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FACULTY-OF-COLOR: EXPERIENCE IN THEIR FIRST YEAR

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Studies focusing on minority faculty have concluded that although institutions are hiring more minority faculty, they are still a small percentage of all faculty (Bowen & Schuster, 1986). Once hired, faculty-of-color are likely to experience their new jobs differently from their white colleagues. Minority faculty report less support from mentors for developing specific projects and skills than white faculty report from their mentors (Olsen, 1991). Some researchers have found that minority faculty members have been asked to spend a disproportionate amount of time on teaching and committee work (Blackwell, 1988). Faculty-of-color also experience unusual demands from students regarding teaching and advising (Banks, 1984). Female faculty-of-color continue to battle sexism and racism (Turner & Thompson, 1993).

The New Faculty Project is an initiative of the National Center for Postsecondary Teaching, Learning and Assessment, centered at Pennsylvania State University. In 1991, the project staff sent 229 surveys to all newly hired, tenure-track faculty at five institutions: a Research-I University, a Comprehensive-I University, two Liberal Arts colleges, and a community college system. The survey contains questions about the background and experiences of new hires regarding job satisfaction, work environment, teaching beliefs, assumptions about students, collegiality, mentoring, stress, career success, and workload. There were 177 completed surveys received from faculty for a response rate of 79 percent. Thirty-seven of the 177 respondents were faculty of color, they are 7 African Americans, 16 Latinos, and 14 Asian Americans.

A subset of the surveyed faculty was interviewed. The structured, open-ended interview allowed faculty to elaborate on institutional processes and support, and interactions with colleagues. Twenty-one of the 37 faculty-of-color were interviewed: four African Americans, nine Latinos and eight Asian Americans.

The following experiences of newly hired faculty-of-color were examined:

- the hiring process,
- support from colleagues and the institution,
- allocation of work time, and
- stress level and stressors.

Collegiality and relationships with mentors play an important role in the lives of faculty. Faculty-of-color rated the quality of collegiality at their respective institutions at a mean of 7.7 (10 is high). This did not differ from white faculty members' rating of collegiality. Contrary to previous research, this sample of minority faculty received just as much support from mentors as their white colleagues. Minority faculty rate their satisfaction with mentoring at 8.7.

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

More than half of the interviewees mentioned that they were hired because of their training, experience and background. However, thirty-eight percent of the interviewed respondents acknowledged that they were hired because of their experience and because of their minority status. For example, a Mexican American faculty member said, "They hired me because they liked what they saw in my mock teaching session. But I'm not naive. They have an emphasis on internationalizing." Another minority reported. "I have a track record in publishing. They needed a minority candidate and I agreed to be considered that way."

For the most part, minority faculty and white faculty did not differ in the way they allocated their work time toward their different roles. There were two exceptions. First, at the community college, faculty-of-color perceive that their institution expects them to spend an average of 78% of their time on teaching while white faculty in the same institution perceive that they are expected to spend 64 percent of their time on teaching. Second, at the four-year institutions, faculty-of-color preferred to spend less time on service than their white colleagues.

In general, faculty-of-color experienced most of their stress from research and teaching demands. Two interviewed faculty mentioned that some stress could be attributed to their membership in a minority group. An Asian American professor who co-taught a course in the Afro-American department experienced allegations of racism. A non-native English-speaking professor said he was experiencing stress due to the difficulty in communicating with students.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Hiring Process. Although over one-third of the interviewed faculty acknowledged that their membership in a minority group may have been one reason they were hired, they also said that they had special skills or perspectives that filled a need within the hiring department. These faculty are confident that they were the best candidates for the job.

Institutions should continue to do thorough national searches to find those minority candidates that best fit the needs of the department.

Support from Colleagues and Mentors. The two-thirds of the surveyed faculty who do not have mentors desire such a relationship and may benefit from one. Institutions can do more to match new faculty-of-color with mentors.

Mentors need not be the same gender, race or ethnicity as the faculty member for the relationship to be an effective one; it is more important that new faculty receive the support and resources needed to manage their new jobs.

Allocation of Work Time. At the community college, faculty-of-color believe that their institution expects them to spend more time on teaching than is expected of their white colleagues. This would be consistent with previous research that minority faculty members are asked to spend a disproportionate amount of time on teaching. (Teaching is defined as time spent in the classroom, preparing for class, advising and grading student work.)

Institutions should recognize that such demands may be an additional source of stress for faculty-of-color.

Stress. Research and teaching demands cause the most stress in faculty-of-color. White faculty also experience most of their stress from these sources. But some faculty-of-color experience unique stress.

Leaders at institutions need to be aware of such unique experiences and to ensure that all faculty are provided the resources needed to deal with such stresses.

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