The Bell Laboratories Cooperative Research Fellowship Program for Minorities (CRFP) founded in 1972, followed closely in 1974 by the Graduate Research Program for Women (GRPW), were the first programs of their kind in the US to address the issue of underrepresentation of women and minorities in the STEM fields and had a particularly strong impact in Physics. In 1981, four PhDs were awarded to African-Americans in the US in Physics and two (including me) were Bell Labs CRFP Fellows. My research career in Optical Physics owes its foundation and perspective to these early Affirmative Action/Diversity programs. In addition to striving to produce leading edge research, these programs made me a strong proponent of the recruitment and retention of women and underrepresented minorities into the scientific enterprise. Now approaching 18 years in academia (including Physics Department Chair), I have had the good fortune to continue the research tradition, where the majority of my graduate students are women and underrepresented minorities – I will present some of my personal observations and strategies.