

The Evolving Nexus of Diversity: Ethnic Minority Faculty Views on Workload and Productivity

By Henry Lee Allen

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Ethnic minority faculty members, like most professors in this postindustrial society, lead stressful lives. They pursue their academic duties while locating themselves within ethnically stratified social systems.¹ This group is not monolithic; it incorporates historic ethnic groups, recent immigrants, and naturalized citizens with different socialization and migratory journeys.² Group members pursue diverse academic interests, and differ in age distributions and political ideologies. Complexity intersects dynamically with diversity.³

The momentum for ethnic studies has waned or morphed into postmodern iterations on many campuses. A generation after virulent battles over affirmative action and alleged reverse discrimination, the nation does not view the plight of minority faculty members as a significant national priority. Multiculturalism has tacit acceptance, though American higher education remains substantially imprinted with European antecedents and the demographic traditions emanating from its predecessors. Most “white” professors underestimate the stresses faced by minority colleagues, and disproportionately—sometimes naively—affect the cultural informalities and organizational milieus of most colleges and universities. Ethnic minority faculty must constantly negoti-

ate the social boundaries of this terrain at a structural demographic disadvantage.⁴

The toxic vestiges of prejudice, discrimination, xenophobia, and ethnic antagonism persist, though now in more subtle or pernicious forms.⁵ Students and colleagues alike—majority white or ethnic minority—may question the credentials, competencies, viewpoints, scholarship, and pedagogy of minority faculty. These colleagues are often torn between involvement with students and the pressures of seeking tenure or meeting professional obligations. Ideological pressures or sanctions within or across groups can lead to divided loyalties, contingent coalitions, and structural alienation. Some ethnic minority faculty members thrive as public intellectuals and popular teachers; they are often visible in key media markets. Others attract attention only when their views upset conventional wisdom. We then hear about these colleagues from bystanders and pundits.⁶

More attention is finally turning to the ethnic diversity of professors, because they will educate an increasingly diverse student body. How do ethnic minority faculty members view their workload, productivity, and tenure prospects? What do their experiences teach us about academic work? What are their views about the changes affecting higher education,

such as immigration, privatization, and corporatization? How do they balance teaching, research, administration, and public service? This article answers these crucial questions by exploring their work experiences. We summarize key themes and findings concerning ethnic minority faculty. We then analyze relevant survey data from the 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF: 04) to determine how institutional type, academic discipline, employment status, age, and tenure shape the workload and productivity of ethnic minority faculty members.

Third, we analyze qualitative data from focus groups, the author's ethnographic observations, and from informal interviews.⁷ Fourth, we consider the theoretical, methodological, policy, and practical implications of our findings. The aim is to see academic work from the vantage point of ethnic minority faculty, a resilient generation of professorial pioneers in the diversification of American higher education. Ethnicity matters, we conclude, in unpredictable ways.⁸

We will report the results of this large, complex investigation in two articles. This essay discusses the ecology and context of ethnic minority faculty as they pursue their academic tasks. It highlights many vivid cases and anecdotes to give flesh to the skeletal data provided in survey research.⁹ The second essay, to appear in the *NEA 2008 Almanac of Higher Education*, will provide empirical results obtained from the focus groups.

THE PLIGHT OF ETHNIC MINORITY FACULTY

The social factors and exchanges affecting organizational life, dissected by sociologist Peter M. Blau, apply to the career experiences of ethnic minority faculty.¹⁰ Blau showed how status distinctions permeate the inter- and intragroup processes that produce differentiation and integration in all social institutions. He uncovered how dominant ethnic groups use their higher prestige, indigenous advantages, and more powerful networks in social and political exchanges with subordinate groups.¹¹ Tensions ensue as universalistic and particularistic norms clash in social interactions. Power, expressed in formal protocols or informal dictates, is brought into play. No mystery here.

Social exchanges based upon mutual attraction and intergroup cooperation result in cohesion and solidarity. Maximized productivity also requires reciprocity, trust, and legitimacy within and between

social groups. Population heterogeneity and social disparities, Blau recognized, affect the structural context of opportunity in any social system.¹² The greater the diversity, inequality, and complexity, the greater the organizational stresses. In turn, these stresses affect faculty recruitment, the tenure process, promotion, publication rates, and prestige. Sadly, sociological illiteracy pervades these institutional and professional rites of passage all too frequently.

Ethnic minority faculty must cope with these organizational dynamics whether at hostile or friendly campuses. Such pressures, coupled with excessive workloads, can produce disengagement, marginalization, alienation, anomie, aggression, and apathy. Moreover, minority faculty must locate their professional identities along an "assimilation to pluralism" continuum.¹³ Assimilation involves minimizing or relinquishing distinctive ethnic identities to blend in with the dictates of the majority; pluralism entails accentuating elements of their own cultural and social heritage.

When successful, ethnic minority faculty members are the key to the future of American higher education. But achieving success requires achievements across three social dimensions:

- Competence in adjudicating, communicating, and implementing the dominant norms of majority culture via assimilation at some linguistic or interpersonal level;
- Developing their self-concept and sense of efficacy within their ethnic domains; and
- Creatively mapping points of intersection between these potentially turbulent social realms—depending on their expertise and experiences.

Most ethnic minority faculty maintain cordial professional relations with their majority colleagues, but their ultimate interests can diverge sharply. Ethnic stratification often permits ethnic majority faculty to "free-ride" or ignore the rigorous demands of such behavioral knowledge.¹⁴

Absent effective coalitions, primordial differences in ethnic social capital among professors can conceal minority perspectives. Majority "white" faculty members rarely acquire the tangible "between-groups" expertise required to understand the plight of ethnic minority faculty.¹⁵ Having few structural incentives to develop this expertise, most majority faculty members have difficulty escaping ethnocentric bias. Ethnic problems can fester, as the "cognitive capital" of some professors is embedded in the glories and imperfections of past cultural traditions, even as oth-

ers study the dynamics of current structures, and yet others imagine future transformations. The academy treads upon an ethnic Babylon as the academic division of labor evolves.

ETHNIC MINORITY FACULTY AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Ethnic stratification influences the academic division of labor. Several national surveys have demonstrated that ethnic minority faculty members remain differently distributed throughout the academic landscape.

The highest proportion of ethnic minority professors with full-time academic appointments consists of Asian American faculty members. This finding occurs across all institutional types—nearly nine percent of all full-time professors, 12 percent of full-time positions in public and private doctoral institutions, and almost four percent of part-time appointments across all institutions.¹⁶ Asian American professors are distributed disproportionately in these academic programs: engineering (22 percent), natural sciences (16 percent), business (14 percent), and health sciences (12 percent). Even among part-time positions, Asian American faculty also dominate the ethnic minority faculty ranks—13 percent in engineering, nine percent in health sciences, and eight percent in natural sciences. This group leads the way in diversifying the ranks of the academic professions.

African American faculty members have also made significant strides since the advent of affirmative action—now constituting six percent of all full-time and part-time faculty across all types of institutions. They represent slightly more than seven percent of all social scientists and hold nearly seven percent of full-time positions in education. Whereas Asian American faculty are disproportionately located in public and private doctoral institutions, African American faculty are concentrated in public master's colleges and universities (nine percent), public community colleges (seven percent), and private undergraduate institutions such as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) (seven percent). African Americans occupy more than five percent of full-time appointments at every type of academic institution except private doctoral universities (four percent). These data reveal a significant shift away from the historic pattern of employment in HBCUs.

Hispanic American faculty members are disproportionately located in full-time faculty positions within community colleges (six percent), with

modest proportions across other institutions (less than four percent). Their greatest concentration occurs in the humanities and social sciences (four percent each), followed by education (three percent). Native American faculty members have yet to attain significant statistical representation.

“White” faculty members, meanwhile, occupy more than 75 out of 100 full-time faculty roles across all types of institutions, and at least 70 out of 100 positions in every major academic discipline. The methodological assumptions and techniques of current studies have obscured ethnic differentiation among “white” faculty. Structural parameters, not merit, circumscribe the prevailing norms in the academic division of labor.¹⁷ Table 1 summarizes patterns of ethnic differentiation (excluding “whites”) in the academic profession.

These aspects of structural differentiation provide a context for different ethnic interests and agendas within the academy. Many scholars recognize how the formation and maintenance of effective, sustainable social networks affect outcomes within and outside organizational boundaries.¹⁸ These networks are the social mechanisms that mediate patterns of mentorship and sponsorship. The present ethnic stratification will shape future generations of faculty unless improvements in educational quality are rapidly diffused among ethnic minority students.¹⁹ We hope for new profiles in courage in a period dominated by terrorism, conservatism, jingoism, hedonism, and petty politics.²⁰

ETHNICITY AND ACADEMIC WORK

Einstein recognized that not everything that counts can be counted and that not everything that can be counted counts. What do these statistical trends imply about how ethnic minority faculty members engage academic work? How does the disproportionate location of ethnic minority faculty members in specific departments and disciplines influence patterns of interaction and differentiation?

This author obtained ethnographic data on these questions during conference meetings and informal interviews at locations throughout the nation.²¹ The intensity of faculty responses varies considerably. Some faculty members are militant in their ethnic identities or cultural styles; others rarely distinguish themselves from the cultural majority in tastes, values, and relationships. But most faculty members harbor mixed, negotiated, or contingent ethnic identities.

Table 1. Patterns of Ethnic Differentiation in U.S. Postsecondary Faculty

| Ethnicity | Modal Institutional Location | Proportion in Modal Institutional Location | Modal Discipline | Proportion in Modal Discipline |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Asian American | Private not-for-profit doctoral | 12.3% | Engineering | 21.7% |
| | Public doctoral | 12.2 | Natural Sciences | 15.7 |
| | Public master's | 7.2 | Business | 13.9 |
| African American | Public master's | 8.6 | Social Sciences | 7.4 |
| | Public associate's | 6.9 | Miscellaneous fields | 7.3 |
| | Private not-for-profit bachelors | 6.6 | Education | 6.6 |
| Hispanic American | Public associate's | 5.9 | Humanities | 4.4 |
| | Public master's | 3.7 | Social Sciences | 4.0 |
| | Private not-for-profit doctoral | 3.3 | Education | 3.3 |
| Native American | Not available | Not available | Not available | Not available |

Source: 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF: 04).

Like all faculty, minority professors are subject to increased scrutiny via extensive professional evaluations, program assessment, and student enrollment requirements. They must keep up with the latest technological and pedagogical innovations; conduct classes, and grade papers. They must relate to students of diverse ethnicities, including many immigrants. They must also interact with faculty colleagues, administrative staff, and benefactors. Institutional mission (teaching versus research, for example), academic discipline, rank, and experience shape these interactions. Ethnic minority faculty members are often first-generation scholars who struggle daily with excessive workloads, family demands, civic engagement, political issues, salaries, and healthcare. They are overwhelmed, in short, by the joys and demands of academic life.

EXTERNAL MATTERS

Much of academe, ethnic minority faculty members note, lacks a positive, coherent, and constructive vision about faculty diversity. Many ethnic minority faculty are concerned about the malaise that inhibits the recruiting of the successor generation—the so-called “pipeline problem.” They express concern about the attractiveness of academic careers, especially where few minority faculty members are present. Some respondents express frustration over the rate or pace of faculty hiring in departments with no minority representation. Many institutions, they add,

develop amnesia about developing the networking and mentoring ties that facilitate the trust relations needed to recruit other faculty.²²

The urgent need for minority scientists continues unabated. Table 2 shows how African American faculty members have fared among the faculty ranks at research universities between 1999 and 2005. Tenure rates vary from 5.4 percent at Emory University and the University of Michigan to one percent at the University of Notre Dame. These results—also typical of elite liberal arts colleges—represent four decades of affirmative action and organizational capital.

Minority faculty are concerned about the structural mismatch or disconnect between student diversity at community colleges and the need for faculty diversity at doctoral institutions. They worry over the costs of graduate education, retention rates for minority students, and funding for higher education. As they age, they are concerned about the costs of retirement and healthcare. A prominent social researcher, who retired prematurely because of a massive stroke, said that the extraordinary stresses she faced as a minority dean—the first ever at her campus—contributed to her declining health. Her ideas, she added, were ignored or disrespected in meetings. Despite her scholarly reputation, her workload was infused with mundane tasks that less senior “white” faculty refused to tackle. Charged, when recruited, with reforming traditional procedures, most colleagues, majority or minority, developed a code of

Table 2. Change in Percentage of Full-Time Black Faculty at Research Universities, 1999–2005

| Institution | 1999 | 2002 | 2005 | Change: 1999–2005 |
|--|------|------|------|-------------------|
| Vanderbilt University | 2.2% | 3.1% | 4.3% | +2.1% |
| Northwestern University | 2.7 | 2.0 | 4.4 | +1.7 |
| University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill | 4.1 | 4.4 | 5.7 | +1.6 |
| Carnegie Mellon University | 1.7 | 1.6 | 3.0 | +1.3 |
| Washington University | 2.6 | 3.4 | 3.9 | +1.3 |
| Johns Hopkins University | 2.9 | 3.5 | 3.9 | +1.0 |
| Princeton University | 2.0 | 2.3 | 3.0 | +1.0 |
| Harvard University | 2.2 | 2.7 | 3.1 | +0.9 |
| California Institute of Technology | 0.6 | 0.6 | 1.4 | +0.8 |
| Brown University | 3.3 | 3.7 | 4.0 | +0.7 |
| Cornell University | 2.7 | 3.3 | 3.4 | +0.7 |
| Stanford University | 2.6 | 2.6 | 3.2 | +0.6 |
| University of Pennsylvania | 2.6 | 3.2 | 3.2 | +0.6 |
| Yale University | 2.7 | 2.8 | 3.2 | +0.5 |
| University of Chicago | 2.4 | 2.7 | 2.8 | +0.4 |
| Duke University | 3.6 | 3.7 | 3.9 | +0.3 |
| University of Michigan | 4.8 | 4.7 | 5.1 | +0.3 |
| Georgetown University | 4.5 | 3.7 | 4.6 | +0.1 |
| University of Notre Dame | 2.2 | 2.8 | 2.3 | +0.1 |
| Dartmouth College | 4.1 | 3.2 | 4.1 | 0.0 |
| Massachusetts Institute of Technology | 2.9 | 3.0 | 2.9 | 0.0 |
| University of Virginia | 3.0 | 3.2 | 3.0 | 0.0 |
| Rice University | 2.0 | 2.1 | 1.5 | -0.5 |
| Columbia University | 7.2 | 7.2 | 6.4 | -0.8 |
| University of California-Berkeley | 3.1 | 2.9 | 2.1 | -1.0 |
| Emory University | 7.1 | 6.9 | 5.2 | -1.9 |

Source: *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 48 (Summer 2005), 79.

silence about the organizational intrigues affecting her. Another faculty member on the same campus, known for his mild tendencies toward assimilation, had a heart attack; his cardiologist cited his hectic workload as a contributing factor. Many other psychological and health-related disorders are likely to occur as long as ethnic minority faculty—with their excessive workloads, aging, and informal social pressures—remain scarce.

INTERNAL MATTERS

Minority faculty can face catastrophic levels of stress that affect their health and psychic well being, caused by unhealthy organizational environments.²³ In a recent consultation of minority faculty, most faculty members cried persistently as they described the enormous pressures they routinely face, above and beyond normal classroom activities. Such stress can

impair a person's immune system.²⁴ Stress grows as they are ignored, undermined, misunderstood, and segregated from the informal networks that create coalitions and decisions that produce departmental or institutional policies. They disdain tokenism, situations in which their individual professional dignity is obscured to make the institution look good publicly while their professional voices are not included in making institutional decisions about minority concerns and regular matters.

All ethnic minority faculty are concerned about instructing in this postmodern generation. One professor from a premier private research university in the South reported about how he and his ethnic minority colleagues were ignored or subverted by administrators during a nationally publicized campus scandal involving undergraduate students. Several resignations occurred in the wake of this insult. This

same professor then described faculty politics where his “white” faculty colleagues conspired against him to undermine his successes.

Many minority faculty are concerned about the post-affirmative action social climate in which they pursue their work, especially academic freedom, tenure decisions, teaching, publishing, administrative work, departmental politics, and institutional governance. A faculty member at an undergraduate liberal arts college was denied tenure despite publishing two prominent books and several articles, and demonstrating outstanding teaching and administrative service. The tenure denial, many ethnic minority faculty suspect, occurred as retaliation for his liberal political activism, as opposition to the dominant ethnic order, and as a reprisal for his position on a visit by a head of state.

Many professors reported the devaluation of their scholarship and pedagogical strategies, especially if they differed from majority norms or expectations. Others want to move beyond ethnic issues. Respondents offered many examples of how less qualified “white” faculty (measured by degree prestige and by experience) used their social connections to obtain promotions and opportunities.²⁵ For example, a Hispanic American faculty member at a prestigious liberal arts college who had served on the graduate faculty of his institution and as an administrator was the only candidate in his category to receive a “modified” tenure appointment, despite an exemplary workload and performance record. Insulted, this professor left for a position at another institution that harnessed his extraordinary abilities to assist the matriculation of Hispanic students—at double the income!

Another faculty colleague from a Midwest public research university discussed her isolation from the social networks that facilitated publications in journals, fearing that this marginalization might jeopardize her promotion to full professor. Women ethnic minority faculty spoke repeatedly about glass ceilings and about isolation from male power networks. All women faculty believed they faced a stacked deck in the tenure and promotion process. Male faculty concurred. The archaic secrecy of this process can cover up interpersonal antipathies, political conflicts, and power dynamics under the guise of due process.

Many ethnic minority faculty expressed concern about informal censorship by students, colleagues, and the public in this age of terrorism. One young Asian American historian, specializing in Japan, China, Korea, and Indo-China, confided that under-

graduates regularly offer racist comments about his teaching. Students, reported a Hispanic American social scientist, gave negative ratings to his teaching on race relations because they objected to his lectures on immigration. Many students expressed antagonism when an instructor mentioned the institutionalized social injustices occurring during the crisis in New Orleans caused by flooding in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Some courageous faculty members faced informal sanctions—disrespect, isolation, alienation, and sabotage—when they taught about the ideological and practical myths that are incorporated within popular culture, media representations, and university scholarship. Being a gadfly about ethnic stratification and political abuses is not sexy! It may not be the preferred type of patriotism in an era where superficial thinking or postmodern rhetoric obscures the search for truth.

IMPLICATIONS

These descriptions are consistent with previous research on ethnic minority faculty.²⁶ But how can ethnic minority faculty members cope with the contextual pressures of academic work? What else is salient? What is the union role in addressing their professional concerns? These questions require further research.

Against enormous odds, ethnic minority faculty members work extremely hard; often risking their health for the life of the mind. Some are privileged; many are less fortunate. None should be demonized, nor should their experiences be unduly romanticized. Most are satisfied with their lot as scholars or teachers. But future research must better specify the social networks or invisible colleges influencing their career experiences—and expose the myth of equality of opportunity. This research must include agent-based computational models as well as traditional methods.

Opportunities to nurture and enrich minority faculty careers must become a national and institutional priority. Unions, professional associations, and philanthropic agencies must invest heavily in the social capital and professionalism of these professors. Strategic planning is axiomatic in such endeavors.

CONCLUSION

Social networks and exchanges, sociologists have long surmised, produce the decisions and policies emanating from the resultant social structures.²⁷ All institutional changes are rooted in these structural parameters, even

when markets subsequently accentuate these phenomena.²⁸ A nation priding itself on world democratic leadership cannot tolerate a postsecondary educational system that minimizes ethnic diversity in its professoriate. The pain and pathos, frustrations and hopes of ethnic minority faculty members are real—even if systematically ignored. Yet, most ethnic minority faculty see themselves as trailblazers for future generations along the academic frontier. More dilemmas of diversity for the academic profession lie ahead.

NOTES

¹ Doob, 1999.

² Higginbotham and Andersen, 2006.

³ Feagin and Feagin, 1993.

⁴ Doob, 1999.

⁵ Rothenberg, 2001.

⁶ A media representative on a popular talk show recently asked this author to comment on the radical viewpoints expressed by an ethnic minority faculty member at a distant campus in a different academic discipline. I was away from my office at the time of the request.

⁷ We obtained the qualitative data from focus groups at locations around the nation. One data set came from a workshop involving nearly 30 ethnic minority faculty members at the National Education Association's 2005 Higher Education Conference. We also interviewed four male and ten female professors during a national conference of African American faculty members. A third source: a designated meeting of 12 ethnic minority faculty on my campus.

⁸ Lelyveld, 2001.

⁹ I use only essential identifying characteristics, to protect the identities of respondents.

¹⁰ Blau, 1964.

¹¹ See Jones, 2005, for example.

¹² Blau, 1994.

¹³ Wright and Tierney, 1998.

¹⁴ Thierry and Banaji, 2003.

¹⁵ Savit, Manuca, Li, and Riolo, 2004.

¹⁶ Allen, 2006.

¹⁷ Blau, 1994.

¹⁸ Buchanan, 2002.

¹⁹ Kozol, 2005.

²⁰ Lynn and Salzman, 2006.

²¹ One data set came from a workshop involving nearly 30 ethnic minority faculty members at the National Education Association's 2005 Higher Education Conference. We also interviewed four male and ten female professors during a

national conference of African American faculty members. The third source was a designated meeting of 12 ethnic minority faculty on my campus.

²² Jones, 2005; American Council on Education, 2004.

Where relevant, I include inferences made by administrators with faculty status.

²³ McEwen, 2001.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jones, 2005.

²⁶ Frierson, 1997; Turner, Garcia, Nora, and Rendon (eds.), 1996; Padilla and Chavez, 1995; Cheatham, 1991.

²⁷ Blau, 1964; Coleman, 1990.

²⁸ Simon, 2000.

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