stipend will be awarded at the end of the program, only to those cadets who have completed and met the performance objectives of the program. It is believed that this will also alleviate some of the performance and discipline issues and attract participants who truly wish to learn about fire rescue as a career option (Diversity Committee Meeting, December 2001).

Since six of the 41 stations operated by HCFR are staffed with volunteer firefighters, many of the youth that are encountered during recruiting efforts are steered toward the volunteer stations to gain exposure and training prior to making a commitment to any formal training programs. An arrangement has been made with Hillsborough Community College to provide three minority scholarships to the Fire Fighting Academy, EMT, and Paramedic schools for qualified volunteers who have served a minimum of one year with HCFR (Meeting with Dean of Public Safety Programs, Hillsborough Community College, 2001).

### **Research Question Three**

What methods can be implemented to improve the Diversity of the applicant pool of HCFR?

Although HCFR is far ahead of most of the surveyed departments in their diversity recruiting efforts, the County Administrator down to the Fire Chief have expressed their desire for a stronger outreach that would produce measurable results . (Personal Communication from Fire Chief, January 2002). Research suggests that avenues not previously considered by HCFR could be entertained in order to reach the target audience and influence interest in Fire Rescue as a career.

In order to gain a perspective of what influenced current HCFR personnel to become interested in fire rescue as a career choice, a random telephone survey of 100 personnel from different shifts and stations was conducted. Their length of time involved in the fire service ranged from 1 month to 30 years. Eight of the respondents were female, and of the 92 male respondents, 10 were Black, 23 were Hispanic and 59 were white. Eighty-nine indicated that they first became interested or exposed to the fire service through a close connection to someone already in or retired from a fire department, either a family member, friend or neighbor. The remaining eleven sited observing fire crews at a house fire or traffic accident, observing someone succumb to a heart attack and feeling helpless, exposure in the military, responding to a Civil Service add in the newspaper, responding to a sign in front of a volunteer station, curiosity, or seeking something different. Only two of the eleven sited a visit by a fire crew to their school as the impetus for selecting a fire service career. (Appendix F & G)

## DISCUSSION

The Hillsborough County EEO and Affirmative Action Plan 2001-2002, indicates that an under utilization of Blacks and Females under the Job Group Descriptions identified for fire rescue exists. The goals established in order to achieve parity with the market availability according to the 1990 U. S. Census Labor Statistics, is fifteen Black and 65 Women. Although goals have been established, it is important to emphasize that these are not quotas. The establishment of hiring goals does not require or mandate the selection of unqualified persons or preferential treatment based on race, national origin, or sex. Goals can be met through effective identification and elimination of problems and barriers (Hillsborough County EEO & Affirmative Action Plan, 2001-2002).

Of particular interest, is the large margin of under utilization for women. This seems to warrant further investigation into the validity of the Task Readiness. As previously noted the current pass/fail rates for the 68 female applicants to HCFR since 1999, the subsequent hiring of only 9 women, and the high failure rates for current female employees would be a strong indicator that the Task Readiness might be having an adverse impact to female applicants. Although the exercises that make up the Task Readiness appear to mirror fire ground activities, it may in fact, be a barrier. The department will have to remedy the situation if found to be a barrier or risk an EEOC charge of discrimination (HCFR Training Division Records, 2002).

The survey results and literature recommendations compared to the existing recruiting program utilized by HCFR, indicate that many of the components of a successful recruiting program are being undertaken by the department. However, the true measure a successful recruitment drive may not be seen for two or three years (Many Faces, One Purpose, FEMA/USFA, 1993). Steps can be taken to produce more immediate results, such as the entry-

level position for non-certified applicants. The establishment of a positive climate through education and commitment is key. Following is an excerpt from a source that is not very current; however, the direction is likely a good piece of “timeless” advice.

Consider carefully before you emphasize numbers as a measure of the success of your recruitment effort, either publicly or within the department. If potential candidates and incumbent firefighters perceive (correctly or incorrectly) that management just wants to hire women to get numbers to fill a hiring goal, the sincerity and effectiveness of your recruitment will be severely undermined. The message that “We want to hire ten women” implies two things, and both of them are negative: (1) that you will hire ten women just to hire women, even if not all of them are qualified, and (2) that if more than ten qualified women apply, you will not hire all of them. It also can make your recruitment drive appear to have been a failure if you “only” end up hiring nine women. Instead, consider making a positive “goals statement” that emphasizes your commitment to diversify your firefighting workforce and to support its diversity in meaningful ways. For example, one fire department said in its advertisements: “We are looking for professionals who want to be part of a progressive, innovative fire department. Our goal is to have a workforce that reflects the diversity of our community. Women and people of color are especially encouraged to apply” (A Handbook on Women in Firefighting, 1993, p. 15).

This same theory would hold true for any minority group who may be targeted, not just women. The risk of attaching a stigma to those that may be hired as non-certified employees and trained while being paid should be considered and addressed before establishing such a program. Although HCFR has presented Diversity Training to all of its employees, and has included it in the new employee orientation, follow up sessions have not been conducted.

Cultural diversity training is not a “one shot deal.” The department should hold follow-up sessions for all personnel on a regular basis. These should not simply repeat and regurgitate the information presented in the original training, but should build on prior training to improve understanding and communications (Handbook on Women in Firefighting, FEMA/USFA, 1993, p. 70).

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The administration of Hillsborough County Fire Rescue should take advantage of the strong working relationship that already exists with the School District of Hillsborough County and Hillsborough Community College to establish a dual enrollment program for high school students so they are ready to enter the Fire Service workforce very soon after high school graduation. HCFR would be taken serious in the community and show a commitment to honoring the mission of the diversity committee.
- Consideration should be given to laying the ground-work to develop a non-certified entry level position. Establish an on-going cultural diversity and communications education program and open the discussion for input from union representatives. Collaboration with the agencies that administer the Youth Opportunity Movement, would be beneficial in creating a pool of potential candidates. Additionally, a partnership with organizations dedicated to supporting young women should also be considered.
- Establish an inner city Explorer Post. This would enable the department to incorporate the parents into the recruiting strategy.

- All cadets entering the YO/HCFR Fire Medic Summer Academy should be tracked to determine the effectiveness of the program. A mentoring and coaching program to outline a course of action to guide them to their goals with regular contact should be initiated.
- Develop a physical fitness program/outline for any applicant to begin a minimum of 12 – 16 weeks before starting the actual screening or training program to assist in making them successful.
- Contract with an outside expert to conduct a job analysis and validation of the existing Task Readiness.

## REFERENCES

- Evans, J. (2001) Meeting, Hillsborough Community College, Tampa, FL
- Federal Emergency Management Agency/United States Fire Administration (1993, January). Many Faces, One Purpose, A Manager's Handbook on Women in Firefighting. Madison WI: Women in the Fire Service.
- Gilbert, J..A., & Stead. A. (1999) Stigmatization revisited: Does diversity management make a difference in applicant success? Group and Organization Management, 24, 239-256
- Hillsborough County BOCC and International Association of Firefighters Local 2294, Suppression Unit, (2002, January) Collective Bargaining Agreement Tampa, Florida
- Hillsborough County Civil Service. (1999 – 2002) Applicant Records, Tampa, FL
- Hillsborough County Civil Service. (2002) Fire Medic Trainee Position Requirements, Tampa, FL
- Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners. (2001, September) Meeting Minutes, Tampa, FL
- Hillsborough County BOCC. (2001-2002) Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Plan, Tampa, FL
- Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (2000) community Protection Plan, Tampa, FL
- Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (2000, May) Diversity Committee Minutes, Tampa, FL
- Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (2000, July) Diversity Committee Minutes, Tampa, FL
- Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (2001, May) Diversity Committee Minutes, Tampa, FL
- Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (2001, November) Diversity Committee Minutes, Tampa, FL

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (2001,December) Diversity Committee Minutes,  
Tampa, Fl

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (2002, March). Diversity Report Tampa, Fl: Nancy L.  
Couch

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (2001, September) Growth Initiative Study, Tampa,  
Fl: David Travis

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (2002) Personnel Records, Tampa, Fl

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (1999-2002) New Applicant Screening & Hiring  
Procedures, Tampa, Fl

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (1999-2002) New Employee Requirements, Tampa, Fl

Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. (1999-2002) Training Division Records, Tampa, Fl

Iwanski, D. (1999, September) An analysis of Entry-Level Firefighter Recruiting and  
Testing for the Fry Fire District, (Applied Research Project) Emmitsburg, MD, National Fire  
Academy, Executive Fire Officer Program

JobTrak Web at <http://www.Jobtrak.com>, (2002, January)

Leonard, B. (2001,January) Vol. 46 No. 1 p. 31

NeXstep Business Alliance. (2001) Youth Opportunity Movement of Tampa [Brochure]

National Youth Employment Coalition. (2000) PEPNet '00 Profiles, 10 Effective Youth  
Initiatives, Washington, D.C.

Orange County Fire Rescue at <http://www.OCFRD.com>, retrieved April 2002



Personal Communication, (2002, January) Fire Chief, Hillsborough County Fire Rescue, Tampa, Fl

Roper, B. (1998, June) Building the Foundation for a Diversity Plan to Serve the Community, (Applied Research Project) Emmitsburg, MD, National Fire Academy, Executive Fire Officer Program

Sarasota County Technical Institute. (2002) Firefighter Training Program for High School Seniors [Brochure].

Urban league of the Pikes Peak Region, Inc. (2001, August) Urban League Firefighter Candidate Recruitment Program [Brochure]

Vision 2010 Communique' for Change, Special Supplement to Fire Chief Magazine (2001, February)

Women Chief Fire Officers Web at <http://www.womenfireofficers.org>

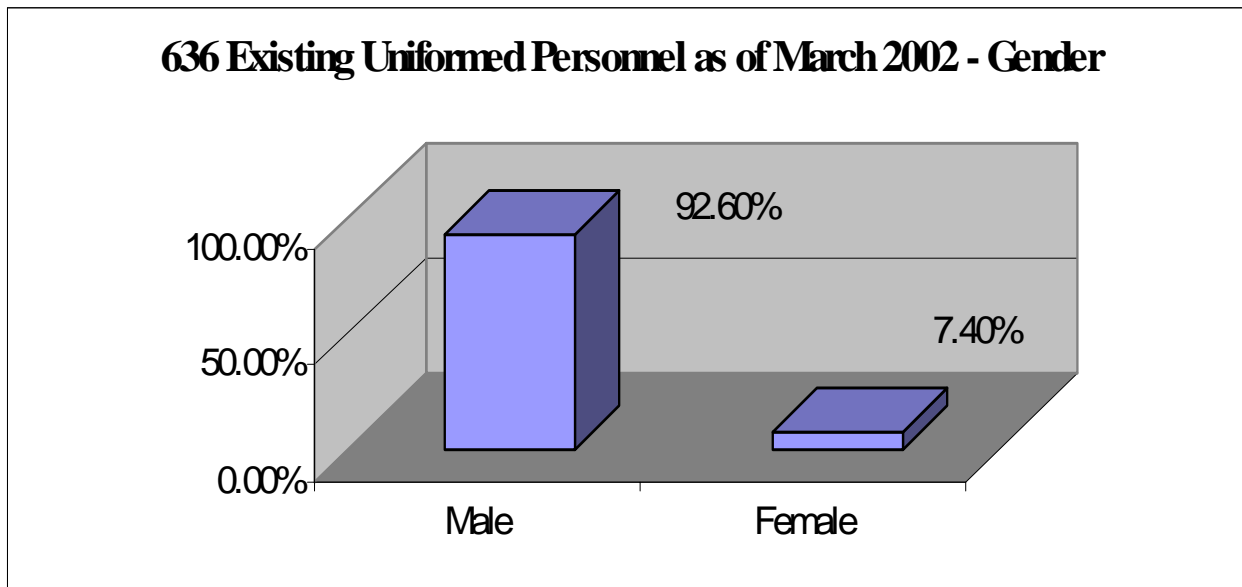
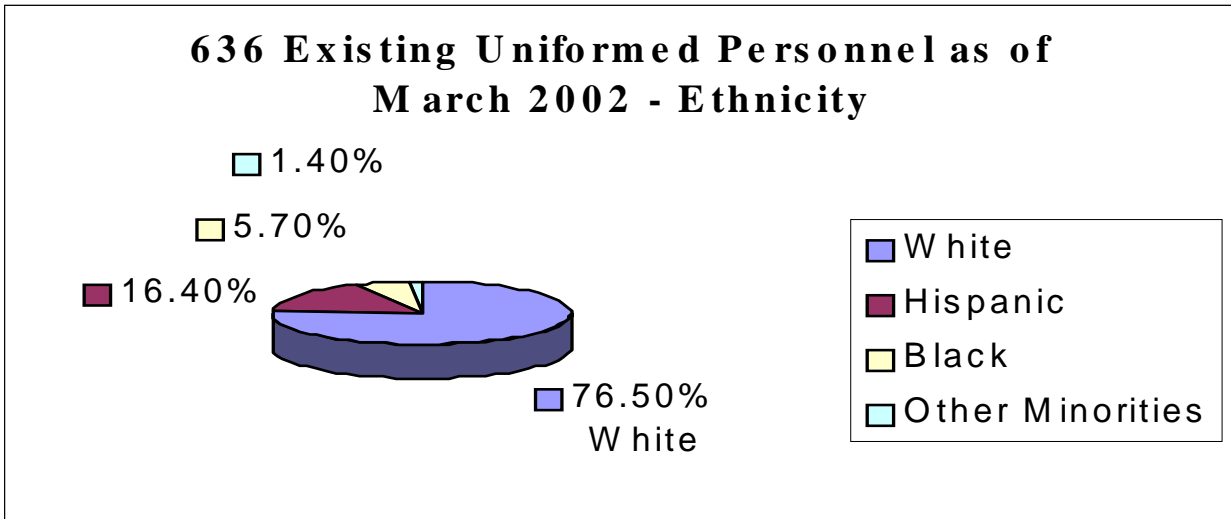
Women if the Fire Service Web at <http://www.wfsi.org>

Youth Opportunity/Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Planning Meeting, (2001, November)

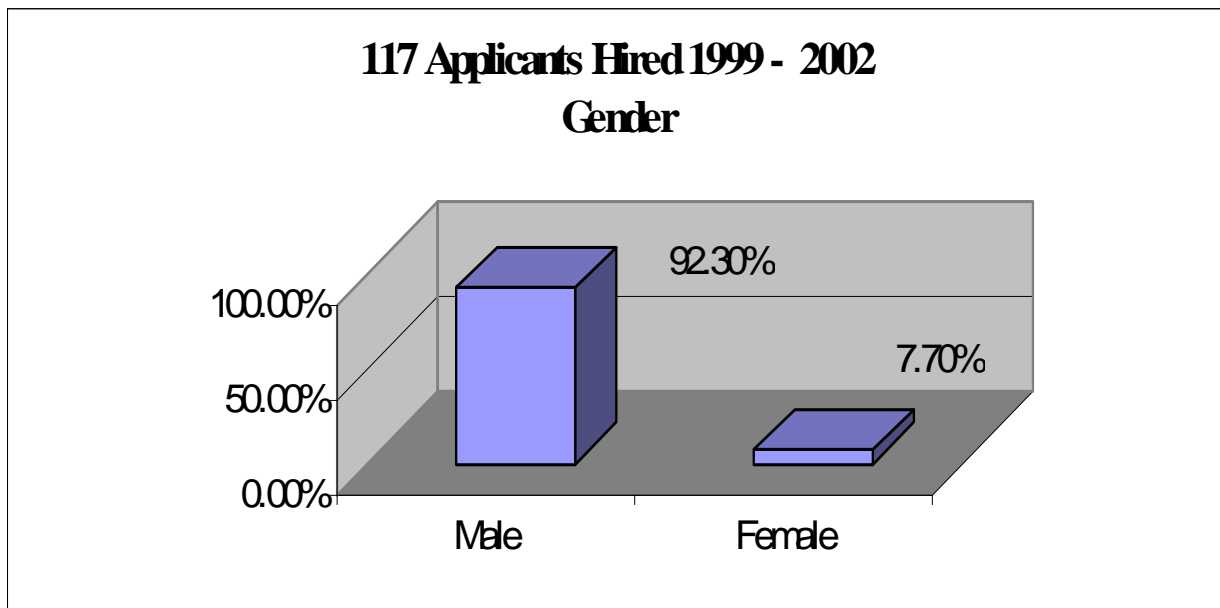
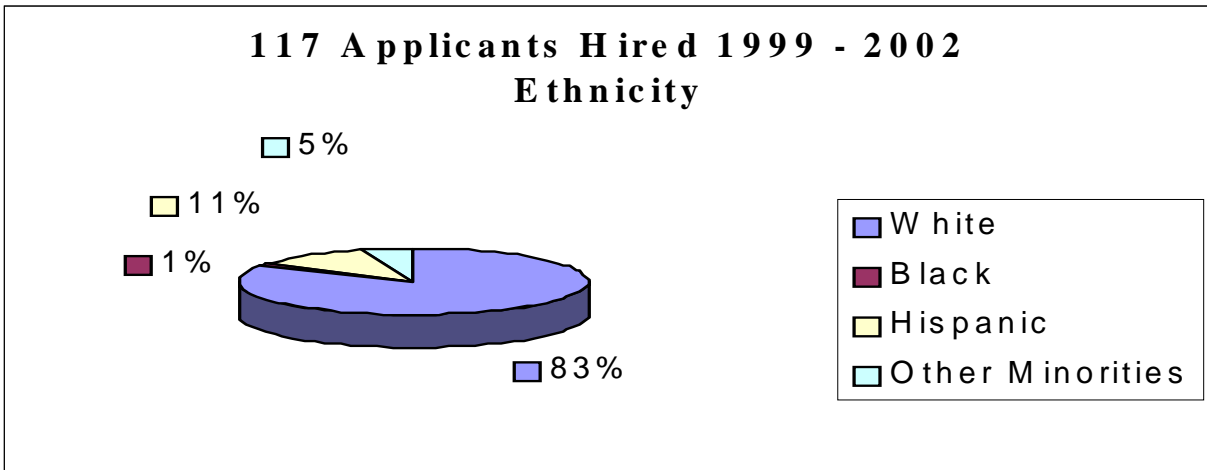
Youth Opportunity/Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Fire Medic Summer Academy Policy & Procedures. (2001, November)

Youth Opportunity Report on Summer 2001 Fire Rescue Participants, (2002, February)

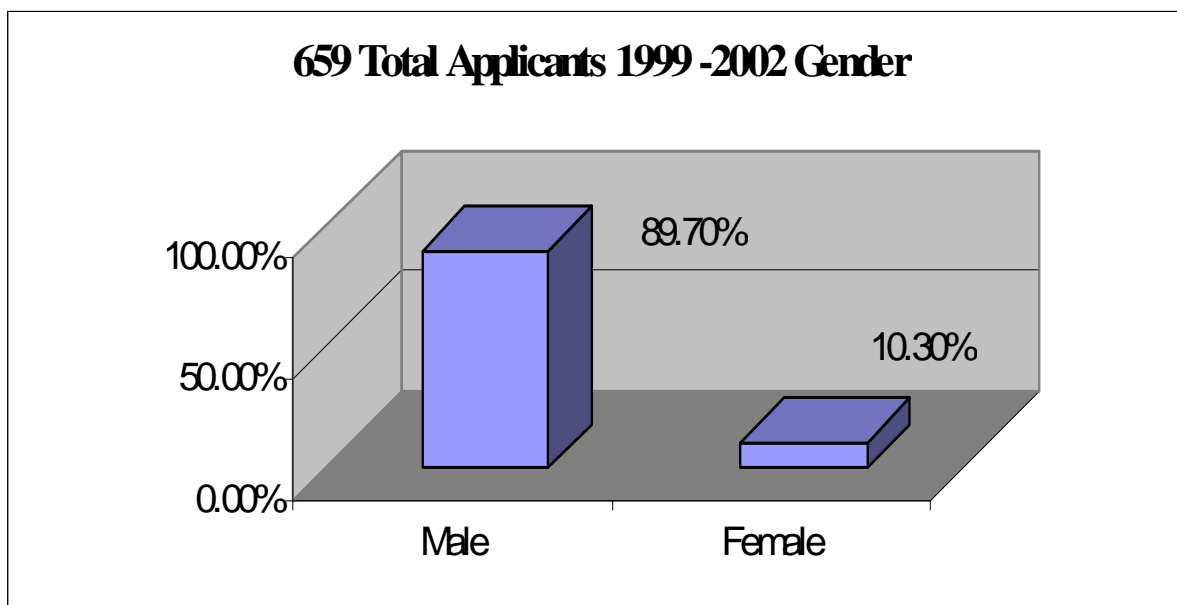
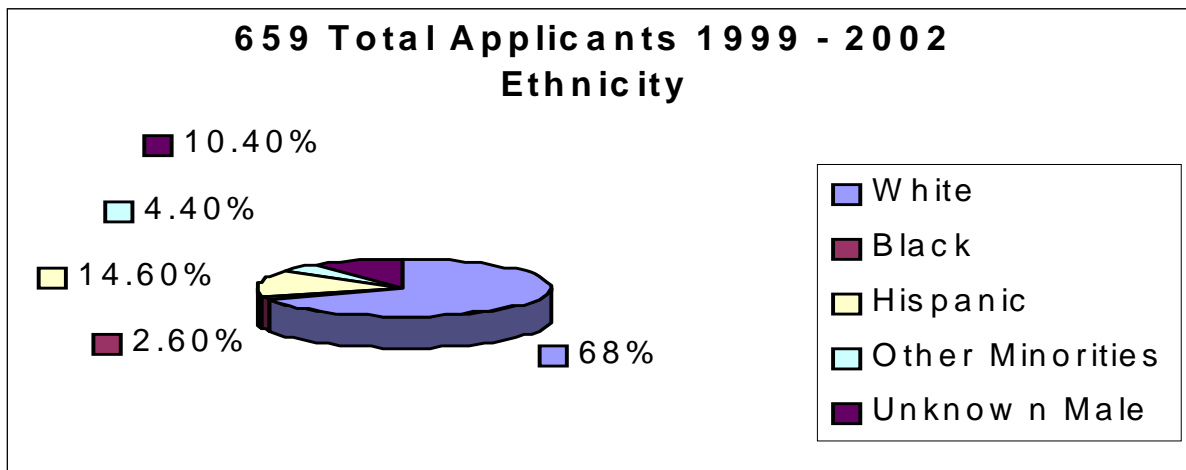
Appendix A



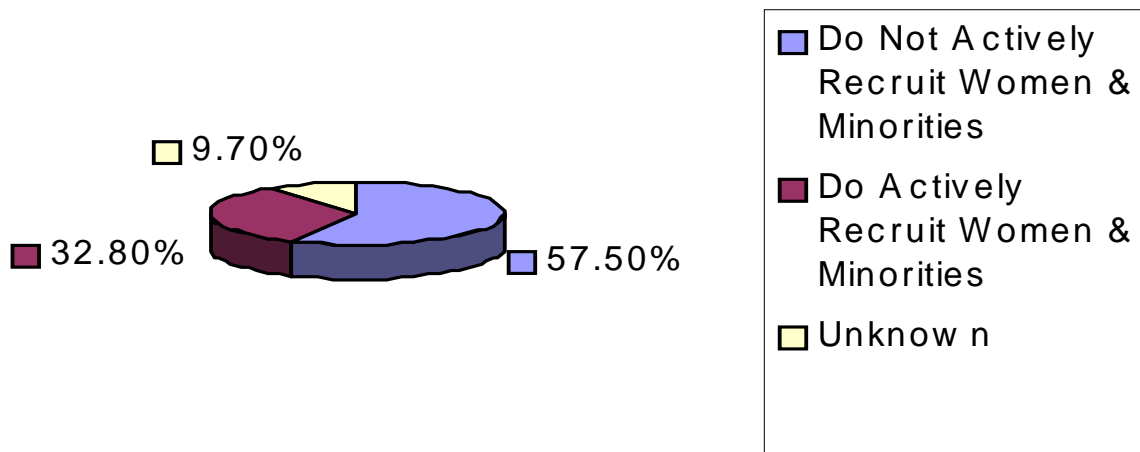
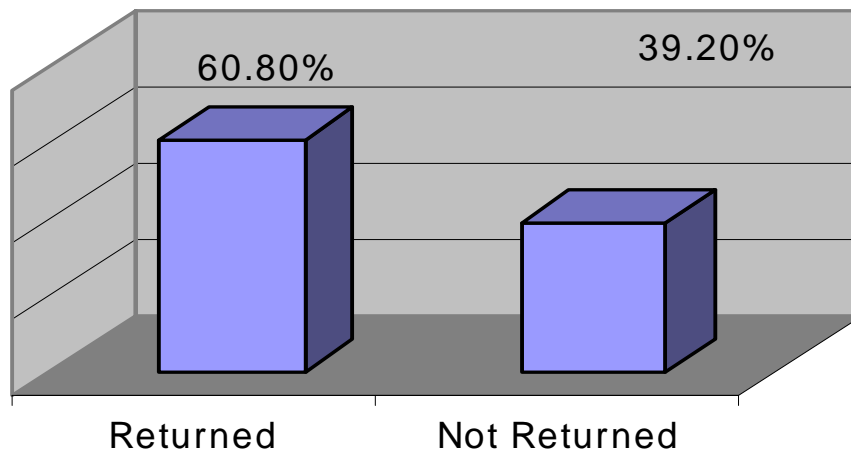
**Appendix B**



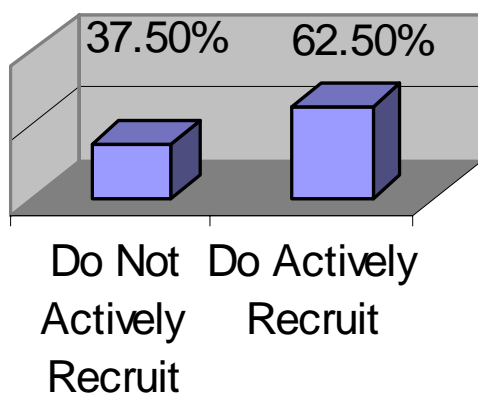
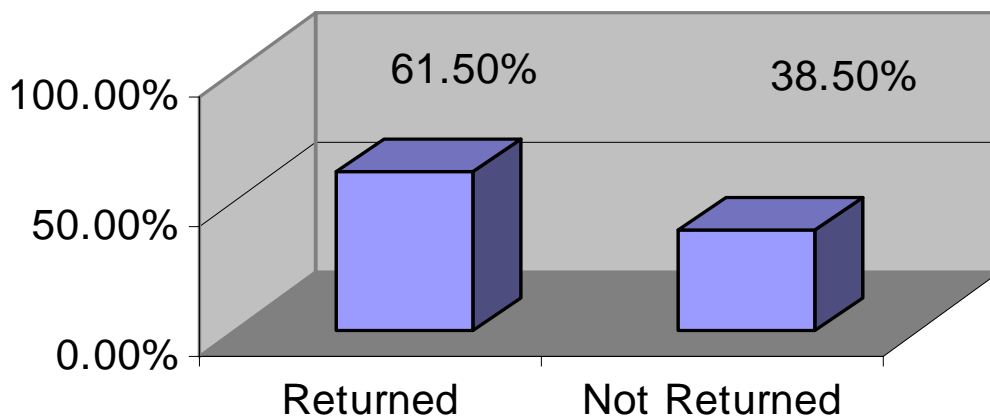
Appendix C



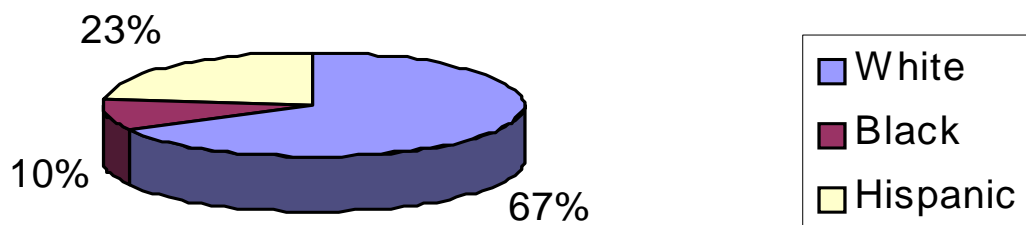
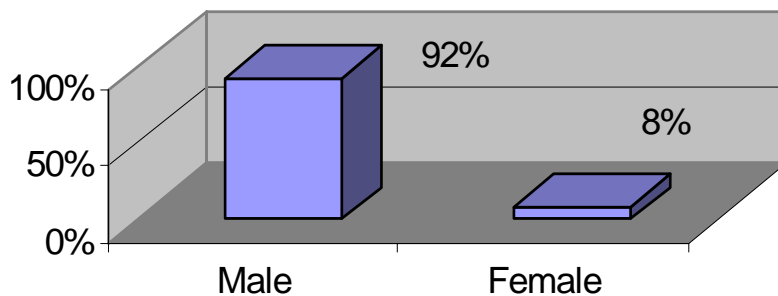
## Appendix D

**Initial Survey of 120 Departments  
73 Surveys Returned****Return Ratio of 120 Department  
Surveys**

## Appendix E

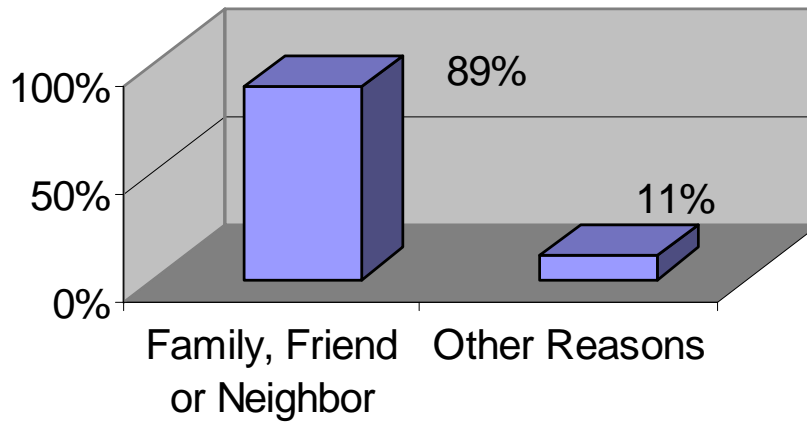
**Secondary Survey of 13 Florida  
Departments - 8 Surveys Returned****Return Ratio of 13 Florida Department  
Surveys**

## Appendix F

**Telephone Survey of 100  
HCFR Personnel  
Ethnicity****Telephone Survey of 100  
HCFR Personnel  
Gender**

Appendix G

**Telephone Survey of 100 HCFR Personnel  
How They Became Interested in F.S.**





## Appendix H

National Fire Academy  
Applied Research Project  
Executive Development

Nancy L. Couch  
Building J, Room  
August 2001

### SURVEY

**For the purpose of this survey, questions pertain to the operations, rescue, suppression, training, and education and/or inspection divisions.**

1. What is the size of your department?  
 below 50       51-100       101-200  
 201-300       301-400       over 400
2. What is the population of the area protected?  
 below 1000       1001-10,000       10,001-25,000  
 25,001-50,000       50,001-100,000       over 100,000
3. What is the present diversity of your department's workforce?  
Women \_\_\_\_\_ (how many)      Minorities \_\_\_\_\_ (how many)
4. How many positions has your department filled in the last 5 years? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many were women? \_\_\_\_\_ Minorities? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many women applied? \_\_\_\_\_ Minorities? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Does your department presently have a diversity recruitment program in place?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_      No \_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you feel your department attracts adequate numbers of women and minorities?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_      No \_\_\_\_\_
9. Is there any aspect of your department's recruiting process that you believe is particularly successful in attracting women and minorities to apply?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_      No \_\_\_\_\_

10. If you answered yes to #9, please identify those areas:

---

---

---

---

---

---

11. If you had the responsibility of recruiting women and minorities for your department, how would you go about it?

---

---

---

---

---

---

12. What do you believe are the barriers to recruiting women and minorities?

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Your department will not be identified by name in the report; however, your department's name and a contact would be appreciated in the event any questions need clarification. Thank you for your time and attention.**

Department \_\_\_\_\_ Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone(\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix I**  
**Diversity Survey**

Department Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact # \_\_\_\_\_ Fax # \_\_\_\_\_

Populations Served: \_\_\_\_\_ Total # of Members: \_\_\_\_\_

# of Women: \_\_\_\_\_ # of other Minorities: \_\_\_\_\_

Does your department actively recruit females and/or minorities: \_\_\_\_\_

What approach to improving/increasing diversity does your department employ: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How many positions has your department filled in the last 5 years? \_\_\_\_\_

How many were women? \_\_\_\_\_ Minorities? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you know how many women applied? \_\_\_\_\_ Minorities? \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix J**

**Telephone Survey of HCFR Department Personnel**

Random selection of 100 personnel from all 3 shifts and different stations.

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Race \_\_\_\_\_

Time in the Fire Service \_\_\_\_\_

How did you first become interested in or exposed to fire and emergency services?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---