Effective Strategies for Recruiting Minority Faculty

by Dr. Charles Taylor

This article is intended to provide strategies to assist campuses in hiring a diverse faculty and to dispel the most common myths surrounding the recruitment and hiring of faculty of color.

Introduction

It is still possible in 2012 for most students on predominantly white campuses to earn their degree without ever being taught by an African American instructor or any other instructor of color. There is a persistent gap in what campuses say they are committed to when it comes to diversifying their faculty and what they actually do. The percentage of Minority faculty (especially African American and Latino) teaching in higher educational institutions has remained extremely low over the past two decades. The number of tenured faculty of color is even bleaker.

At the beginning of the 21st century, 87 percent of the full-time faculty members in the United States were white; 64 percent were male; and these disparities increase at every level of the academic pipeline (Trower & Chait, 2002).The most recent report from the National Center of Education Statistics (2009) indicated that African Americans represent 21,047 or 9.67% of 217,518 executive, managerial, and administrative staff in degree granting U.S. College institutions in the fall of 2007.

The US department of education offers the following statistics on doctoral degree completion by race within the past decade.

Table 1-Percentage distribution of doctoral or equivalent degrees conferred		
Race	1998-99	2008-09
White	63.2	58.6
Black	4.8	6.5
Hispanic	3	3.8
Asian/Pacific Islander	5.2	5.7
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.4	0.5
Non-resident Alien	23.4	24.9

The National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) was a nationally representative sample of full-and part-time faculty and instructional staff at public and private not-for-profit 2- and 4-year institutions in the United States. The study was designed to provide

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data about faculty and instructional staff to postsecondary education researchers and policymakers. The study was initially conducted during the 1987-88 school year and was repeated in 1992-93, 1998-99, and 2003-04. The study was conducted by the US department of education. The following statistics are extracted from tables provided by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Table 2-Percentage distribution of faculty and instructional staff by race

	White	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Other
Full time faculty 2003	80.8	5.5	8.1	3.5	2.1
Full time faculty 1998	85.1	4.9	5.5	3.4	1
Part time faculty 2003	85.3	5.6	3.6	3.4	2.2
Part time faculty 1998	87.6	4.3	2.9	3.9	1.3

Source: US department of Education – National Center for Education Statistics
http://nces.ed.gov/das/library/nsopf.asp

Table 2 cannot be adequately compared to Table 1 because Table 2 does not make the distinction for non-resident alien faculty. In any event, at a glance one can see, that while whites account for only 63% of the doctoral degrees, in 1998-99, they made up more than 80% of the full time and part time faculty in all institutions. This is just an analysis at a glance and any decisive statement can only be made after a more thorough statistical analysis which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it does present a general trend of the overall picture, where minorities are underrepresented both in degree attainment and as faculty on our campuses. But as most of us know it doesn't require a study, all we have to do is look around and ask the HR department for the numbers.

Arguments for a diverse faculty are as compelling as those for student diversity, which extend beyond the obvious reasons of equity. Faculty diversification fosters educational equality and inclusive excellence. The more diverse the faculty, the greater the diversity of course content and readings, curricular and teaching methods and scholarly ideas presented to students.

Evidence suggests that colleges and universities that have more faculty and students from diverse backgrounds have students that report being more accepting of people of different

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races/cultures and more culturally aware. Additionally, students from diverse campuses also showed greater growth in the areas of leadership, critical thinking, ability to work cooperatively, interpersonal skills, and problem solving, (Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Milem, & Allen, 1999).

We've learned what works over the past several decades and this information is available to any college or university seriously interested in diversifying their staffs. Here's what works:

Make your Campus Climate Welcoming

Many campuses conduct an annual climate survey to assess how welcoming the campus environment is to its students and employees. We know from the research that campus climate is extremely important in the recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty. It can be defined as "behaviors within a workplace or learning environment, ranging from subtle to cumulative to dramatic, that can influence whether an individual feels personally safe, listened to, valued, and treated fairly and with respect," (Campus Climate Network Group, 2004).

In their extensive research on 20 years of literature about faculty of color, Turner et al. (2008) found that when faculty perceive the departmental and institutional campus to be unsupportive, not diverse, and uninterested in the research they produce, they are less likely to stay on. Such lack of support contributes to negative experiences by faculty of color. Furthermore the authors suggested that a considerable amount of research has mentioned campus climate as one of the factors that affects faculty retention. They defined campus climate broadly to include the research being pursued in various departments, the structural support available for research on race and ethnicity, as well as efforts to promote diversity on campus.

Moody (2004), offers a very detailed insight into how to make the campus and department welcoming for faculty of color. The author suggests a collaborative effort designed to inform the newcomers about their course assignments, responsibilities, and to get them familiarized with people who might have previously taught the courses they have been assigned. Since the transition to the professoriate is crucial, Moody suggests that the department should make all the efforts necessary to smooth out the transition for new hires. This includes addressing issues about the campus climate to ensure candidates that these concerns are taken seriously.

Give them Support and Respect

Campuses that value diversity provide the academic, social, and cultural support that faculty of color need to be successful on campus. They provide faculty development opportunities and mentors; place them on the tenure track and provide promotional

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opportunities. Turner et al. (2008) identified mentoring as an important theme that has come up consistently in the literature to promote faculty retention. Research also points to inadequate mentoring as one of the factors responsible for the attrition of faculty of color.

Specifically when junior faculty of color do not receive mentoring, they have to rely entirely on themselves for their intellectual development, and by doing so remain largely unaware of the informal mechanisms by which one moves up the academic ladder. It is therefore imperative to provide support to new faculty by establishing strong mentoring relationships, and providing structural and institutional support to buttress their career.

Jayakumar et al. (2009) in a study on issues of retention contends that the literature points to certain challenges that are specific to faculty of color. These challenges include overcoming a feeling of otherness, experiences of racial and ethnic bias, and barriers to attaining tenure.

Moody suggests that the chair or a senior faculty member can provide a welcoming environment for the new faculty member by introducing him or her to the students on the first day of class, and tell students why the department is so thrilled to have him/her. This helps to establish the authority of the female or minority professor, whose intellectual integrity is often questioned by students just because of their gender or skin color, (Moody, 2004).

Circulate the Job Announcement to non-traditional places

This is not a new strategy but it is an effective one and you might be surprised at how many campuses continue to ignore this strategy and then complain when they continue to get the same results. There are a variety of social, cultural and educational organizations that can be tapped to help spread the word about job openings. Your HR office can easily compile a list ranging from churches, fraternities, alumni contacts, to ethnic publications. You should be able to identify at least 20 non-traditional ways to get the word out, including the use of social media.

Smith (2000) suggests that in order to become serious about diversifying faculty, institutions need to take a more aggressive and proactive attitude towards the hiring process. Smith implies that if campuses would develop more personal connections with potential candidates, they would better understand the perspective and richness that they would bring to the department rather than merely the group that they would represent.

One other important recruitment resource that shouldn't be overlooked is the existing faculty of color in the institution. They often know other people through their associations,

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alumni connections and professional work. This is a meaningful way to include them in the institutional mission of increasing diversity.

Don't use all-white hiring committees

Moving away from being satisfied with candidates who are most similar to existing faculty, to considering candidates that are different, involves more expanded and innovative ways of thinking about faculty positions. This is not to say that an all-white hiring committee won't recruit a diverse candidate but rather to simply acknowledge their track record and admit that diverse hiring committees tend to perform better in this area than homogeneous ones.

Diverse committees are usually more open to candidates that are different from the traditional model. Smith (2000) suggests that having a diverse committee makes it less likely that someone would be ignored just because they did not fit the traditional model of a potentially successful scholar. In fact, having a diverse search committee is necessary to hear multiple voices, and incorporate complexity in the search system. A group of people that might have had similar experiences might unknowingly contribute to less diverse faculty even when they have the best of intentions just because they did not have any alternate voices in the group.

Ignore the Myths

"We can't find any qualified minorities;" "they won't like it here;" "We can't afford to pay what they're asking," etc. The fact that these myths are still around speaks to their staying power. It's time to start calling them what they are-excuses for not hiring or making a sincere effort. Back in 1988 Dr. Marian Swoboda spearheaded the publishing of an excellent booklet, "Achieving Faculty Diversity," that was literally a sourcebook of ideas and success stories to help campuses diversity their staffs, (Spann, 1988). That was nearly 25 years ago and this booklet, although out of print, should be updated and made required reading on our nation's campuses.

The booklet took dead aim at challenging negative attitudes and myths surrounding the hiring of faculty of color and provided clear proof how committed colleges and universities were able to hire a diverse faculty despite the "limited" supply and in spite of lean budgets and organizational resistance to change. Successful colleges and universities demonstrated that the myths could all be soundly defeated through strong leadership that elevated diversity to the short list of institutional priorities.

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Provide Incentives for Departments

A study by Turner (2002) indicates that in 71% of faculty hires in which faculty from underrepresented groups were hired at colleges and universities nationwide, an intervention strategy (special hire and/or diversity in job description) was needed. All Native American, 84% of African American, 43% of Latino, and 18% of Asian American faculty in his study, were hired through these interventions. It shouldn't take special efforts for colleges to do the right thing but as those statistics point out, without incentives the minority hiring picture would be extremely depressing. Data such as this indicate the need for institutions to actively develop strategies for recruiting diverse faculty and develop a climate that is welcoming of this faculty.

There is a need to make sure that before the new faculty members arrive, there are discussions about how faculty diversification increases rather than decreases the quality of the program. No one should be considered a so-called 'affirmative action hire', but rather the senior departmental administrators should take preemptive action to handle any backlash, and to ensure that everyone is aware of the departmental support for the new hires (Moody, 2004).

Moody also suggests that in order to ensure that minority hires are not discriminated against or looked down upon, the chair or other administrators should point out how European American men have enjoyed an invisible form of affirmative action through discriminatory policies, since the colonial era. Affirmative Action laws have a much shorter history in this country than the history of systematic legal oppression of people of color, (Moody, 2004).

Train your Search Committees

Daley's study listed several benefits to having a diverse faculty in academic medicine. According to the authors, a diverse faculty contributes to academic excellence by providing students and other faculty members with varied perspectives on healthcare. They also serve as role models for minority students and influence curriculum design better suited to deal with an increasingly diverse patient population. Furthermore, they can be crucial in creating linkages with hard to reach populations, introduce new kinds of scholarship and issues that have a greater social justice agenda, (Daley et al., 2006).

This suggests that promoting diversity does not by any means imply throwing academic excellence out of the window. In fact, it means quite the opposite. Search committees ought to be better trained to consider alternative research interests, or techniques, as strengths that would enhance the academic environment on campus and can be used as criteria for future hiring, thereby broadening the committee's perspective as well as the intellectual

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framework of the department. A research interest in Ethnic Minority issues is just as legitimate as is research interests in European history.

Grow Your Own

Austin et al. (2007) discuss the aspirations and challenges faced by new faculty, in which they discuss the socialization process of new faculty as something that begins right when students become part of a graduate or doctoral program. As students move through the graduate program, they are essentially being prepared for faculty roles. As students assume the position of teaching assistants and then dissertators, they are getting socialized into the faculty role that they eventually might assume.

Campuses therefore have an opportunity to increase faculty diversity through their own graduate programs. However this requires them to intentionally mentor their graduate students of color and make a more organized effort of placing them in faculty positions. Campuses who don't have doctoral programs can still grow their own through fellowships, partnerships, endowment funds and similar targeted initiatives.

Involve the ALANA Community

When ALANA (African, Latino, Asian and Native American) candidates visit your campus for an interview, they are also interviewing your community. It makes sense then to involve that community in the hiring process. This can be done in a number of ways ranging from having community members serve on the search committee, to having a community sponsored reception.

It's also important to involve ALANA faculty who are already employed at your institution. When potential faculty are introduced to and meet current ALANA faculty, they have a chance to ask direct questions about the institution and get a better perspective on the campus and community climate.

Some colleges provide personalized tours and resource information that has names of ethnic restaurants, grocery stores, businesses, names of ethnic minorities that hold important government or political offices, social clubs or organizations that specifically cater to ethnic minorities, and any other avenues, governmental or non-profit that are directed specifically for the benefit of ethnic minorities. They are finding that these extra efforts yield real results and in the long run increases the retention rate of their faculty of color.

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Conclusion

It has been proven time and again that the above strategies promote successful racial minority recruitment and retention. There is always the temptation to believe the solution lies elsewhere or is out of reach, but those campuses who are making progress will tell you, it's because they've implemented many of the tested strategies that are outlined in this paper.

I'm convinced that your campus can make similar progress. With powerful leadership and a willingness to network in different ways, I look forward to sharing your victories and stories about how you helped to build an inclusive campus that will prepare our students to live and work in the 21st century.

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