Workload and Productivity: Strategic Views of Unionized Ethnic-Minority Faculty

By Henry Lee Allen

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The shortsightedness and ethnocentrism of policymakers, many ethnic-minority faculty members fear, have jeopardized possibilities for multicultural campuses. Blinded by seemingly urgent, but in reality transient matters, institutional leaders ignore the need for long-term capital investment in academic employment. Societies rise or decline, these faculty members add, based on the expertise they generate and transmit across generations. Contingent academic labor—many ethnic-minority scholars fear this fate—portends a contingent nation.

Several *NEA Almanac* authors show how ecological forces led to the restructuring of organizations, markets, academic careers, and finances—for the worse. Higher education faces organizational restructuring, observes sociologist Gary Rhoades. The instrumental dictates of academic capitalism, he notes, undermine the implicit social contract established between citizens and public higher education. Market forces, adds John Lee, an expert on faculty compensation, restructure salaries within areas of study and among institutions. Preparations for retirement, notes Valerie Conley, restructure the contours of academic careers. State financing, William Zumeta reports, has restructured policies in public higher education. In addition, the appearance of ethnic-minority faculty on formerly homogeneous campuses portends the demographic restructuring of the academic professions.[1]

Faculty members from majority "white" groups may have trouble grasping the complexities of restructuring.[2] This is more so for ethnic-minority faculty. Pioneers for faculty careers in a more diverse United States, these colleagues face pressures unnoticed by others.[3] This article examines the views of *unionized* ethnic-minority faculty on issues related to workload and productivity in this changing environment.

Ethnic-Minority Faculty in the U.S. Academic System

Faculty diversity can benefit a campus under appropriate, receptive conditions.[4] Ethnic-minority professors can contest ethnocentrism, limited theoretical notions, biased historical interpretations, distorted presuppositions, and naïve policy assertions. They can expand student intellectual horizons and social experiences. Even conflicts can generate new challenges and innovative solutions.

One quantitative study examined the potential and challenges of diversity in schools, firms, and communities.[5] The empirical findings included:

- Diverse perspectives and tools enable collections of people to find more and better solutions and contribute to overall productivity.
- Diverse predictive models enable crowds of people to predict values accurately.
- Diverse fundamental preferences frustrate the process of making choices.
- Diverse identities bring diverse perspectives.
- Diverse perspectives, interpretations, heuristics, and predictive models matter more than any one person's capacities in producing innovations and solutions to complex problems. In short, group diversity trumps individual ability.

Social systems that adapt to diverse inputs, the study concluded, produce new levels of innovation.[6] Cognitive diversity is productive when nurtured by proper leadership and by adequate support in schools, firms, and societies. We are just beginning to explore the implications of these findings for ethnic-minority faculty and students in postsecondary education.

What structural ramifications face all professors?[7] Two observers produced this list: a chronic, depressed job market in traditional arts and sciences, recruitment and retention of scholars, withering fields of study, the undermining of academic freedom, the unbundling of faculty tasks, and other labor market bifurcations. These observers suggest interviews and small-scale case studies to augment their quantitative tabulations about the restructuring of academic work.[8] As for faculty diversity, they note:[9]

> There are a host of questions about the scope and dynamics of truly diverse academic communities that need to be addressed. One issue is the matter of unit of analysis. To what extent is diversity a characteristic of academic programs, academic departments, schools within universities, and entire colleges and universities? Can an academic unit support diversity within a larger organization that does not? What about diversity as a characteristic of academic fields? At each level of analysis, how is diversity reflected in the student body, the instructional staff, the administrative staff? What does it mean to support diversity? At what point does the presence of diversity—whether in race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, language, or political persuasion—translate into what one might consider to be a truly open and tolerant community, for minority as well as majority members?

There are issues to be addressed regarding faculty, students, and their interactions. What does it mean to truly support diversity in the academic workplace? Last year's *Almanac* published the results of a qualitative study of the workload and productivity concerns affecting *non-unionized* ethnic-minority faculty members.[10] Table 1 lists key findings from informal interviews and ethnographic observations. The left column lists general concerns; the right column summarizes the specific manifestations of those issues.[11]

Let's summarize the key findings. Differential institutional patterns and career paths produce faculty diversity: the type of college and the regional location matter. The composition and experiences of minority groups differ. Stress levels vary among ethnic-minority faculty, due to exogenous societal pressures and to structural

relations or organizational cultures on campus. Intergenerational differences may include ideological and experiential divergences between indigenous minorities and recently naturalized faculty. Gender issues may reflect diverse ethnic sojourns.[12]

Perhaps the most salient finding to emerge from this research is the high level of acute or catastrophic stress experienced by ethnic-minority faculty. Recent studies of academic work explore the impact of dangerous levels of stress in the lives of all faculty members.[13] Ethnic-minority professors also face normal career pressures—finances, tenure, family, and society—and escalating tasks of academic work. But isolation in academic departments, and subtle ethnocentrism or racism may escalate this stress.[14]

Stress, another study notes,[15] affects productivity and health:

- Toxic relationships affect stress.[16]
- Stress is a major risk factor for disease and death.
- Prolonged stress elevates cortisol—"stress hormone"—levels to where it impairs the immune system, harms memory, and contributes to cardiovascular disease.[17]
- Allostatic load can cause cells to decay.[18]
- The lower the position in an organization, the higher the levels of cardiovascular disease.[19]

Table 1. Key Workload and Productivity Concerns: Non-unionized Ethnic-Minority Faculty

General Concerns Related to Diversity Expressed by Ethnic-Minority Faculty	Specific Issues Facing Non-unionized Ethnic-Minority Faculty
Economic insecurity, coupled with fear of terrorism and crime	Catastrophic stress imposed by teaching, publications, and marriage and family
Post-affirmative action backlash	Competitive overload/assessment pressures and protocols
Resurgence of overt racist incidents	Tenure and promotion stresses
Faculty bashing over curriculum, assessment, and tenure	Financial stress (e.g., repaying loans)
Contingent labor (turf wars between full and part-time faculty)	Organizational/interpersonal stress in departments (climate)
Structural or ecological tipping points (community colleges)	Faculty politics, prestige, disrespect
The affordability crisis/excessive school debt	Research funding
Technological imperatives (keeping up)	Intergenerational changes within and between minority faculty (ideology)
Leadership crisis (few overt champions of faculty diversity on many campuses)	Aging of civil rights generation
Lack of an affirmative and engaging vision for higher education	Concern about the pipeline problem
Questions of competence (the qualified minority syndrome)	Technological pressures
Associating diversity with lower academic standards or rigor	Different disciplinary pathways
	Lack of leadership in recruiting minority faculty at research universities
	Exit strategies/faculty disengaging from campus activities beyond designated workload

Source: Allen, 2007.

- The lonelier a person feels, the poorer the immune and cardiovascular functions.[20]
- Medical research links toxic relationships to heart disease.[21]
- Stress symptoms might include frequent colds, fear and anxiety attacks, and an inability to sleep well.[22] Domestic abuse, addictions, cheating, and deviant sexual escapades may result from denying or failing to cope effectively with stress.[23]
- Stress sometimes causes important gender disparities in health outcomes.[24]

UNIONS AND ETHNIC-MINORITY FACULTY

Qualitative data suggests that unionized faculty can have the advantage of a sharper, more contextualized view of the vicissitudes of academic work. Unions can provide significant health advantages to their members if they manage or prevent toxic relationships within colleges and universities.[25] Table 2 displays the concerns of unionized ethnic-minority faculty regarding workload and productivity. These results were obtained from direct interviews with a focus group of national union leaders and from observing strategy meetings, symposia, and conferences organized for unionized ethnic-minority faculty in 2007.[26] The leaders attending the focus group were asked:

- What are the most important issues or concerns you face in your academic work, in your workload, or regarding your productivity as a faculty member?
- What must be done to address each of the issues and concerns you just cited?
- What do you think about the future of ethnic-minority faculty, given your experiences?
- Assuming no limits, how may institutions best assist ethnic-minority faculty as they enter and pursue academic careers?

Informal conversations helped to clarify the context of the remarks summarized in Table 2.

Like most professors, unionized ethnic-minority faculty leaders want to be heard by their colleagues, academic administrators, students, and policymakers. They want respect and rewards for their work—even if that work differs from mainstream or dominant agendas. Tired of serving as token representatives on too many committees, they advocate recruiting more minority professors to share the institutional burdens. But, they add, institutions too often engage in the rhetoric of diversity without assuring tangible results. Unionized ethnic-minority faculty leaders reiterate concerns about the pipeline problem. They see a climate in which search committees have minimal accountability, colleagues repeat popular ethnocentric stereotypes, and policymakers ignore their plight.

Many campus leaders, seemingly indifferent to the struggles of ethnic-minority faculty, avoid discussing racially sensitive matters. Often, it seems that these colleagues receive attention only when public scrutiny or humiliation exposes their private struggles. Some professors routinely encounter, but fail to report racist antipathies. Declining state funding can reduce already feeble efforts to bolster minority faculty recruitment at historically white colleges and universities. Meanwhile, inadequate funding jeopardizes the future of many historically black colleges and universities.

Unionized ethnic-minority faculty members seek opportunities for community engagement and urge that the tenure process reward community-based research. They also desire increased funding to mentor minority students in high school in depressed communities. Many first-generation faculty members—themselves rescued from poverty and illiteracy—know the benefits of postsecondary education, especially advanced degrees. They enjoy teaching students from varied social backgrounds. As they age, many are tired of trying to bridge the gaps between campus traditions and minority constituencies. They urge their unions to become even more engaged, proactive advocates for minority faculty concerns, even as they recognize general threats to faculty autonomy.

Table 2. Workload and Productivity Concerns of Union Leaders

Having our voices heard

Committee overload

Diminishing or stagnant numbers on campus (no desire for increase)

Rhetoric, not action regarding recruiting minority faculty

A disappointing climate

State funding

Opportunities for research

Concerns about the future of historically black colleges and universities

Exposing private struggles to public scrutiny

No accountability for search committees

Ideological battles over diversity

Racial inequalities in publicity, recognition, and rewards

Unions need to be more engaged and proactive on minority faculty concerns

Concern about pipeline problem and community access to postsecondary educational opportunities

Funding, funding, funding!

Minority faculty members need to be recruited like coaches recruit prized athletes

Running out of energy

Threats to faculty autonomy

Recognize the potential of minority faculty leadership

Need to take risks in recruiting minority faculty

Need to talk about racial issues/faculty diversity at multiple levels across campus

Recruit minority faculty by engaging communities in research

Source: Focus Group Interviews, 2007

When discussing tenure and promotion, rank-and-file union members support each other's struggle to persevere against institutional odds. Feeling overwhelmed by the demands of the tenure process, faculty women of color on one unionized campus started a dialogue about workload, race, and minority professor retention. Their solution: increased recruitment of ethnic-minority faculty, followed by a mentorship program sponsored by the institution. The college embraced their successful efforts. Awards for excellence now accrue, but only after a struggle for social justice and meaningful institutional change. Workshops, receptions, and meetings on workload, tenure, promotion, and productivity are now routine.

Union members began a fight against tokenism and excessive workloads on another campus by creating discussion forums. These forums also led to a mentorship program supporting teaching, research, and grant writing. The mentors urged unionized ethnic-minority faculty to avoid becoming "sidekicks" in departmental or institutional policy debates on their campuses. Neither an aggressive demeanor nor a passive tokenism is conducive to earning tenure, they noted. They advised younger colleagues to teach, publish, and render institutional service before becoming campus change agents. The women's and Latino caucuses brought fresh insights to balancing private life and work on this campus—to the point of attracting student notice.

Unionized ethnic-minority faculty members have pressed for changes in the traditional tenure process. Younger leaders are renegotiating barriers to tenure on key campuses. Viewing the "publish or perish syndrome" as unhealthy and outdated, they desire more effective outreach to future generations of minority students. Success, they argue, requires reduced faculty burnout and community alienation. Ernest Boyer's diverse approaches to academic work struck a chord with faculty who value community service, service learning, and outreach to undeserved minorities including women.[27] These minority professors are reconstructing the politics of survival in the academy.

Unionized faculty members are challenging bogus stereotypes about minorities and women, and are unafraid to accentuate caring and equity concerns. Tenure is less sacred than rigorous thinking and concerted retention efforts. White privilege is waning. Neither state policies, nor union-busting institutional activities and paternalism blocks the persistence of these battle-tested vanguards.

COMPARISON: UNIONIZED VS. NON-UNIONIZED FACULTY

How do unionized ethnic-minority faculty members conceptualize the social contours of their workloads and productivity in an era of restructuring? Unions matter, they believe, but they could matter a lot more. Studies contrasting unionized and non-unionized faculty suggest that a collective status orientation—exemplified by union organization—filters the structural impediments and market disparities affecting academic work. By contrast, efforts on behalf of non-unionized faculty are episodic and disjointed. The relative lack of systemic support for their professional affairs may raise stress toward catastrophic levels. Absent sufficient and recurrent coping mechanisms, isolated individuals may succumb when confronting overwhelming social forces.

We need to know more about:

- Ethnic-minority faculty identities across intergenerational cohorts and diversified social experiences (immigrant faculty, hip-hop generation, postmodernism).
- Unions and young faculty leaders.
- Diversity by discipline plus performance accountability.
- Diversity by organizational contexts (informal vs. formal).
- Diversity by sector (private vs. public) and institutional type.
- Diversity by employment status (full-time vs. part-time or contingent).
- Diversity by invisible colleges (social networks).
- Diversity by mentoring and sponsoring graduate programs.
- Diversity by labor markets (external and internal).

Mathematics of academic systems—their interconnected structures, networks, processes, and outcomes—could yield beneficial knowledge to the next generation of ethnic-minority faculty.[28] Probability theory, for example, allows scholars to compare probable labor market, publishing, remuneration, and tenure outcomes for ethnic-minority and majority faculty.[29] These investigations can take us beyond the algorithmic complexity typical of current computational and statistical studies.[30] Ripe for analysis are comparisons between unionized and non-unionized campuses, disciplines, and institutional climates and academic departments.

IMPLICATIONS

Perplexity stalks the academic professions for all postsecondary faculty, but ethnic-minority professors must shoulder additional, difficult burdens, not of their own making.[31] The academic career has multiple dimensions: discipline, professional association, and institution.[32] A recent study advocates research on the role strains experienced by university scientists as they pursue academic work along these

dimensions.[33] Scholars have studied how some famous academics addressed intersections, overlaps, and conflicts along these dimensions. A new biography of Einstein's life, work, foibles, achievements, and regressions is a benchmark for understanding the multidimensional complexity of academic lives.[34] Other examples include a new biography of Madame Curie,[35] and new study exploring how Nobel Laureates in scientific disciplines tenaciously pursued their discoveries across decades.[36]

These contributions take the humanity of faculty life far beyond the flat dimensionality of cross-sectional surveys. They display the creativity, nuances, contradictions, serendipities, and constant perplexities of academic work at its best. May their tribes increase. The public must understand the life of the mind to appreciate its intricate, mysterious beauty and its romance—beyond salaries, performance measurement, and bureaucratic technologies featuring pedantic aspects of the academic enterprise.

Quantitative studies of faculty work are likewise exploring new options. Scholars in New Zealand, for example, measure academic workload at eight public universities.[37] Table 3 below displays time allocations for teaching-related tasks. Important findings about faculty concerns in this innovative research include:

- "Respondents were relatively less satisfied with extrinsic rewards from their work such as their salary, chances for advancement, and the recognition received for good work. They were relatively more satisfied with intrinsic aspects such as flexibility, amount of responsibility, and variety in their jobs."[38]
- "Examination of the information submitted in the workload 'snapshots' revealed five main areas where work demands were perceived to be expanding: compliance requirements and information requests, administrative duties associated with the introduction of new systems and changes to University policies; increasing numbers of program and paper offerings; increased workload resulting from a variety of delivery modes supported by the University; and increasing demand for a longer teaching year (i.e., summer school)."[39]
- Respondents reported they worked considerably in excess of full-time.[40]
- Faculty valued equity and transparency in the allocation of their workloads.[41]
- "The interviews with staff identified a surprising lack of problem-solving or creative thinking by academics who, one would presume, would apply such skills to their disciplinary work—both teaching and research. During the review process, the taskforce interviewers had encouraged staff to suggest strategies and initiatives the unit had explored or might explore to enhance the use of the workloads model and contribute to the resolution of workload challenges. Feedback from the focus group meetings suggested that staff in some areas of the University had retreated to a 'culture of blame' stance rather than proactive problem-solving or advocacy to address difficulties in workloads management."[42]
- "There was little evidence in some areas that staff had attempted to resolve workloads pressures through reprioritization of tasks or refusing additional tasks where resources were already stretched. Instead, there was a tendency to blame another unit or system for their frustrations, absorb additional tasks at the expense of overall productivity, and become increasingly insular which, in turn, would further decrease effective communication towards solving problems."[43]

The study did not single out ethnic and racial minorities, but the findings resonate with these colleagues, and suggest the need for further study.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic-minority faculty will increasingly shape the future of higher education, assuming the demographic restructuring of academic employment continues, and could be a strategic niche for union leadership. We already have a viable

Table 3. Variations in Times Allocated to Teaching-Related Activities

Teaching Activity	Range of Time Allocations
Preparation of a new paper for internal use	50–100 hours
Preparation of a new study guide	40–360 hours
Major revision of a study guide	24–144 hours
Minor revision of a study guide	8–80 hours
Lecture preparation	1–11 hours per lecture
Tutorial preparation	0.5–4 hours per tutorial
Laboratory/practical preparation	1.5–15 hours per lab
Grading (100-200 level)	0.4–1.5 hours per student
Grading (300 level)	0.4–4 hours per student
Supervision (Masters): per year	20–67.5 hours per student
Supervision (Ph.D.): per year	16–92 hours per student
Supervision (research project): per year	6–45 hours per student
Paper coordination: per year	20–70 hours per paper
Program coordination: per year	50–270 hours per program

Source: Houston, Meyer, and Paewai, 2006.

agenda and relevant direction for unionized ethnic-minority faculty.[44] Union leaders must advocate constructive policies that empower these colleagues. On the top of the list: recruitment and retention, and training for leadership. Performance measurement, accountability, and cost-containment accompany intergenerational academic succession. This demographic restructuring is inevitable. The question is: who will lead or mislead this transition?

The success of minority faculty begs strong leadership that can address excessive workloads, inadequate resources, and the chronic stresses that may adversely affect faculty productivity.[45] Heeding the directions established by unionized ethnic-minority faculty benefits the college by producing a more satisfied workforce and by reducing healthcare costs, for example. Even more important, enlisting visionary leadership to bring hope to ethnic-minority faculty enables postsecondary education to achieve its full potential.

NOTES

[1] "The Systematic Restructuring of Employment in Higher Education: Patterns and Prospects," November 9, 2007, Association for the Study of Higher Education, Louisville, Kentucky.

[2] Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006.

[3] Allen, 2007.

[4] Page, 2007.

[5] Ibid., 13.

[6] Miller and Page, 2007.

[7] Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006, 340-341.

[8] Ibid., 355, 358.

[9] Ibid., 354.

[10] Allen, 2007. Qualitative methodology was selected to ascertain how actual ethnic-minority faculty (rather than more convenient statistical aggregations of disjointed individuals) viewed the meanings and contexts of events or transformations influencing their lives.

[11] See Allen, 2007 for a full explanation of these items.

[12] Allen, 2007.

[13] Boardman and Bozeman, 2007; Tytherleigh, Jacobs, Webb, Ricketts, and Cooper, 2007; Houston, Meyer, and Paewai, 2006.

[14] Other studies corroborate these findings: Stanley, 2006; Jaeger and Thornton, 2006; Jacobs and Winslow, 2004; Johnson, 2001; Olsen and Sage, 1995.

[15] Goleman, 2006.

[16] Ibid., 224.

[17] Ibid., 225.

[18] Ibid., 226.

[19] Ibid., 227.

[20] Ibid., 239.

[21] Ibid., 228.

[22] Ibid., 220-237.

[23] Ibid., 240-242.

[24] Ibid., 243-244.

[25] Ibid., 244-249.

[26] Efforts were made to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents.

[27] Boyer, 1990.

[28] Hunt 2007; Lindley 2006. Hewson, 2005, Siegfried, 2006, and Skyttner, 2007 suggest new mathematical paths for investigating the complexities of postsecondary education. Social scientists already capture such dynamics in other complex systems. See Buchanan, 2007.

[29] Byers, 2007 suggests a theoretical mathematics that incorporates ambiguity, paradox, contradictions, and conflicts as it develops new types of creative complexity.

[30] Miller and Page, 2007; Page 2007; Hedstrom, 2005; Sawyer, 2005.

[31] Altbach, 1991.

[32] Light, 1972.

[33] Boardman and Bozeman, 2007.

[34] Isaacson, 2007.

[35] Goldsmith, 2005.

[36] Lightman, 2006.

[37] Houston, Meyer, and Paewai, 2006.

[38] Ibid., 24.

[39] Ibid., 25.

[40] Ibid., 27.

[41] Ibid., 27.

[42] Ibid., 28.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006.

[45] Spalter-Roth and Erskine, 2007.

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