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The Paucity of Asian-American Distinguished Professors and Endowed Chairs: Toward a More Racially Integrated System of Advancement in the Professoriate

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Abstract
Although not discussed much in the literature related to faculty careers and development, increasing the amount of Asian American endowed chairs and distinguished professors is an important issue that needs to be addressed. The purpose of this article is to explore and account for the paucity of Asian Americans in prestigious academic faculty appointments, namely distinguished professorships and endowed chairs in the field of education. This article discusses the nature of distinguished professorships and endowed chairs and the racial compositions of current occupants of these positions. The successes of other underrepresented racial groups in achieving prestigious faculty positions are also explored. In the interest of racial parity in all levels of the professoriate, the following recommendations for policy and practice are shared, including exposing early career faculty to potential opportunities through intentional faculty development programs, along with mentoring, advocacy, and organizational cultural change.

Keywords: Endowed Chair, Distinguished Professor, Faculty of Color, Asian American Faculty

Introduction

Asian Americans are commonly stereotyped as quiet, studious, intelligent, and disciplined *model minorities* (Poon, Squire, Kodama, Byrd, Chan, Manzano, Furr, & Bishundat, 2016). As they are seldom portrayed as violent or disruptive to the status quo, Asian Americans are often perceived as ideal candidates for positions requiring knowledge and considerable educational investment, particularly when those positions involve scientific and technical knowledge (Hune, 2011). This stereotype may partially explain the fact that Asian Americans could be considered as being over-represented as full-time college and university faculty, since while the Asian American

population of the United States is only 5.8% of the United States population (US Census Bureau, 2018), Asian Americans comprise 10% of all full-time U.S. faculty appointments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Since faculty positions require considerable knowledge and many years of formal study, it is logical, within the context of this stereotype, that *smart* Asian Americans should gravitate toward academia, and that once there, they would also receive accolades for their work. However, this does not appear to be the case as the data indicate that Asian Americans are decidedly underrepresented in prestigious faculty positions such as distinguished full professorships and endowed chairs.

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to explore and account for the paucity of Asian Americans in prestigious academic faculty appointments, namely distinguished professorships and endowed chairs in the field of education. The article begins with a discussion of the nature of distinguished professorships and endowed chairs and the racial compositions of current occupants of these positions. The successes of other underrepresented racial groups in achieving prestigious faculty positions will be explored. In the interest of racial parity in all levels of the professoriate, recommendations for policy and practice will be given for institutions seeking to assist Asian American professors in their journeys farther up the academic career ladder.

Implications of Asian American culture and mythology in academe

Lee and Zhou (2015) explain that although there have been stark differences in educational attainment at the time of arrival in the United States (i.e. educational differences between Chinese immigrants and Vietnamese refugees), Asians of various national heritages have consistently excelled academically within a generation after arriving, even though these immigrants and refugees frequently faced socioeconomic disadvantages such as menial jobs and prejudice. Lee and Zhou (2015) attribute this second-generation success to a general cultural premium placed on education and respectability, as well as to the existence of specific support systems and strategies. These support systems and strategies, however, have tended to channel Asian Americans into a limited range of well-paying, high-status positions, including science, engineering, medicine, and law.

Salary expectations for Asian Americans within the academy appear to be very similar to those of their Caucasian counterparts. Such success likely perpetuates the Model Minority Myth (MMM), described by Poon, Squire, Kodama, Byrd, Chan, Manzano, Furr, and Bishundat (2016) as a "racial stereotype [that] generally defines AAPIs [Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders], especially Asian Americans, as a monolithically hardworking racial group" (p. 469). The MMM has received ample attention from scholars, particularly those who seek to discredit it (Museus, 2009; Chou & Feagin 2015; Wing, 2007; Haan, 2017; Nadal, Pituc, Johnston, & Esparrago, 2010; Strayhorn, 2014; Teranishi, 2010; Pak & Maramba, 2014).

Poon, et al. (2016) have drawn critical attention to a number of studies debunking this myth by demonstrating that not all Asians can be characterized as *hardworking*, *successful*, or *smart*; while they support the destruction of this myth, they warn that such studies can encourage either smaller, more specific stereotypes (pertaining to national heritage groups such as Vietnamese Americans or Chinese Americans, for example,) or to deficit models of thinking (e.g. Cambodian

Americans do not achieve academic success; definition of Asian Americans or Asian American subgroups by who and what they are not). These authors advocate an approach to Asian American studies that moves beyond disproving the MMM, focusing on who Asian Americans are (with sensitivity to differences between different Asian cultures and communities) rather than who they are not.

Lack of Asian American faculty holding distinguished full professorships and endowed chair titles

When highly educated Asian Americans earn faculty positions, Lee (2002) writes that it is difficult to determine whether or not they must contend with a *glass ceiling*, or artificial barriers to success, in the workplace. Although Asian/Americans comprise 10% of all full-time U.S. faculty appointments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), they are decidedly underrepresented in positions of academic prestige. Hartlep, Wells, Ball, and Kahlon (2018) report that Asian Americans nationally hold less than 2.9% of endowed professorships and less than 1.7% of distinguished professorships. Although positions such as the endowed chair may be used to add racial diversity to an institution, as of 2018, only fourteen United States endowed chairs and distinguished professor positions were held by those identifying as Asian American in the field of education (Hartlep et al., 2018). Since the composition of Asian Americans in faculty positions is higher than their percent of the population (10% vs 5.8%), this overrepresentation carries with it a paradoxical lack of institutional power for Asian Americans, who are less often found in faculty leadership or administrative positions (Wang, 2007). Similarly, Asian Americans are well represented in the field of law, holding positions in academia, government, and law firms; however, there is a notable paucity of Asian American leadership and career advancement in this field, both academic and otherwise (Chung, Dong, Hu, Kwon, & Liu, 2017).

Definition of distinguished full professors and endowed chairs

Although the specific titles of distinguished full professor and endowed chair can and will vary in meaning by institution, Shamos (2002) describes distinguished full professors as faculty whose remarkable achievements in research, teaching, and service have raised them to important standing within their disciplines, thus bringing acclaim to their institutions. Though it is undeniably a mark of honor, the title of distinguished professor does not inherently assure dedicated funding or reduced course loads to recipients. Endowed chairs, conversely, are those "whose expenses, including the salary of the incumbent, are paid out of designated funds, often obtained through charitable donation" (Shamos, 2002, para. 201) Endowed chairs, Shamos (2002) writes, may be particularly distinguished faculty members whose research contributions and ongoing work are supported and rewarded through such financial differentiation.

According to Hall (2005), the position of endowed chair is an enviable one, with duties including "teaching a light course load, mentoring graduate students, performing service, and, of course, maintaining an energetic research program" (para. 1). Due to the preeminent value ascribed to research within the academe, Hall (2005) writes, the position of endowed chair can be considered the pinnacle of faculty achievement and the ultimate reward; endowed chairs, after all, are given ample time and dedicated funds for research while distractions from research (namely, teaching) are minimized. This position is understandably prestigious, though not necessarily powerful in an administrative sense. Endowed chairs fall beneath department chairs in the hierarchy of the academy; department chairs are responsible for administrative functions, while endowed chairs are expected to focus primarily on scholarship, rather than departmental governance.

In 2018, Hartlep, Wells, Ball, and Kahlon conducted a study to compare the number of endowed chairs and distinguished professorships by race. This study was similar to the study by Hartlep Theodosopoulous, Wells, and Morgan in 2016 which conducted a national analysis of endowed chairs and distinguished professors in the field of education. Some of the unique findings from Hartlep et al. 2018, study (Table 1) includes that Whites hold 79% and 86% of all endowed chairs and distinguished professorships at American universities and colleges respectively; There is greater gender parity as it relates to the amount of those holding these positions amongst those listed as "all other races" (which excludes White, African American, and Asian faculty) as there are 15 males and 14 females that hold endowed positions and 2 males and 2 females that hold distinguished positions. And among Asian Americans 11 males hold either an endowed or distinguished position. Whereas, only 3 Asian American women hold such positions.

Table 1

Mean Time Between Ph.D. and Endowed or Distinguished Chairs/Professorships

		Endowed Positions			Distinguished Positions		
Race	Gender	*n*	mean	*SD*	*n*	mean	*SD*
	Male	186	22.7	9.53	60	28.1	9.06
White	Female	145	19.2	8.21	42	26.0	9.27
	Total	**331**	**21.2**	**9.13**	**102**	**27.2**	**9.16**
	Male	25	18.0	10.53	10	14.5	8.29
African American	Female	20	20.3	7.59	2	20.5	6.36
	Total	**45**	**19.0**	**9.31**	**12**	**15.5**	**8.08**
	Male	9	14.8	8.14	2	26.5	3.54
Asian American	Female	3	15.3	9.07	-	-	-
	Total	**12**	**14.9**	**7.95**	**2**	**26.5**	**3.54**
	Male	15	19.6	8.91	-	-	-
All other Races	Female	14	18.7	8.84	2	12	12.73
	Total	**29**	**19.2**	**8.73**	**2**	**12**	**12.73**
	Male	235	21.7	9.72	72	26.2	9.97
Combined Races	Female	182	19.2	8.16	46	25.1	9.59
	Total	**417**	**20.6**	**9.15**	**118**	**25.8**	**9.80**

Note: SD = standard deviations

Note: Reprinted from Hartlep, N., Wells, K., Ball, D., & Kahlon, A. (2018). Introduction. In N. D. Hartlep (Eds). Asian/American Scholars of Education 21st Century Pedagogies, Perspectives, and Experiences. New York, NY. (pp. 1-128). Peter Lang Publishing.

Progress of other faculty of color in achieving these titles

African Americans. Although African Americans and Blacks comprise approximately 13.4% of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), they are decidedly underrepresented in full time faculty positions. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2018), a mere 6% of full-time faculty members identify as Black or African American. Interestingly, however, Black faculty are better represented in the positions of distinguished professor and endowed chair than are Asian Americans, who are overrepresented at the full-time faculty level (Hartlep & Theodosopoulos, 2014; Hartlep, 2014). This may be due, at least in part, to the information made available by successful Black scholars who have

prioritized sharing their strategies with other Black faculty in order to encourage Black advancement within the academe (Thompson, Bonner, & Lewis, 2015).

As of 2018, there were 45 Black endowed chairs and 12 Black distinguished professors across United States institutions (Hartlep et al., 2018). This equates to less than 1% of the African American professoriate. However, African Americans occupy more of these positions when compared to all other ethnic and racial groups combined excluding Whites. Races other than African Americans and Whites occupy a combined number of 42 endowed chairs and four distinguished professors across United States institutions (Hartlep et al, 2018). This is also particularly remarkable in light of Lemelle Jr.'s (2010) observations that Black faculty, much like Black individuals engaged in other careers, tend to find themselves in "subordinate social and economic position[s]" (p. 126). Another factor may be that Black faculty are more numerous in liberal arts fields and in liberal arts institutions than they are in research universities; this may well be due to the traditional gravitation of Black students and scholars toward liberal arts majors such as literature, psychology, sociology, and political science and away from science and engineering majors, which are often specialties of larger research universities (Anonymous, 2005). Indeed, a majority of the most-cited Black scholars (who are paradoxically often employed by Ivy League institutions) are social science scholars (Kaba, 2009).

There are a number of possible reasons why Blacks are underrepresented in full-time faculty positions. Frazer (2011) points to an institutional lack of focus on retention of Black full-time faculty, citing lack of mentoring, a hostile climate, unclear tenure requirements, and unfair expectations of collegiality (e.g. requiring Black faculty to perform more service and non-tenure-building activities than their White counterparts) as reasons why Black full-time faculty decline to stay for long periods of time in one institution. Griffin (2012) adds that Black faculty perceive themselves as likely to spend greater amounts of time with their students than their counterparts of other races, but less likely to collaborate with them on research; this tendency to focus on student development may distract from research productivity and contribute to Black faculty attrition.

All other races. It has long been a goal for academe to increase faculty diversity to levels of parity for all races and genders (Gose, 2008). However, institutions struggle to achieve this goal by retaining faculty throughout the tenure process (Guanipa, Santa Cruz, & Chao, 2003; Jacob & Sanchez, 2011). Although United States institutions have increased hiring levels of racial/ethnic underrepresented faculty, including Hispanics and Latinx (between 1995 and 2007), Hispanics and Latinx are still significantly more likely to be hired for part-time or adjunct positions, or for positions at two-year colleges or Hispanic-serving institutions than other faculty of color (Hodge, Cervantes, Vigo-Valentin, Canabal-Torres, & Ortiz-Castillo, 2012). Although Hispanics and Latinx comprise 18.1% of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), a mere 5% of full-time faculty identify as Hispanic or Latinx (U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Data identifying percentages of Hispanic and Latinx distinguished professors and endowed chairs are sparse; Hartlep, et al. (2018) grouped Hispanic and Latinx faculty with *all other races* (i.e. not Caucasian, Black, or Asian), who together comprise 5.8% of endowed or distinguished professorships in the field of education. There is little available data regarding percentages of Hispanic and Latinx distinguished professors in other academic fields. However, the general

underrepresentation of Hispanics and Latinx in full-time faculty ranks, as well as the overwhelming percentages of non-Hispanic, Caucasian faculty occupying distinguished professor and endowed chair roles (Hartlep, 2016) suggest that Hispanic and Latinx faculty face significant challenges in rising to the upper echelons within the academe.

Rationale for Increasing Racial/Ethnic Underrepresented Faculty Presence and Status

Academe has long held the goal of a diverse student body and a correspondingly diverse faculty (Abdul-Raheem, 2016; Rizvi, Naqvi, & Batool, 2019). Yet, while it is easy for the general public to understand the necessity of attracting and retaining a diverse student body, the attraction and retention of a correspondingly diverse faculty often receives less attention (Stout, Archie, Cross, & Carman, 2018; Rhodes & Lees, 2017). However, there are compelling reasons for the academe to focus on ensuring that student and faculty diversity are considered of equal importance.

According to Collins and Kritsonis (2006), a diverse faculty composition benefits students by providing a wider range of experiences to them, by supplying underrepresented students with role models, and by exposing all students to ideas and people groups they may later encounter in an increasingly racially diverse nation. Similarly, the presence of racial diversity within faculty ranks can serve as an inspiration and a comfort to faculty of color, or as a reassurance to underrepresented faculty that they are welcome, likely to be heard and valued, and, in the case of underrepresented faculty who hold prestigious titles, unhindered by a glass ceiling (Woo, 2000) and free to achieve their full potential as scholars. Maintaining optimal diversity at the top of faculty ranks can communicate value to faculty of color below; no racial group should be excluded or left unrepresented.

Endowed chairs and distinguished professorships are arguably the most powerful academic positions within the academy (Freeman, 2018). It is important that more faculty of color be hired in tenure-track positions for there to be a more representative amount of faculty to be eligible for future endowed chair and distinguished professorship opportunities in the future. While hiring faculty of color is an important first step in this direction, true diversity is not reached simply by hiring people from underrepresented populations. There must also be an institutional culture in which faculty of color (in this case Asian Americans) have opportunities to thrive and be promoted. Institutions should also examine their tenure and promotion processes to ensure that they are clear, fair, and equitable to faculty of all backgrounds (F. Kochan, personal communication, May 17, 2008).

> Freeman (2018) critiqued the tenure and promotion processes when he states,
>
> The field of higher education has been racist from its inception and any analysis of racial groups' advancement in the professoriate must take into account the implicitly racist promotion criteria that favors the majority. It is also important to consider the fact that some of the expectations associated with promotion are foreign to faculty of color. For instance, many communities of color value collective advancement over individual gain; when faced with the expectation of individual advancement, faculty of color are forced to navigate a culturally invalidating climate (p. XVIII).

There are particular cultural differences that must be taken into account if we are to ensure that Asian American faculty are provided with opportunities to earn these coveted positions. In order

to be truly helpful to Asian Americans seeking academic advancement and positions such as endowed chairs and distinguished professorships, it is necessary for the academe to develop an understanding of Asian American culture, as well as the motivations and desires of Asian Americans in the academic workplace. Ono (2013) explains how some of these cultural difference may be misunderstood in the American context when he shared,

> Many Asians…learn attitudes and behaviors at home that conflict with those of the typical American workplace…Among these an egalitarian view of power, a preference for indirect communication, and a tendency toward emotional restraint. As a group, Asians tend to defer to authority and seek consensus—*The tallest nail gets hammered down* is a traditional saying—and this can be mistaken for a lack of initiative or leadership skills (para. 8).

Department chairs, deans, and other faculty leaders need to ensure that they are cognizant of such nuances that may impact the ways in which faculty of color may operate within an academic culture. Academic leaders should evaluate their own latent bias and prejudice to ensure that they are providing all faculty with equitable opportunities for promotion. In the next section we share strategies that can help the advancement of Asian American faculty obtain endowed chairs and distinguished professorships.

Strategies to support the advancement of Asian American faculty

Preparation. Upon securing a tenure track professorial position, Asian American and other faculty of color should be exposed to all levels of professorial opportunities that they have to advance and serve within the academy. These opportunities include understanding the tenure and promotion processes to both associate professor, the promotion to full professor process, and the standards for achieving endowed chairs and distinguished professorships. Chambers and Freeman (n.d.) explained,

> Clarity is the key difference between tenure and promotion to associate professor processes and procedures for promotion to full professor. Whereas in the case of tenure and promotion, institutional guidelines tend to be clearer given the due process rights of faculty which attach to the conferral of tenure, a property right, with promotion to full professorship there are no set timelines and faculty are more likely to take personal agency to request promotion based on situational factors and internal cues (p. 5).

We advocate for the development of a program like the National Science Foundation's (NSF) ADVANCE program (2019). A program that seeks to "increase the representation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers, thereby contributing to the development of a more diverse science and engineering workforce" (para. 1). However, the focus of the program would focus on increasing the advancement of people of color in achieving promotion to full professor, endowed chairs, and distinguished professorships. Such a program would be designed by specific institutions and based on the institutional context.

Mentoring. The concept of mentoring is applicable and helpful to Asian American faculty seeking career advancement (Nguyen & Huynh, 2007). However, due to differences in acculturation preference (i.e. assimilation, separation, integration, or marginalization) different mentoring approaches for individual Asian Americans may be necessary. As Asian Americans

do not form a monolithic group, it is logical to conclude that even generally recommended practices such as mentoring should be tailored to individual needs and career goals.

Mentoring can serve several important purposes beyond strictly promoting advancement to positions of academic prestige, however; it may also enhance career satisfaction and be associated with advancement, if not possibly entirely responsible for it. In the context of advancement to full professor, Gardner and Blackstone (2013) argue that women and faculty of color are more likely to advance when requirements and expectations are made explicit, rather than when advancement depends on how well candidates can relate to those in power. Making requirements explicit may be accomplished via mentoring, workshops, and professional development opportunities sponsored by institutions interested in developing and maintaining a diverse workforce at all levels of power. It may be used merely as a means of helping faculty achieve full professorship (a legitimate use, to be sure), or it may be used to assist those interested in achieving positions of greater power, prestige, or influence, such as endowed chair or distinguished professor positions. It is also important for academic administrators and senior faculty to help design written policies at the department, college, and university levels that are transparent and clear as possible so that faculty are aware of the standards for promotion (Chambers & Freeman, n.d.).

Advocacy. According to Hartlep et al. (2018), white males disproportionately occupy posts of academic prestige such as endowed chair positions. While the current occupancy of prestigious academic posts is unlikely to change rapidly, Hartlep (2016) encourages influential white males to advocate for the hiring of women and faculty of color. Women and faculty of color who have been hired for these prestigious positions, in turn, are encouraged to share their experiences for the benefit of others interested in ascending to them (Thompson et al., 2015; Freeman, 2018). Chan (1989) encouraged Asian American faculty to advocate and set examples for others by concentrating not simply on scholarly excellence, but on serving on committees (in order to form the connections necessary for appointment to positions of power,) and on accepting administrative positions after earning the rank of full professor (which can advance the cause of Asian Americans throughout all areas of the academe).

Organizational cultural change. To advance more faculty of color and specifically Asian American faculty into endowed chairs and distinguished professorships, Academic leaders will need to engage in a cultural framework analysis process (Kochan, Searby, George, & Edge, 2015). Intentionality is key to moving this cause forward. Utilizing a cultural framework analysis process will support them in being attentive to cultural differences and monitoring whether they are being fair and equitable to all faculty. Elements of this process include examining the institutional culture and the level of sensitivity and deep reflection that those in power such as full professors and academic leaders have related to issues such as “White privilege, voice and departmental traditions and values in order to succeed [within that context]” (p. 206).

Another element of the process assesses whether the organization fosters a culture of individuality and independence, as such that it assumes faculty of color who need more support or mentoring are somehow deficient. Additionally, institutional leadership should assess how power and privilege is perceived and used within their college or university. Kent, et al. (2015) shared that “ethnicity, gender and social status might not be as important as perceived power, influence, compatibility and commitment” (p. 209) when developing mentoring

opportunities/relationships to advance underrepresented populations. Lastly, "organizations that wish to… [shift to a inclusive] culture should focus attention upon values that emphasize the differentiation of individuals as well as on the integration of individuals into the culture of the organization" (p. 209).

Discussion and Conclusion

Although not discussed much in the literature related to faculty careers and development, increasing the amount of Asian American endowed chairs and distinguished professors is an important issue that needs to be addressed (Hartlep, 2016 & 2014). Many faculty of color are not exposed to the *hidden curriculum* of earning these prestigious titles and this does not lead to a more inclusive academy (Freeman, 2018; Thompson et al., 2015). Structural changes need to be made to the process to ensure the advancement of Asian Americans to these elite professorial levels. Institutional policies need to be transparent and clear. By exposing early career faculty to these potential opportunities through intentional faculty development programs, along with mentoring, advocacy, and organizational cultural change, we are hopeful for increasing numbers of Asian American faculty assuming these prestigious positions.

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