



Racial Diversity in the Student Body: A Compelling Need for Retaining Faculty of Color

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At a little more than 10 percent of the full-time undergraduate faculty, faculty of color are severely underrepresented in American higher education (Astin, Antonio, Cress, & Astin, 1997). This is a figure that many can quote. Underrepresentation continues to be a chronic problem, and we have come together once again in search of solutions. Despite our efforts, and the efforts of many others throughout the country, recruitment and retention efforts remain stifled, their goals unfulfilled.

We are also quite aware of the significant progress that students of color have made over the past twenty years, progress so great that white students are not the majority on many campuses. The level of racial and ethnic diversity in our colleges and universities only highlights the lack of progress we continue to witness within the faculty ranks. And even while diversity in the student body is threatened in the current anti-affirmative action era, demographic change will continue to push these levels across the nation.

Legal challenges to affirmative action in college admissions, while threatening to erode diversity efforts at the most elite schools, have had the beneficial side effect of focusing national attention to questions regarding the educational benefits or detriments of a diverse student body. People from all parts of society are weighing in on the “diversity issue” on editorial pages, talk shows, and in some cases, stump speeches. And perhaps more significantly, social scientists, including many of you present this morning, are conducting research on student diversity. In the most highly consequential court case, the University of Michigan undergraduate admission case, the effect on research activity has been tremendous. The allowance of social science evidence into the record has had the effect of mobilizing numerous researchers, a myriad of organizations, and probably a few million dollars toward the investigation of the single question of how diversity enhances the education of our students.

It strikes me that despite the juxtaposition of a stubbornly and unchanging, overwhelmingly white faculty with an increasingly diverse student body, we have yet to seriously think about the benefits of a diverse student body for faculty. Researchers such as Sylvia Hurtado and Daryl Smith have been admonishing us to consider the entire campus community—faculty, staff, students, and administration—when addressing issues of diversity and multiculturalism in higher education. Racial and ethnic diversity influences an entire campus, its culture, values, and eventually its ethos. As we continue to look at all the possible strategies to diversify the professoriate and to retain our faculty of color, let us remember in particular that the faculty and student worlds are not separate, that each influences the other. Faculty interact with students almost daily, walk through a campus where students dominate the social landscape, and develop hundreds of relationships with students, both casual and close.

Our recent flurry of research on students has established that a diverse student body confers benefits to students ranging from the development of intellectual and social self-confidence to exposure to different ideas and viewpoints as well as cognitive development and academic achievement. We are beginning to understand how diversity actually looks, from surface representations on campus down to the friendships students develop in a diverse environment. We are beginning to understand how diversity works, with the coordinated management of structural diversity, campus climate, and a diverse curriculum. And we are beginning to understand how diversity evolves, from zero-sum between-group competition to mutual learning through vulnerability, border crossing, integrity, and trust.

I think our focus on student diversity provides us with a valuable opportunity to re-double our efforts to maintain and increase the representation of faculty of color in academe. Today I would like to pose a few propositions regarding the potential benefits of a diverse student body for faculty of color. The propositions enjoin us to ask the following questions: Do initiatives to diversify the student body also assist institutions to recruit and retain diverse faculty? Are these dual objectives indeed complementary? Can they be conceived of as two parts of a broader strategy for institutions to increase and manage diversity on their campuses?



Retaining Faculty of Color

That the retention of faculty of color is a very important matter for higher education is incontrovertible (Turner & Myers Jr., 2000). The most recent research on the experiences of faculty of color points squarely to an entrenched academic culture that questions their place in the academy, de-values their scholarly work, and sets up structural barriers to tenure and promotion (Aguirre, 2000). Turner and Myers Jr. (2000) cite seven major factors that contribute to a “chilly” climate for faculty of color in academe:

- Denial of tenure or promotion due to race/ethnicity
- Being expected to work harder than white faculty
- Having color/ethnicity given more attention than their credentials
- Being treated as a token
- Lack of support or validation of research on minority issues
- Being expected to handle minority affairs
- Having too few minorities on campus

The “chilly” climate experienced by minority faculty contributes to feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction, feelings that can affect research productivity, campus citizenship, and ultimately, commitment to the profession. A number of researchers have drawn similar conclusions from their own studies (Aguirre, 2000). The common recommendation offered by researchers to improve the climate for faculty of color almost always focuses on the policies and practices of department chairs and deans, and the behavior and attitudes of white faculty colleagues. Rarely are students cited as contributors to the campus climate and the academic culture or as potential benefactors to faculty of color.

Another approach to retention that researchers have used is in documenting the unique contributions made by faculty of color to academe. Daryl Smith has written in this vein within the context of student diversity. After reviewing the literature, Smith (1989) contends that a diverse faculty provide numerous benefits to a campus, particularly benefits afforded to students of color. She offers these specific benefits:

- Racially diverse faculty provide support to students from diverse backgrounds
- The presence of diverse faculty and staff is a symbol to diverse students that the institution cares about them
- The presence of diverse faculty and staff creates a comfortable environment for students
- Diversification of faculty and staff is likely to contribute to a broader range of what is taught and how, and to the development of opportunities for collaboration and sharing of new ideas and pedagogies
- Adequate numbers of diverse faculty and staff ensure that faculty play more than a token or symbolic role in institutional change

In Smith’s more recent work (Smith, 1997), she suggests that the corollaries to these statements also deserve discussion and investigation. Let us, for example, posit that:

- The presence of a diverse student body is a symbol to faculty of color that the institution cares about them
- The presence of a diverse student body creates a comfortable environment for faculty of color

Similarly, we may also ask how diversity among students improves the academic climate for faculty of color by addressing the seven factors cited by Turner and Myers Jr. earlier.

With these two studies as an orienting frame, we may reasonably expect faculty of color working in institutions with more racially diverse students to be more comfortable with the academic culture, more comfortable with the social culture, and generally more satisfied with their job.

Before I continue, I want to offer some empirical evidence to support this line of reasoning. Is it true that faculty of color in more diverse institutions have greater job satisfaction? To explore this question, I used the national survey of faculty conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (Sax, Astin Arredondo, & Korn, 1996) to calculate the relationship between overall job satisfaction and student body diversity for faculty of color in 1995-1996. In the calculation, I controlled for gender, age, salary, tenure status, rank, and institutional size, selectivity, and Carnegie type. As I expected, I found a positive relationship for faculty of color working in research universities as well as for those in doctoral institutions. The relationship between satisfaction and diversity was not statistically significant for faculty of color in master’s and baccalaureate institutions. Perhaps then, presuming that racially diverse campuses can play an important role in retaining faculty of color is a viable notion that we should consider more closely.



Four Propositions

I now propose four statements regarding the relationship between the experiences of faculty of color and student diversity, based upon the work of Turner and Myers Jr. and Smith.

Proposition One: The isolation experienced by faculty of color is reduced by racial diversity in the student body.

The climate for diversity is a function of institutional policy, institutional history, and of course, racial and ethnic diversity among the faculty, staff, and student populations (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998). Resistance to diversity in less diverse environments contributes to an inhospitable climate for faculty of color. Diversity in the student body not only forces institutions to improve their climates for diversity, it also provides a minority faculty member some kind of campus community to become a member of and also provides opportunities for mentorship and role modeling. As one of my colleagues told me, "Because there are so few black students here, I feel guilty, like I'm somehow going to waste because I'm giving up opportunities to mentor students by not being at a diverse institution."

A predominantly white student body may, in fact, contribute to loneliness and isolation by sending faculty of color constant but subtle messages that they do not belong on campus, that they are "affirmative action hires" (Aguirre, 2000). In the eyes of many white students, faculty of color are beneficiaries of affirmative action and therefore illegitimate members of the faculty. Consequently, they may not seek out faculty of color despite their interest in the faculty member's research. They may avoid that faculty member's classes, especially those with racial content. And they may steer clear of any advising relationships with faculty of color. In this way, white students contribute to the chilly climate for faculty of color by fostering a culture that questions the legitimacy of their presence in the department.

To the extent that a diverse student body contributes to a positive campus climate for diversity, its presence helps to create a more comfortable environment for faculty of color, and in the process, conveys to them that their institution cares about diversity, including the diversity they themselves contribute to the community.

Proposition Two: Diversity in the student body is likely to contribute to a broader range of what is taught and how, and to the development of opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of new ideas and pedagogies.

The two most significant changes in course catalogs and curricular requirements in the past thirty years would not have occurred without student diversity. The development of ethnic studies, in the late 1960s and continuing today, was due largely to the efforts of students of color. Most of us can recall the student strike at San Francisco State and the Third World Coalition at Berkeley that ushered into the academy the new disciplines of Asian American, Afro-American, Chicano, and Native American studies. Evelyn Hu-DeHart (2000) re-emphasized this point clearly during the late 1990s wave of student activism for ethnic studies:

"When students of color organize politically to press for ethnic studies, they usually do not do so at the behest of faculty members in ethnic studies; indeed, such faculty members are almost nonexistent on some of the campuses that have witnessed the loudest demonstrations" (p. 42).

The multiculturalism movement of the 1980s, though spearheaded by faculty who were deflecting attacks by the conservative right, would not have been an issue if the humanities had not already evolved with the emerging diversity of the student body and the rest of the country. At many institutions, multiculturalism led to the reform of general education programs. In many cases, the reconstruction of general education included the introduction of innovative pedagogies such as service learning, learning communities, and freshmen and sophomore seminars.

These curricular and pedagogical changes speak directly to the concerns of many faculty of color regarding institutional values that conflict with their scholarship and with their educational goals for students. Diversity unquestionably played a role in addressing these concerns.

Proposition Three: A diverse student body reduces the possibility of denial of tenure or promotion due to race/ethnicity.

Ostensibly, students do not play a role in tenure reviews. Letters from students regarding teaching and advising are usually the only input students have into tenure cases. Student activism can play a pivotal role, however. The case of Don Nakanishi, professor of education and Asian American Studies at UCLA, is perhaps the clearest example. In a clearly political struggle between factions within the Graduate School of Education, supporters of Nakanishi pressured the chan-



cellor to investigate his case, and ultimately to grant him tenure (Minami, 1990). One of the key groups of supporters was a coalition of Asian American, African American, Latino, and Native American undergraduates who mobilized students as well as local communities of color to apply pressure on the administration. After a lengthy campaign, the chancellor, himself an outspoken supporter of the racial diversity at UCLA, had no choice but to carefully revisit Nakanishi's case and reconsider Nakanishi's tenure decision.

In this case, a diverse student body not only contributed to a successful tenure case for a minority faculty member, I would argue that it also affected the parameters of the debate regarding research on minority populations and minority issues. Since Nakanishi's case, diversity has increased, additional faculty in Asian American Studies have been recruited, and now UCLA has the greatest number of tenured faculty in Asian American Studies in the country.

Proposition Four: A diverse student body reduces expectations placed on faculty of color to handle minority affairs. The rapid growth of the diverse student population has placed extreme pressures on institutions to “manage their diversity.” Administrative positions have been created on a number of campuses that were previously unneeded and existing programs were expanded. At my own institution, we have a full-time multicultural educator in the Dean of Students office, four ethnic community centers with full-time staffs and directors at the assistant dean level, four ethnic theme houses, and various mentoring, tutoring, and advising programs that target underrepresented students. Most of these positions were established in the past ten to fifteen years in direct response to growing student diversity. Tommy Lee Woon, assistant dean of students and director of multicultural education was hired to create his position just five years ago.

Retention Through Diversity

Each of these propositions, if found to be true, illustrate the interaction of diversity objectives in higher education. What I have tried to show is that student diversity is not disconnected from faculty diversity, staff diversity, and diversity of thought and knowledge. The diversity project in higher education needs to progress in all of these areas, and certainly, the project is unfinished and unbalanced.

A multicultural university is a place where inquiry, teaching, and learning flourish by virtue of an interactive diversity. Interactivity implies relationships, dialogue, and contact across a medium. In a multicultural institution that medium is cultural difference. Currently that medium is only populated by students, with the few faculty of color on the outside looking in. As we continue our struggle for self-preservation and self-determination in academe, and as we invest our brightest talents into “keeping our faculties,” let us keep in mind the larger project that is diversity.

In seeking interactivity, this diversity project has within its core mission the recruitment and retention of faculty of color. Diversity in the student body is making race, ethnicity, and cultural difference salient wherever and with whomever students interact, and frequently these interactions involve faculty. Diversity in the student body is capable of making demands for change that strike at the monocultural nature of the academy, and whether it is knowledge, curricula, or professional conduct, the effects impact the faculty.

To conclude, retaining faculty of color requires cultural change in the academy, and we would be well-served to look to the evolutionary and sometimes revolutionary power of student diversity for help, guidance, and support.



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