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Sheila T. Gregory
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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Faculty Diversity: Effective Strategies for the Recruitment and Retention of Faculty of Color

by Sheila T. Gregory

By the year 2000 one-third or more of the nation's population will be composed of African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, Asians, and other minority and immigrant groups. It is expected that two-thirds of the nation's aging professorate will have to be replaced by the year 2000, and in the next century or two, women and minorities will outnumber non-minority men across the board. Unless more effective methods of recruitment and retention are developed, few persons of color will be likely to assume faculty positions in American colleges and universities.

According to the American Council on Education, the number of African-American students obtaining Ph.D. degrees has been declining over the past decade. For example, of the 36,027 Ph.D. degrees awarded in 1990, roughly two percent, or only 828 were earned by African-American graduate students. In 1990, 518 African-American and 161 Hispanic students received doctorate degrees in education, compared to seven and five in mathematics, four and two in computer science, and three and one in physics, respectively. Between 1981 and 1993, the number of doctoral degrees for African-Americans dropped from 3.9 percent to 3.2 percent, and rose during the same period for Hispanics from 1.4 percent to 2.0 percent.

Of the approximately 550,000 full-time faculty teaching in American colleges and universities, only 4.9 percent are African-American and 2.5 percent are Hispanic. Of African-American faculty approximately 44 percent teach in historically Black institutions. Thus, there is a serious underrepresentation of African-American faculty at predominantly white institutions. The problem is especially acute at major research universities and at leading professional schools where only the most talented scholars tend to be appointed. The problem is worst in those academic areas where relatively few minorities have sought Ph.D.'s, specifically in the disciplines of mathematics, the sciences, engineering, architecture and the foreign languages. In 1993, the number of African Americans holding teaching positions in American colleges and universities were 37,056 as compared to 57,785 in 1996.¹

A recent study found that among the nation's flagship state universities, only three had five percent or more Black faculty. The University of Maryland and the University of Mississippi both reported 6.6 percent and

Rutgers University of New Jersey, 5 percent. Those institutions with the largest number of Black tenured faculty included Rutgers University of New Jersey which reported 5 percent, and the University of Maryland and the University of Michigan which reported 4.7 and 3.7 percent respectively.²

In the past few years, several studies have suggested strategies for achieving faculty diversity. Most of the research has focused on recruitment and retention efforts. Upon review of the literature, four common themes of faculty diversity efforts surfaced, including institutions with a strong commitment with the support of senior administration, strong faculty alliances, clear measurable goals, comprehensive plans to carry them out, and clear accountability with appropriate incentives.

Recruitment Strategies

Many institutions of higher learning who are committed to developing a more richly diverse campus have searched for effective methods of recruitment and retention of faculty. The list is lengthy but most fall into four major categories, including: increasing the numbers in the pipeline through college fairs, fellowships, and internships; ensuring the search process covers the entire pool; holding departments accountable for minority participation; and looking outside the traditional ranks to business, industry, and government. Some institutions hold the false belief that if someone wants a job, they will apply. But Robert Smith found that many of those who are exceptionally talented may be either not actively looking to move but would move for the right opportunity, or those who simply don't see the advertisement.³ In addition, some African-American faculty women have been found to leave higher paying positions in private industry for the opportunity to teach where they can serve as role models and make a difference in the lives of minority students.⁴

In the past three years, five studies have been conducted on minority faculty recruitment. In the most recent study, Smith examined the academic labor market experiences of 393 Ford Foundation Fellows, Mellon Fellows, and certain Spencer Fellows who had recently completed doctorate degrees. A high response rate revealed that 70 percent were appointed to regular faculty positions or to postdoctoral positions (17 percent) in their fields. Of those in faculty positions, 92 percent were appointed to tenure-track positions or faculty positions at Ivy League institutions that did carry tenure. These studies contradict previous findings from other scholars.

Smith identified six discrepancies he termed "common myths" including: faculty of color are so few that institutions must compete in the hiring process; the scarcity of faculty of color in the sciences means that few are available and those that are available are in high demand; scholars like those in this study are only interested in the most prestigious institutions, making it virtually impossible for other institutions to recruit them; individuals are being continually recruited by wealthy and prestigious institutions with which institutions with less

resources cannot compete; faculty of color are leaving academe altogether for more lucrative positions in government and industry; and campuses are so focused on diversifying the faculty that Anglo men are at an enormous disadvantage. He concluded that institutions can raise the level of qualified candidates by improving the search and hiring process and by considering non-tenure alternatives.⁵

Robin Wilson stunned some in academe when she reported that colleges and universities which had made minority hiring a priority in the late 1980s were now recruiting fewer African-American scholars and were witnessing more of those leaving the campus, partly due to increased competition for African-American faculty.⁶ The previous year Charles Wilson and Jerry Owens both explored strategies to improve minority faculty retention.⁷ Wilson focused on strategies to improve minority faculty hiring procedures and made the following recommendations: listen to minority faculty's needs; establish strategies to prepare campuses for intellectual, social, ethnic, and cultural diversity; establish a staff conversion program to identify staff members in instructional support departments who may be interested in teaching; establish diversity programs in all divisions and departments; determine which universities have minorities in the pipeline by discipline and start early recruitment efforts; develop relationships with minority organizations to seek their assistance in identifying qualified candidates for faculty positions; develop minority candidate pools; include minorities in all phases of recruitment efforts; make efforts to keep minority faculty in the face of proposed budget cuts; have current faculty serve as mentors to minority graduate students at area universities; establish curriculum vitae banks; and establish summer teaching and research opportunities to interest minority graduate students.

Owens suggested similar strategies which included: keeping an open mind about credentials and recognizing the value of nonacademic experiences; include area minority professionals on search and interview committees; utilize minority media in recruitment campaigns; recruit through business and industry partnerships; keep candidate pools open until minority applicants are found; maintain dialogue and faculty exchanges with historically Black colleges; implement long-range programs that encourage minorities and women; and diversify the entire campus.⁸ In contrast, Maurice Collins recommended establishing higher education partnership consortiums, visiting professorships and faculty exchange programs, providing provisions for housing and other benefits, establishing mentoring programs, and implementing fair practices regarding academic rank.⁹ The appointment of minority faculty to short-term, interim, research, part-time appointments or as visiting scholars and lecturers have been shown to be good arrangements when full-time faculty appointments cannot be made.

Retention Strategies

Institutions can do a much better job of retaining minorities if they provide parity in pay, rank, benefits, tenure and promotion for faculty. Because tenure and promotion are so critical, it is important that faculty know exactly what is expected of them and have a fair opportunity to meet those expectations. Institutions should be aware of some of the common factors which impede minority faculty success. Among these are large teaching loads and committee assignments that keep faculty from research, the absence of research funding, lack of mentoring relationships, little value placed on teaching and community service, and the lack of recognition for research published in peer reviewed, but not refereed journals.¹⁰

In a 1995 study African-American faculty women consistently reported that they felt higher education, in general, had a shallow commitment to faculty diversity. Some faculty stated that they observed new minority faculty members being brought on board primarily to raise the numbers of compliance for reporting purposes rather than to be provided with real opportunities to become long-term members in academic departments. Perceptions of this kind are often validated by personal experience in academic environments and by high rates of minority faculty attrition. These experiences can be devastating to faculty morale.¹¹ In addition, Ronald Opp and Albert Smith argue that "a hire is of little value if that individual leaves in a year or so because of a chilly and unwelcoming environment."¹²

Owens suggested institutions follow four steps to retain faculty of color. He recommends they begin with a thorough orientation, promote collegiality, schedule diversity training and staff development programs, and incorporate minority faculty in decision-making and all facets of campus life.¹³

Dr. Alice Brown-Collins an African-American social psychologist and tenured professor at the University of Vermont observes: "For faculty of color, tenure is torture." Dr. Brown-Collins is an African-American social psychologist and tenured professor from the University of Vermont. "Whether they receive tenure or not, a very large percentage of Black and female academics find the tenure process bitter and traumatic...Because even if you get tenure, unless every vote was unanimous it means that now you get to spend the rest of your life with some people who thought you weren't good enough to be there."¹⁴

Suggestions for Academic Leaders

Today, there are still small numbers of minority faculty in the pipeline, a lack of role models, and a discomfort that some minority faculty experience on "majority" campuses. Minority faculty are looking for opportunities not only to advance their own careers with possibilities of growth and leadership, but to be a part of an institution that is strongly committed to the advancement and support of minority students. One of the major reasons for the failure of efforts to increase the numbers of minorities

in higher education is the lack of these factors and the absence of incentives and rewards.

Institution-wide commitments are essential to the success of any diversity effort. First, resources must be provided as incentives for compliance. Second, universities should reexamine mission statements and streamline programs to find the funds necessary to implement new initiatives. Third, executive leadership should clearly establish comprehensive plans and measure accountability to promote success. Fourth, colleges need to ensure that funds are devoted to meet the needs of qualified minority candidates, to see that they are provided incentives to join the faculty ranks, and that efforts are in place to make them feel part of the campus and surrounding community.¹⁵ Fifth, recruitment must be accomplished in a systematic manner and retention be an on-going process. Finally, institutional leaders should keep in mind that faculty members of color have different personal histories, different cultural values, and different priorities that are often linked to the needs of the community. For example, many minority faculty tend to publish in professional peer reviewed journals that are not mainstream. These journals have a broader scope and are more willing to publish quality research on minority populations than refereed journals. Therefore, academic leaders should consider providing equal recognition for quality research published in professional peer reviewed journals in a faculty member's general area of expertise.

Achieving diversity is going to require major changes and the reallocation of resources. Academic leaders must be willing to improve the quality of life for all and ensure that each member of the campus community benefits. Institutions must also realize that the decisions they make today will likely have a profound effect on the future of their institution.

Any time a person is brought into a faculty, a statement is made about the future of that entire faculty. Anytime a person is hired, a decision is made about what the department believes, and values, its students. Anytime these strategies are used to assure commitment, build

climate, and employ colleagues you have made a decision about what you believe education and our educational systems are supposed to be. Now is the time, some say past due, for us to make positive statements about our values and to express confidence in our future. The people we hire are how we build that legacy.¹⁶

Notes

¹*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* "Vital Statistics" 5 (Spring 1997), 175.

²*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* "Black Faculty at the Nation's Flagship State Universities, 1996" 12 (Summer 1996), 15.

³Robert Smith, "Successful Recruitment of Minority Faculty: Commitment Culture and Choice," *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration* 3 (1994), 152-156.

⁴Sheila T. Gregory, *Black Women in the Academy: The Secrets To Success and Achievement* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995).

⁵Daryl Smith, "The Pipeline for Achieving Faculty Diversity: Debunking the Myths," Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1996.

⁶Robin Wilson, "Hiring of Black Scholars Stalls at Some Major Universities," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 41, 38 (2 June 1995), A16.

⁷Charles Wilson, Development of Recommendations to Improve Minority Faculty Hiring Procedures at Kansas City Community College. (Ph.D. dissertation, Nova Southeastern Dissertation, October 1994); Jerry Owens, et al. "Bridging the Gap: Recruitment and Retention of Minority Faculty Members" in "Creating and Maintaining a Diverse Faculty," in William Harvey and James Valadez, *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 1994.

⁸Owens, et al. "Bridging the Gap," 1994.

⁹Maurice Collins, "Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention of Minority Faculty and Staff in Institutions of Higher Education," *Action in Teacher Education* 12.30 (1990), 57-62.

¹⁰Gregory, *Black Women in the Academy*, 1995.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ronald Opp and Albert Smith, "Effective Strategies for Enhancing Minority Faculty Recruitment," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 18.2 (1992), 147-163.

¹³Owens, et al. "Bridging the Gap," 1994.

¹⁴Paul Ruffins, "The Shelter of Tenure is Eroding and For Faculty of Color Gaining," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 19-26, 16 October 1997.

¹⁵Barbara Gibson-Benninger and James Rateliff, "Getting and Keeping the Best Faculty for the 21st Century Community College," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 20, 2 (1996), 151-167.

¹⁶Smith, "The Pipeline for Achieving Faculty Diversity," 1996.

Sheila T. Gregory is assistant professor of educational leadership and higher education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.