Reaffirming Diversity in Higher Education through Faculty Hiring: A leadership Perspective

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Abstract

Ongoing globalization and immigration bring diversity and rich cultural elements to American organizations at all levels. An educational environment with faculty and leaders from people of colors will set a good example for all students, especially for students of color who are eager to explore ideas and arguments at a thoughtful level to rethink their own education and to reconsider their life promises. Higher education needs to reaffirm diversity though faculty hiring.

Key words: Reaffirming diversity; Faculty hiring

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Demographic shifts and changing immigration patterns are the characteristics of current American society (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The question in culture and diversity is not long whether American universities and other organizations want diversity or whether should they accommodate people from diversified cultural background, for cultural diversity are clearly the present and the future (Smith, 2009). The discussion about how to address the diversity in higher education needs to occur within a global and national context. First, addressing diversity in higher education is unique and critical because it produces teachers and leaders for schools at all levels to educate children and adults who will in turn serve and lead their nation's communities, schools, and societies in a diverse and multicultural environment by practicing their intellectual knowledge, skills, and commitments (Sergiovanni, 2007). How they are going to practice them in a heavily rely on their attitudes, ability, and experience they accumulated from their schooling (Flowers, 2004). Therefore, how higher education engage in diversity population has profound national and global implications and effects. Second, historic issues of races, gender, social class, and continuing concerns about access to higher education for underrepresented minorities and low-income students are still a challenge for higher education. Therefore, higher education and its administrations plays important role in helping "build resources through scholarship and policy that will effectively address inequities that keep the world off balance" (Smith, 2009, p.4).

Literature Review

There is little doubt that many universities and colleges shared an articulated mission for and a commitment to diversify their faculty and students. A report by the American Council on Education and the American Association of University Professors (2009) showed that 63% of

their faculties believe that their universities value racial and ethnic diversity. However, rhetoric does not always match action (Stanley, 2006). Although in higher education, there is a commitment to having diverse faculty and leaders, the numbers of faculty and leaders from minority groups remain disproportionately low in comparison to white faculty (Synder & Hoffman, 2007). Therefore, minority leaders and faculty are working to break the walls on their way to be successful leaders in higher education field.

Also, researchers, educators, and practitioners generally believe that leaders from minority groups play critical role in bridging achievements gap among students from minority group. Nieto and Bode (2008) reported that minority students in their case study talked at length about teachers who made a difference in their attitude about school and their engagement with learning because "these teachers are from the same racial or ethnic background as students themselves" (p.417). Also, an educational environment with faculty and leaders from people of colors will set a good example for all students, especially for students of color who are eager to explore ideas and arguments at a thoughtful level to rethink their own education and to reconsider their life promises. The life and career experience of leaders of color can pave the way for the oncoming faculty and leaders of minority groups because as human beings, people tend to learn by doing and from experience (Dewey, 1997).

Moreover, as Johnson (2009) argued, that dearth of minority faculty at a university or in a discipline discourages minority students from selecting that university or discipline, since most students are comfortable in environments that include people with backgrounds and characteristics similar to theirs, and students who do choose the discipline need role models and mentors to inspire, motivate, and encourage them. Also, Cejda & Murray (2010) pointed out that numerous studies and long standing research show that diversity in a faculty and student body

will lead to great benefits in education for all students. More importantly, Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) argued the importance of hiring for students' success instead of hiring based on the color of the faculty by holding that "the process of hiring for students' success is, indeed, as important as "hiring" a supreme court justice: college staff, faculty, and administrators affect the lives of students daily and help to determine their success in college and in life" (p.71).

More importantly, Rudenstine (1996) argued that we need to remember that the characteristics of American society, from its very beginning, have been shaped by our collective willingness to carry forward an unprecedented experiment in diversity. Therefore, knowing the challenges and opportunities of leaders from minority groups can shed light on and affect the change needed in predominantly white colleges and universities, just as McGowan (2000) argued:

> These experiences should not be a private problem for individuals, rather the problem
> should be addressed collectively by the university administration and college and
> department colleagues and central to solving such problems are overall campus policy
> and institutional strategies that are crucial yet difficult to implement, yet necessary to
> support specific coping strategies of faculty and leaders of colors (p.21)

Purpose of the Study

The overall objective of this qualitative study was to explore, describe, and analyze the perceptions of a sample of faculty members from three universities in the Rocky Mountain area regarding minority leadership challenges and opportunities in higher education hiring system. Throughout the study, the researchers sought to identify obstacles that might lead to discouraging and isolating faculty and leaders of colors, and opportunities that might enhance the working and life satisfaction of leaders in higher education. This research, through understanding and sharing the working and life experience of leaders of minority groups, examined the challenges and

opportunities that they have been going through in higher education. Knowledge of these features may be of great value as researchers and educators seek to provide supportive network and connections with communities of color within and outside the academy. Also, the findings might help minority leaders be prepared to be better faculty and leaders, notify policy-makers to pay more attention to this special group of people in the potential employment pool and to reach social justice in education hiring systems.

Theoretical Orientations

In this qualitative study, researchers looked at diversity in higher education fields through multicultural social justice (Sleeter & Grant, 2009) and critical race (Ladson-billings, 1998) theoretical lens for two reasons. First, racism is normal in American society and white have ben he primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation. Therefore, the researchers conducted this study in ways so as to not further marginalize the population under study. Second, the researchers conducted this research that is change-oriented and seeks to identify power imbalance. The purpose was to seek to address issues of social justice and call for change.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research question:

1: What are the opportunities and obstacles in reaffirming diversity through faculty hiring in higher education?

2: What should administrator do to address the diversity issues in the current hiring policies and practices?

Research Design

We adopted systematic in-depth face-to-face interviews and researcher-generated documents mining in this qualitative research. A qualitative approach is suitable over other

research methods for this study because it enabled a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the issues through comprehension of personal experience and its interpretation as was lived, understood, and portrayed by individuals (Merriam, 1998). Also, qualitative research methodology can better guide the researchers to investigate important issues such as marginalization and empowerment of special groups such as women and minority groups (Creswell, 2003). More importantly, as Merriam (2009) argued, interview and documents are two important types in qualitative data collection "in all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interview" (p.87), and documentary data are more objective, stable, and can be used in the same manner as data from interview or observations. Additionally, the identity of participants remained confidential from their working organizations and the program (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). The number of participants was based on Stake's (2006) recommendation of sampling 4 to 10 participants and Dukes' (1984) recommendation of studying 3 to 10 participants. The researcher reached saturation after roughly seven participants, but conducted a few more interviews to ensure saturation. Moreover, to capture the complexity of information available and to gain insights, multiple transcripts checking, intercoder agreements, and multiple types of data collection (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 2000) were applied to safeguard the reliability and validity of the study. By collecting and analyzing 13 interview protocols, this study relied on inductive reasoning to document emerging themes.

Findings

Through analyzing the data, four categories emerged. The first category— promise made and promise lost— calls for a real genuine commitment to diversity and more efforts needed in embracing social justice in faculty hiring policies. The second category—roles of models and

cultural ambassador—illustrates minority leaders' role models contribute a lot to higher education as a whole.

Promise Made and Promise Lost

The diversity promise of higher education is to offer significant opportunities to enhance students' and faculty's capacity to function in a pluralistic society (Smith, 2009). By looking at the university missions on the website, it is easy to see that they all promise to build the campus where diversity and rich culture will be respected, embraced, and celebrated. However, the research findings that the challenges are that few stories and examples exist of diversity societies and campuses are successful. Sadly, the promises are lost and there are far more stories of failure. Faculty leaders argued that race still matters and a big obstacles. The encountering of discrimination in their schooling and working life shared by Sam and Anthony were echoed by other participants. Also, leaders of color showed concerns about race and racism in the hiring procedure, especially when the search committees are all white.

Anthony shared his vision based on his experience of working at two universities. He said, "Institutional policies that close their doors to certain groups of people are a great challenge. Some of these policies are deliberate but most are not but have that effect. They need to be changed."

Emilia, a Latino female in a leader position, shared her experience in hiring:

People will hire people they like. People who look like them not people who are different. Because of that diversity, they are looking for that fit, you know someone who fit this culture. Someone can fit this society. I am open to talk about this because I talked about this as human beings. And sometimes people will say oh, this is not true. This is not how it is, you know. Or we are looking for this skill; we are looking for the super star we are

looking for people …. Really, to me, it is a human being thing. How you really want to look at the candidate in the pool who may have the experience as … so they do not give the chance to interview even.

In addition, leaders of color shared concerns regarding their white counterparts' tendency to believe in the predetermined perceptions. They shared concerns regarding their White counterpart's tendency to adhere to a deficit-laden perspective about their academic ability. Being a leader of color, they need to work harder than their white colleagues because they are perceived as "less smart" than their counterparts and they are hired to present diversity on campus not because their ability and expertise in the fields. Sam "needs to work harder because I am the department chair now and still a 100% percent faculty member in another department." Carlos, a Latino professor, also shared the experience of being coerced to serve on double positions when he applied the job:

I just applied for a job in the communication department, so the faculties are not pleased with the director of Chicano studies. It is an adjunct position it offered. But originally I just a tenured faculty in teaching communication department not Chicano studies and I accepted. And in May, I got a call from the dean and the dean made me to be the director of the program.

Newman, an African American male, working as a curriculum director, described his experience:

A lot of things happened in academia, you know we are sort of in the background is people with this idea people who got what they got is from their positions because they are helped by government. They are helped by others they are not really as talented as the majority groups faculties. Just because they are helped, they are not really qualified.

Roles of Models and Cultural Ambassador

Although the leaders and faculties of color encountered various challenges, the efforts they made in being a role model for faculty of color and students as a whole emerged from the interviews. Sam argued that leaders and faculty of color play huge roles in education because "to students of color, when they see people like you in leadership positions, since you are the first, then they might think although I am one student from a minority group but the instructor is the same as me, then they start to think oh, I can do that too. For most ethnic minorities, we have our leaders in the roles in entertainments, but when it comes to teaching, professor, there are fewer. The higher you get, the whiter it gets. For white students who feel afraid of people of color, this is a great moment because you can change their perceptions from movie, media and let them know there are many other perspectives you can live in the black culture."

Anthony, who has been working on multicultural education for many years, believed that minority people have played the most important role in the development of multicultural education:

> I would urge one to go back to J. Banks' *Handbook of Research on Multicultural*
> *Education*, and his chapter in particular, which details that history…first in segregated
> schools where minority people did lots of "uplift" for their communities and developed
> knowledge which highlighted the experiences and contributions of their community, to the
> anti-racist work, to the ethnic studies programs, to the contemporary work in multicultural
> education. I think we have to continue to play this role, recalling it as both our
> legacy/history and as our trajectory/future. We have a role to play in organizational work,
> in the discovery and dissemination of new knowledge, in the creation of new programs.

When I learned that Latino people have done so much as scholars and intellectuals also has

influenced me…and I feel like I'm not a pioneer nor am I alone.

Sam, who is leading the department, puts the role model this way:

There will be difficulties but being prepared to confront them. To continue to build

experience, knowledge, expertise and skills to help the students and to serve the

community to build a role model for students and faculties of all.

Emily talked about the role model from a perspective of being a cultural ambassador:

As a leader who worked with students and surrounded by white colleagues, I have to feel

comfortable with being the educator, with being the ambassador of my culture, of being the

person for others to follow, so it will not be harder for others. To change people's

perceptions, to talk about the Hispanic culture experience, to talk about African American

experience through open respectful communications.

All the participants agreed that role models are highly important for them psychologically. The roads paved and built by other minority leaders help them to guide through daily and academic lives, to make important decisions that affect the outcomes of their lives, to navigate successfully in a different culture. Therefore, they all expressed the willingness and happiness to be a role model for the coming generations.

Discussions & Implementations

The values and culture of the higher education campus can be reflected through the campus culture, how people from diversified background are treated, and how they perceive the institution with respect to diversity. Virtually, to reaffirm diversity in higher education need joint and engaging efforts from every single individual, every sector in higher education settings.

Showing Respects and Appreciations to Minority Faculty and Leaders

To value the presence of leaders and faculties of color on university campuses and to recognize their contributions to the development and growth of the students and community, universities and society as a whole need to discover ways to encourage educational leadership faculty to reexamine how they address the complexity of race and racism (Allen, 2006). For example, one of the ways to show our gratitude to their contribution is to take their teaching loads and their services to promoting community diversity into consideration in the tenure track process. Another way is to really value their contributions to the academic field by inviting their insights of interpreting different cultures and social values.

Making Resolutions to Lead for Social Justice

Aspiring university leaders, especially those who are sitting on hiring committees, need to develop a skill set to deepen their empathic responses with issues of social justice and equity. The first step is to deepen their understandings concerning the importance of having faculty from different cultural backgrounds through culturally responsive program trainings (Caldwell, Davis, Du Bois, Echo-Hawk, & Goins, 2005). From the training, they will develop their culturally responsive leadership skills in cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural competency. The second step is to include faculty of color in the search committee since people tend to hire people like them. The third step is to make sure that people are not hired based on their race or gender, and for the "flowery" (described by one of the interviewees) visions of celebrating diversity, but on their knowledge, skills, and contributions to the society and community. Also, in hiring system, there should be differentiating policies between domestic diversity and international diversity. Faculties from other countries do bring on their cultures and enrich the diversity on campus. However, in the real hiring practices, this practice will make the diversity

efforts lose its focus. More importantly, university needs to create a supporting system to keep faculty of colors through coordinated efforts from both white faculty and faculty of color such as developing a mentoring program. Combining experience and knowledge can help faculty leaders of color know the skills to navigate among different cultures presented on campus and community. In this way, the celebration of diversity will not just be words in the air but actions for real.

Conclusion

From this current research, we found that issues on race are still main factors to hinder the development and growth of leaders and faculty of color. Although America has been making progress regarding racial issues, there is still a long way to go to achieve social justice in higher education. People of colors should join the groups and push harder in fighting against this race war by presenting the group to benefit the adult education as a whole.

As Clawson (2012) mentioned, the three characteristics of being an effective leader are: knowing something need to be done, knowing the underlying forces that will affect what need to be done, and initiating actions to change. This definition of leaders is especially true for leaders of color. But from the very beginning of this study, we have become aware of the tensions and fears of faculty and leaders of color. There are people who did not want to participate in this study because they do not think this study will change anything or they are afraid of being recognized although we guaranteed confidentiality. From the interviews, we learned that there are people who are afraid of being shut up if they spoke up. But we also learned the courage and spirit in its true nature; the importance and the benefits of speaking up through an open and honest communication channels as Emily summarized, "To change the current situations, we need to take the initiatives. We need to speak up as cultural ambassadors, so it will not be so

harder for others instead of feeling tired and just beating in a sense that why do they (minority leaders and students) always have to change, why do they need to be the educator, why do they have to explain because under many circumstances she or he is the only one in the particular culture."

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