SUCCESSFUL MULTICULTURAL CAMPUS:
Free from Prejudice toward Minority Professors

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Introduction

With the heightened interest in multiculturalism in higher education, universities and colleges have sought to become multicultural institutions by recruiting faculty with diverse cultural backgrounds. Consequently the faculty of formerly predominantly White colleges throughout the country have become more diverse and it is no longer unusual to find either foreign-born or minority professors in most departments. This has contributed to a growing racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity among professors (Achinstein & Athanases, 2005).

According to the "National Study of Postsecondary Faculty" report on faculty and instructional staff, the percentage of full-time minority professors in degree-granting institutions has increased steadily to 20%, from 15% in 1998, and 9% in 1990 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). As these census statistics show, impressive progress has been made in increasing the numbers of minority faculty in higher education.

While there have been significant improvements, the increased numbers of minority professors alone does not ensure a fair and equitable learning environment

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in American higher education. Although foreign-born and minority professors are teaching in most academic fields, not all students view minority and foreign professors as qualified due to unfounded stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. Some students, for instance, continue to view African-American and foreign-born professors as less competent than White American professors.

Boute (1999) and McGowan (2000) agree that when students are enrolled in courses taught by professors with ethnic and linguistic backgrounds different from their own, both the students and professors encounter some level of discomfort, tension, and conflict. Penny and White (1998) also found that students and professors have the least amount of conflict, and that students perform significantly better in courses where they have the same or similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds as their instructors.

The purpose of this article is to alert the college community to racial conflicts between students and minority professors, identify several positive aspects of multicultural learning environments, provide practical suggestions in order to minimize racial biases minority professors may face, and promote a successful multicultural environment on college campuses.

Biased Perceptions toward Minority Professors

Although considerable progress in increasing the presence of minority faculty and incorporating diversity into educational programs has been made, several cases of racial bias have been reported.

One of the authors of this article experienced students' biased perceptions personally upon receiving course evaluation reports. She noticed the existence of negative comments based solely on the fact that she is not an American-born native-English speaker and speaks with an accent during her lectures. Her accent, however, does not interfere with the ability of others to understand her. Her English ability, in fact, has been highly commended by her administrators. A few of her reading education students, however, believed they should have had an American professor, since they were learning how to teach English reading and writing. They wrote in narrative course evaluations that they disliked non-native English speakers with accents because they believed such accents hindered their learning.

Her administrators, however, determined that these comments resulted from the students' biased perceptions rather than any real phenomenon since many students throughout her professorship in America for the past 11 years have commented that her course was instrumental in helping them to learn English reading instruction.

Several studies (Cracraft, 1988; Goodwin & Nacht, 1983; Lee, Adb-Ella, & Burks, 1981; Lee & Janda, 2005; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) reported racial problems in higher education. They found that students rated minority professors as less competent than American professors in end-of-semester course evaluations. These researchers be-

lieve that the race and nationality of the instructors were significant factors in the students' lower ratings for minority professors, and that they have negative perceptions regarding instructors' teaching ability based on the professors' ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. These students did not appreciate the unique opportunity of being exposed to diverse perspectives of minority professors.

Sometimes, students have biased opinions of minority professors even before interacting with them. Jacobs and Friedman (1988) observed that some students try to avoid registering for courses after seeing "foreign-looking" names of instructors listed in the course schedule. They also confirmed that preconceived negative feelings toward a professor on the first day of class, or even before registration, may cause lower course evaluations at the end of the course and these students may not benefit as much from the course as non-biased students.

African-American and foreign-born professors experience discrimination and lack of support not only from students but also from peer faculty and administrators. Contributing to the discriminatory climate on some campuses is the belief of peer faculty and administrators that minority professors have been hired not because they are the best qualified, but because their hire helps meet affirmative action quotas. They view minorities as less competent than White American professors. This hinders a fair assessment of minority professors' performance based on their scholarly merits and leads to more frequent denial of their tenure and lower promotion evaluations (Branch, 2001, p.178).

Racial Conflicts
in Less Diverse Fields of Study

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2004), the highest concentration of full-time minority professors in degree-granting institutions is in the field of Engineering (31%), and the lowest in Fine Arts (13%). As the latest data indicates, professors' racial and ethnic backgrounds tend to be related to their field of teaching, and minority professors are primarily concentrated in the academic disciplines of science and engineering where many students and professors are also foreigners and therefore share similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Harrington, Southerland, & Johnson (1993) reported that the majority of the non-American teaching faculty at science and engineering colleges immigrated to the United States from Asia, India, and Western Europe and over half of the graduate

degrees from these colleges are conferred on non-American students. Thus, foreign and minority professors are as well accepted as White professors by other faculty and their students and they therefore experience fewer racial conflicts in these college communities. This enables them to relate comfortably to one another (Connors, 1987).

In comparison, racial conflict and discomfort may be more common in the academic fields where professors and students are still predominantly White. Generally speaking, minorities are not well represented in the field of social sciences and students in this field are less frequently exposed to minority peer students and professors of ethnic backgrounds different from their own. Consequently, the presence of minority or foreign professors in the academic disciplines of the social sciences is not well accepted by some students. For example, 90% of persons who hold a bachelor's or higher degree in the field of education are White and only 10% are African American. The percentage of minority professors and students in education is only 13% and 14% respectively (Bureau of the Census, 2001).

The lower representation of minorities in the social sciences, such as education, may contribute to increased racial tension between students and professors. Some students unfortunately tend to lack respect for and are ready to criticize and give lower course evaluations to faculty whose ethnic or racial background differs from their own. Gladstein and Mailick (1986) stated differences in race and ethnicity in the classroom could be a potential source of conflict, which hinders positive interactions between students and professors, negatively affecting students in achieving a successful educational experience.

It seems that the race and ethnicity of professors tend to affect students' perceptions toward the professors' teaching competence. When minority professors teach subject matter that could not be directly connected with their race, their competences were questioned. For example, students tend to more easily accept and are used to a traditional situation in which African-American Studies courses are taught by African-American professors to African-American students.

This phenomenon leads to qualified minority professors being excluded from the academic fields where most faculty and students are White. Thus, less diverse academic fields continue to have mono-cultural interactions between professors and students, which deprives students of the opportunity to confront differing points of view (Bradley,1997; Hendrix, 1995).

In less diverse fields of study, students

also try to avoid field practicum assignments in communities of color because they are uncomfortable working with minorities. Black, Maki, and Nunn (1997) reported students desire to complete a required field assignment with people of their own race, which suggests that students enrolled in less diverse fields of study feel discomfort when not working within their own racial and ethnic groups.

Similarly, Galbraith (2002) stated that ethnic and racial minorities at older universities with smaller populations of minority students and professors face discrimination. Not only minority students, but also minority professors suffer from discrimination and negative attitudes toward various ethnic minorities. Thus, foreign and minority professors might be considered more effective and professionally satisfied in those fields of study where students, faculty, and staff members are culturally and ethnically diverse (Neves & Sanyal, 1991).

When students are enrolled in a program that does not have a significant representation from students and professors of different races, their learning experience will be impoverished due to the lack of diverse interactions and discussions. In order to achieve greater multicultural interactions, minority professors and students with diverse backgrounds should be valued. Further, professors' ethnicities should be irrelevant to their academic specialty and competency. Students and the academic community must respect the individual professor for his or her credentials and qualifications regardless of their personal characteristics, such as ethnic and linguistic background.

Positive Aspects of Multicultural
Learning Environments

Many universities have committed to creating a multicultural and international learning environment on campus where peoples' differences and heritages are respected. Deliberate efforts to promote diversity in all aspects of college campus life bring a rich cultural environment for all students and contribute to intellectual, social, and personal development.

Ethnic and cultural diversity on campus allows professors and students to retain their personal identities, have a sense of belonging, take pride in their own heritage, and foster an appreciation of diversity among the entire college community. Ethnic and cultural diversity also encourages a society where all people are equally respected, symbolizing society's democratic commitment to human dignity and equality (Smith & Necessary, 1994).

The presence of minority students and professors in college classes enriches the quality of cross-cultural communication and advances the educational benefits to both White and non-White students (Adams, 2002; Boylan, Sutton, & Anderson, 2003; Lee, 2002; Pascarella, Palmer, Moye, & Pierson, 2001; Smith, 2004; Terenzini, Cabrera, Cokbeck, Bjorklund, & Parente, 2001; Yates, 2000). When students interacted with diverse people in classrooms, they were more likely to move from dualistic thinking (believing in a right or wrong answer to any question) to more multiplistic or relativistic thinking (believing in multiple "right" answers to questions).

Experiences such as attending classes with diverse students and professors, having personal interaction with members of different ethnic groups, participating in ethnic cultural events, or engaging in structured campus dialogs on diversity issues contribute to the students' problem-solving and thinking skills. In essence, the more experience college graduates had with students and professors from other cultures during their undergraduate years, the more sophisticated their intellectual processes.

Clark (2002) found that multicultural interactions through a special program, or "inter-group dialogues," enabled students to develop comfort with, and skill for, discourse on difficult topics helping them in developing positive, meaningful, and sustained cross-group relationships. According to Clark, inter-group dialogues typically bring together two groups of 8-10 participants each, 16-20 total, representing two discrete identity groups, for two to three hours a week, over the course of several weeks to discuss the issues between, and forge friendships among, the groups. The inter-group dialog program helps students and faculty not only learn about different cultures but to value them as well, which may ensure less racial conflicts and more interest in multicultural classrooms.

Similarly, Chang (1999) found that socializing with someone of a different racial group was positively related to student retention, self-confidence, group interaction skills, and satisfaction with the college experience. It is important to have professors and students of different races, cultures, and backgrounds in higher education because diversity plays an important role in the quality of higher education. A university needs diverse people to be engaged in knowledge creation and its dissemination. Professors and students need to share different experiences and participate in the most dynamic and global learning practices. Diversity in higher education ensures that all students will have the opportunity to enhance their self-confidence, their social and intellectual development, and improve their ability to work harmoniously in a global work environment.

Recommendations for A Successful Multicultural Campus

Below are practical suggestions to create and maintain successful higher education environments that are free from ethnic prejudice or racial conflicts, where minority professors are valued, and their competence is judged solely on their scholarly and professional merits.

1. Acknowledge the Existence of Biased Perceptions toward Minority Professors

Universities should acknowledge the possibility of biased perceptions toward minority professors which may affect the ratings received on both student and administrative evaluations. Administrators and evaluation committees should be cautious when they review class ratings and evaluation statements written by students and peer faculty about minority professors. They should not blindly accept student and peer faculty's course ratings and comments as the sole evidence of teaching competence.

2. Appreciate Diverse People on Campus

Even today some students, professors, and administrators in higher education institutions may not have a commitment to recognize and respect ethnic and cultural diversity. Those individuals need to make an effort to appreciate the unique contributions of all cultures in classes and embrace the different perspectives of ethnically and culturally diverse peoples. People need to appreciate the extent to which students can gain insight into other cultures and learn different perspectives by taking courses and interacting with minority professors.

3. Provide Additional Moral Support for Minority Professors

Once hired, minority faculty should be nurtured by universities and be assisted in meeting and exceeding the expected criteria in teaching, research, and service. High-ranking professors and administrators need to show an interest in the minority faculty's research agenda, and provide encouragement for their successful academic career. Such support for minority professors will assist them in building a positive reputation and establishing their credibility among students and peer faculty.

4. Set Up a Minority Council in Each Department

A minority council specialized in preventing and solving racial issues and discriminatory treatment within each department is rare or nonexistent. Every department should have a minority council in place to clearly comprehend conflicts and offer effective alternatives and solutions. The minority council members can be comprised of not only minority professors but also any faculty and students who are conscious of and sensitive to minorities' struggles. They may oversee the well-being and equity for minorities, find ways to improve the level of diversity, work to prevent racial conflicts, and solve any conflicts that do occur in each department.

5. Reduce Unbalance in Number of Minorities

Minority faculty are more common in disciplines such as computer science and engineering, hence students have more experiences attesting to their professors' competence in these areas than in social sciences where such faculty are rare. This lack of experience and less frequent interaction with minority professors in less diverse fields of study may hamper students' ability to develop an image of competent minority scholars. Thus, universities need to make a greater effort to increase the number of minorities in the social sciences fields.

6. Set a Comprehensive College Goal on Diversity and Conduct an Annual Progress Evaluation

Universities and colleges need to have an achievable goal for improving the quantity and quality of diversity. They need to conduct ongoing, systematic evaluations each year on multicultural curriculum, training, environment, special events and programs, and the level of diversity commitment in order to promote more idealistic diversity in both academic courses and non-academic events.

7. Expose Students Frequently to Minority Professors To Build Less Skeptical Concepts Regarding Their Competence

When students have more frequent exposure to professors from various ethnic minorities and more successful experiences in learning course content, they will build less skeptical concepts about minority faculty's teaching ability and will no longer view them as less fit. When students have more positive cross-cultural experiences with minority professors, their anxiety, tension, and negative perceptions will gradually disappear.

8. Enroll Students in Required Multicultural Education Courses

Many universities offer multicultural education courses as an elective rather than a requirement for graduation or professional certification. Since multicultural education helps students build the essential abilities for meaningful interactions with diverse people and better prepares them to work successfully in the global society, universities should require students, staff, professors, and even administrators to take multicultural training, and offer such training in all undergraduate, graduate, and specialization programs.

9. Start a Systematic and Ongoing Inter-Group Dialog Program

Not many universities have implemented systematic and ongoing inter-group dialog programs. As Clark (2002) stated, universities need to grant academic credit when students participate in an inter-group dialog program. In the same manner, faculty members who are active in facilitating the inter-group dialog need to be rewarded.

10. Start a New Office on Diversity and Equity

Universities can hire a nationally-known higher education expert on diversity as a chief officer for diversity and equity. The University of Virginia recently started such an office to assess the quality of the student experiences that are unique or generally germane to women and minority students (Wood, 2005). The Office of Diversity and Equity will suggest means of identifying racial problems and propose policies and strategies to improve academic and employment opportunities for under-represented populations.

Closing Remarks

American institutions of higher education are the leading pioneers for the implementation of cultural diversity, which ensures equity and human dignity throughout the education system as well as society. Universities are at the vanguard of implementing democratic ideals such as diversity and equality, and strive not only to recruit and retain qualified minority professors and immigrant scholars, but also to search for solutions and strategies to eradicate racial conflicts that some may still face.

With the continued efforts of university communities to minimize biased perceptions and protect minority professors from unfair judgments about their competence, minority professors will eventually enjoy the pursuit of academic excellence in higher education free from stereotypes.

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