



Recruitment, Retention, and Promotion of Minority Faculty

Williams, Sharon E., and Alan Kirk. "Recruitment, Retention, and Promotion of Minority Faculty." *The Department Chair*, 19(2), (Fall 2008):23–25. Reprinted with permission from Jossey-Bass, an imprint of Wiley.

Recruitment and retention of minority faculty is extremely important for university administrators, as universities seek to be a microcosm of our society that embraces diversity and full minority participation in all aspects of our culture. As faculty recruitment guidelines are defined and decisions are made regarding hiring and promotion, it is clear that there is a need to revisit the subjects of recruitment, retention, and promotion of minorities in the academy.

THE PROBLEM

Diversifying our nation's higher education institutions continues to be one of the most important challenges facing administrators, and we must expand our efforts in order to achieve environments that reflect our diversity. Despite years of affirmative action policies, a continuing pattern of underrepresentation of faculty of color in higher education remains. In 1999, faculty of color represented about 15 percent of the professoriate. This number grew by less than 1 percent (15.6 percent) in the following six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2005), even though minorities of color represent almost one third of the U.S. population. Although institutions report increased diversity as one of their institutional goals, few have a structured plan for achieving this goal. To make real progress, universities must devise strategies that lead to opportunities for minorities to pursue and obtain doctorate degrees, to obtain faculty positions, to be awarded tenure, to be promoted, and to become leaders in the academy.

BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND PROMOTION OF MINORITY FACULTY

Recent studies on underrepresentation of minority faculty in institutions of higher learning and barriers to recruitment, retention, and promotion found two primary themes: isolation and lack of mentoring.

Minority faculty who have been successful attribute much of their success to a relationship with a senior faculty mentor. Mentoring of junior faculty by senior faculty appears to have the dual effect of socialization into the academy and social networking. Many minority faculty report feeling isolated from informal social and professional networks. The degree of association with senior faculty has been shown to be a strong predictor of success in both promotion and tenure. Faculty of color are sometimes isolated and struggle with socialization within university communities. A supportive environment has often been cited as the single most important factor in their success. When the climate is unwelcoming, it becomes an occupational hazard for minority faculty. It leads to isolation and decreases opportunities for socialization and social networking, all of which are needed if one is to succeed in academe.

A MODEL THAT WORKS

Several initiatives have been employed in an attempt to rectify the underrepresentation of minorities in institutions of higher learning and thereby create diverse college communities. One such model is summarized here.

It has been reported for some time now that mentoring, social integration, and interactions are important to the success of faculty in achieving tenure and promotion. Focused mentoring programs allow for interactions within and across groups, social integration, and networking. Kennesaw State University has developed a model of mentoring that has led to a degree of success. This model is based on the premise that the existing conceptualization of mentoring as a process and outcome must be redefined.

The Department of Social Work and Human Services has been successful in diversifying its faculty. The leadership in the college and department has shown a commitment to faculty diversity as reflected in recruitment efforts that have generated a balance of minority to majority faculty. We have done this through a "growing our own" approach to recruitment.

GROWING OUR OWN

Minority faculty often have different expectations of the academy compared to majority faculty. To be successful, minority faculty must often adjust their expectations. The extent to which they are able to make this adjustment, experience social integration, and interact with senior-level faculty members, regardless of race, determines to a great degree their level of success in terms of retention. Our model consists of three primary areas: mentoring by senior faculty (teaching); writing teams (scholarship); and committee assignments and community leadership and facilitation (service). Teaching, scholarship, and service are the three primary areas associated with tenure (retention) and promotion.

Mentoring: teaching. From a traditional perspective, mentoring occurs on a more informal basis where senior faculty select junior faculty as protégés. Given the underrepresentation of minority faculty to select and mentor other minority faculty, there is a need to develop a model of mentoring that is cross-cultural, more formal, and sharper in focus.

The Department of Social Work and Human Services has worked collaboratively with a local HBCU to identify minority doctoral students who have an interest in teaching at the university level. If there is a convergence of interests, the identified student is offered a focused mentoring environment within the College of Health and Human Services and the department. The doctoral student is then provided opportunities to collaborate with faculty, teach courses, and advise our graduate and undergraduate students. The student essentially becomes a member of our faculty within a framework of growing into a tenure-track faculty position following completion of his or her doctoral studies.

Overall, we believe that mentoring creates an environment that promotes social integration and interactions along all dimensions. More specifically, we promote diversity by creating a pluralistic environment in terms of positions hired, committee assignment and leadership, and the environment in general. The Department of Social Work and Human Services serves as a model by formulating relationships with graduate students and helping them grow into a faculty role, creating diverse faculty and administrative leadership, and encouraging environments that promote diversity in accordance with the values and ethics of our profession.

Scholarship: writing teams. Scholarly productivity is a substantial predictor of success in the tenure and promotion process. We make a concerted effort to ensure that minority faculty are provided opportunities to collaborate in scholarship leading to publication. For example, funds have been allocated through the department to support travel to and engagement with faculty at a collaborating institution, the State University of New York at Albany. As a result of this effort, three minority faculty members are now engaged in a regional research effort. The data captured by this project will generate publications developed by the research team. We believe that such collaborative efforts have great promise for retention and promotion of minority faculty within the department and across the profession.

Service: committee assignments and community leadership and facilitation. Service to the community and university is another key element of promotion and tenure. As opportunities are presented, leadership within the department and the college seek minority faculty representation on committee assignments and leadership within the university community and community at-large. For example, a minority faculty member was identified to serve on a campus-wide evaluation committee, which allows for social interaction and integration across campus. Our faculty shares a commitment to ensure minority representation on tenure and promotion committees. We consistently look for opportunities for minority faculty to serve on community advisory boards. As we are considered a service hub for local nonprofits, we have had success with placement of our minority faculty in key leadership positions within the community.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The Department of Social Work and Human Services at Kennesaw State University has managed not only to recruit but also to retain minority faculty. We will continue with what has worked for us: implementing a structured mentoring program, collaborating with an HBCU, and, most importantly, creating opportunities for minority faculty to work with senior faculty on research and publication. Moreover, we will continue to develop leadership opportunities and implement systematic continuous assessment and improvement processes, all directed at creating a climate that promotes and appreciates diversity.

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