

Ivory Tower of the Brave New World

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Abstract

American society is becoming increasingly diverse. With only 62% of the college going youngsters being White, there is need for aggressive strategies to recruit and retain faculty who are diverse. Diversity has several educational benefits. It enriches students' educational experiences, offers multiple perspectives, promotes personal growth and healthy society, strengthens communities as well as workplace and enhances economic competitiveness. Despite the changing demographics and numerous benefits of diversity, faculty of minority background are severely underrepresented in American institutions of higher learning. The current research literature points to a number of valid reasons for the low representation of faculty of color in higher education. Some of these reasons are: chilly climate of the academy for members of minority groups, endeavors at marginality and undermining of minority faculty research and teaching, excessive teaching loads and service assignments, unrealistic work expectations, social isolation, and unsupportive work environment. Well meaning senior faculty members often make cognitive mistakes that undervalue their minority colleagues. They do so on a routine basis as well as during crucial gate keeping processes such as reviews for promotion and tenure and elections for rewards and leadership posts in and outside of the departments. In this presentation, we share with our fellow teacher educators how the current state of affairs can be changed for the benefit of all. Our success story and stories of our other minority colleagues in our department allude to the fair practices of our department and our campus.

Keywords: Diversity, Ivory Tower, Faculty of color, Minorities, Higher Education

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**Ivory Tower of the Brave New World
Roundtable Session
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Section I: Content

A. Statement of the Problem

American society is becoming increasingly diverse. With only 62% of the college going youngsters being White, there is need for aggressive strategies to recruit and retain faculty who are diverse. Diversity has several educational benefits. It enriches students' educational experiences, offers multiple perspectives, promotes personal growth and healthy society, strengthens communities as well as workplace and enhances economic competitiveness. Faculty members of diverse backgrounds make excellent role models for all especially minority students (Baez, 2000).

Minority professors improve the diversity of their campuses. In a survey of deans of 100 universities and colleges, majority of the deans mentioned that hiring minority professors has helped them attract more minority students. Unfortunately, recruiting and retaining faculty of color remains one of the most difficult challenges facing higher education. Faculty of color are severely underrepresented in American higher education. According to the most recent report of American Council on Education, only 5% of the full time faculty are African American, 2.4% are Hispanic, 5.1% are Asian American, and 0.4% are American Indian. Academia is not reflecting society. Further, faculty of color are unevenly distributed across institutional types, disciplines, and academic ranks.

They are especially underrepresented in education and continue to be almost invisible among college/university faculties (Sotello, & Turner, 2000).

B. Literature Review

The current literature offers several explanations for the low representation of faculty of color in the education departments of academy. Lets us look at them:

There are researchers who believe that under representation of the faculty of color stems from the fact that the relatively few students of color earn doctorates. This limited pipeline argument has been presented by a few studies (Myers, & Turner, 1995; Thurgood & Clarke, 1995). However, as Smith (2000) found in his study of minority scholars, it is a myth that should be debunked.

Research in the experiences of faculty of color described by Aguire (2000) points to an entrenched academic culture that questions the place of faculty in the academy, devalues their scholarly work, and sets up structural barriers to tenure and promotion. The chilly climate experienced by minority faculty contributes to their feeling isolated and dissatisfied, which can affect their research productivity, campus citizenship, and ultimately commitment to their profession (Moody, 2004)

Junior faculty, especially faculty of color is given excessive teaching, advising, and service assignments. Their teaching schedules reflect the most undesirable schedules of their departments. As Turner & Myers (2000) observed, faculty of color are expected to work harder than White faculty.

Generally, after faculty of color are hired, they get no or minimal support. Whereas White faculty members within a department usually receive plenty of mentoring

in the form of psychosocial support as well as instrumental assistance compared to minorities in the same department. This can translate into low morale as well as significant and cumulative professional disadvantage for the faculty of color (Moody, 2004).

Faculty of color often faces additional job stresses. Generally, there are a few students who continuously question their authority. And as Stanley (2006) noted, students often give bad evaluations to those whose accents differ from those of students.

Well meaning senior faculty members often make cognitive mistakes that undervalue their minority colleagues. They do so on a routine basis as well as during crucial gate keeping processes such as reviews for promotion and tenure and elections for rewards and leadership posts in and outside of the departments. And as Springer (2002) noted the criteria for promotion and tenure usually has subtle discrimination built into it.

As Alger (2001) noted, “Collegiality” as a criterion is creeping into more and more faculty evaluation processes. Collegiality can be a code word for favoring candidates with backgrounds, interests and political and social perspectives similar to one’s own. This results in unwelcoming and unsupportive work environments for faculty of color.

Faculty members of color are often shortchanged. They receive lower salaries and less institutional research funding than their White counterparts. Gubitosi-White (2005) ascertained that *Rank-based Hierarchy, Untenured Faculty Silence* influence both majority and underrepresented faculty but they affect the underrepresented faculty differently. Often, the heart of the problem is that equal talents and accomplishments are viewed as unequal when seen through the eyes of prejudice (Moody, 2004).

Quezada & Louque (2004) have noted that some institutions have a good track record in recruiting and hiring faculty of color but they have a greater challenge in retaining the new faculty. The reasons vary from not attaining tenure or promotion to leaving the institution due to not receiving genuine support and because issues of diversity are used as a “disguise” in the initial recruitment and interview process.

C. Contribution

We share with our fellow teacher educators how the current state of affairs can be changed for the benefit of all. Our success story and stories of our other minority colleagues in our department allude to the fair practices of our department and our campus.

Our campus has substantial racial and ethnic diversity amongst full-time faculty. In 2004, we had 183 full time teaching faculty of which 7.2% were black; 5.8% Hispanic; 6.7% Asian, and 1 % Native American. The diversity in our department is higher than on campus. We have 16 full time faculty members, approximately 27% of the faculty members represent cultural and racial diversity. We share with participants in ways our chair and deans make formal and informal efforts to reach out to minority faculty and integrate them into social and professional life of the department and the university community. They provide informal mentoring, guidance on research, teaching, and the tenure and promotion process (Singh & Stoloff, 2003). The promotion and tenure data of past several years indicate that all of our minority faculty members with the exception of one member have been granted promotion and tenure.

Our senior faculty members openly discuss department quirks, norms and expectations. Their support, advice and guidance in the tenure and promotion process have gone a long way towards integrating us into the department.

Our minority faculty members assume significant roles in the department and on campus. They chair the faculty search committees and actively participate in the recruitment of new faculty members. They serve and often chair departmental promotion and tenure committee. They participate in the evaluation of junior faculty members. They make observations of their teaching; participate in their retention and promotion decisions. They write renewal and evaluation letters. They actively participate in the development of departmental by-laws, policies and procedures. They also serve on campus wide Promotion & Tenure (P&T) Committee. They serve on other significant faculty Senate committees such as Liberal Arts Program Committee that has been assigned to revise the general education requirements, Sabbatical Leave Committee, and University Assessment Committee (UAC).

We discuss our “Pipeline” strategy for minority youth at the secondary level who wish to be teachers. For the last 10 years, we have been hosting on our campus, the Summer Institute for Future Teachers (SIFT), a program funded by the Connecticut State Department of Education. The Sift is a 4-week residential program for rising juniors and seniors of minority backgrounds in high schools considering education as a major and teaching as a profession. Participants of the SIFT, on the average 30 each year, enroll in a three-credit undergraduate seminar, Teaching in the 21st Century (EDU 110) and participate in an intensive evening housing program which features the promotion of multicultural understandings and the development of a community of learners and

professionals. We share the details of our “Teacher Cadet Program”, an outreach program designed to provide inner city minority high school students who wish to be teachers with early campus experiences. Our education faculty members go to Hartford High School, teach and make the aspiring minority students familiar with college teaching and learning.

D. Relevance

Our presentation had relevance for the AACTE conference Strand, “Imagining Future Students, Future Teachers”. We shared exemplary practices of our department as they relate to faculty of color. Our quantitative and qualitative data can be used to inform the practices of our fellow teacher educators to retain and recruit diverse faculty.

E. Implication for Action

We presented an example of an Ivory Tower that can be a vision for the Ivory Tower of the Future. Faculty of color are valued here. Other departments of education can emulate our strategies. We will be happy to collaborate with them to conduct needs assessment of their departments/campus as they endeavor to recruit and retain faculty of color.

Section II: Outcomes and Methods

A. Learner/Participant Outcomes

At the end and during this Roundtable session, the participants were able to:

1. Discuss the current less than desirable status of faculty of color as evidenced by research.
2. List benefits of faculty diversity in the Ivory Tower.
3. Describe ways in which minority faculty can become contributing members of the academy.

4. Discuss the vision of an Ivory Tower of the Future where diversity is celebrated.

B. Methods

We used collaborative learning principles. We sat around a table. We engaged the participants in a dialog and encouraged them to share their experiences with diversity and policies/ procedures of their departments and campuses. We exchanged e-mail addresses for future networking and to sort of form a community of learners.

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