

Not a Rainbow Yet

Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success

By Caroline Sotello, Viernes Turner & Samuel L. Myers, Jr.,
Allyn & Bacon, New York, N.Y., 2000

Reviewed by David J. León

Professors Sotello, Turner, and Myers have written a book of great importance on a vital topic: minority professors in the university. Insights are everywhere, and as a faculty member of color, I read many passages that applied directly to my career. The book proceeds logically and persuasively, each chapter building on stones laid before. The authors have done solid research of their own, they use others' with mastery, and their first-rate, current bibliography adds further heft to their recommendations. If any college or university is unsure how to increase its faculty of color, its department chairs and administrators should read this book.

Three questions guided the authors' work: How underrepresented are faculty of color? What factors contribute to this underrepresentation? What do we know about possible solutions?

Their findings derive from a thorough study of African American, Asian Pacific American, American Indian, and Latino faculty in eight Midwestern states, using four basic approaches: econometrics analysis, interviews with individuals and groups, a survey of institutional faculty development, and a study of exemplary programs.

The conclusion: The data "not only reveals the continued underrepresentation of faculty of color in the nation's colleges and universities, but, equally significantly if more subtly, the persistence and the personal and professional effects of a decidedly chilly work environment."

Overt racism on campus has long gone underground, the authors note, and manifests itself mainly in "campus racial incidents, hate speech, and

hostility to multicultural curricula." Postsecondary institutions employ a number of tactics that hurt diversity, such as sending negative signals during interviews, continuing to use white male networks as a primary recruitment tool, and omitting minorities—especially tenured faculty of color free to voice their opinions—from search committees.

Retention is also a problem. Because minority professors tend not to belong to the informal networks of their departments, one of their most commonly reported difficulties is a sense of isolation. In addition, faculty of color face a Catch-22: They feel bound to serve on committees, but such service cuts their time for research, the typical focus of tenure review. The authors maintain that "faculty of color will continue to be pressed into additional services as long as they are so scarce," contending also that "they should be rewarded for their special contributions." Sotello, Turner, and Myers further argue that institutional racism is at work in higher education when "research on minority issues is not considered legitimate work, particularly if articles are published in journals that are not mainstream."

Is "chilly climate" an apt metaphor for the environment that confronts faculty of color in higher education? The authors note that the term fails to explain the discomfort faculty of color often feel in primarily white institutions that are "welcoming" rather than hostile. Instead, the authors characterize such faculty as "guests" and cite Daniels, who notes that "guests are not family, whose foibles and mistakes are tolerated. On the contrary, guests honor their hosts' customs without question, keep out of certain rooms of the house, and must always be on their best behavior."

The authors interviewed 55 faculty of color and held focus group interviews with nine more to learn how faculty of color perceived the workplace. The 64 participants included 11 Asian Americans, 28 African Americans, 14 Latinos, and 11 American Indians. Their average age was 46, and most were tenured. Both tenured and non-tenured faculty expressed the following concerns: denial of tenure or promotion because of race/ethnicity, expectations that they would work harder than whites, attention paid more to their color/ethnicity than their credentials, treatment as a token, little support or validation of research on minority issues, expectations that they would handle minority affairs, and paucity of minorities on campus.

Why do faculty of color stay in academia despite reporting condemnation and other difficulties? Among the foremost reasons are intellectual challenge, love of teaching, freedom to pursue research interests, and the opportunity to promote racial/ethnic understanding. Others include a supportive administrative leader (school dean or department chair), mentors, and the presence of other faculty of color in the workplace.

What can institutions do to improve the representation of faculty of

color in colleges and universities? The authors conclude that higher education must overcome its resistance to change despite overwhelming evidence that something is wrong. Institutions must abandon the “business as usual” approach to recruitment and retention of faculty of color to create authentic diversity and pluralism in higher education.

First, the authors contend that the lack of aggressive recruitment is a greater problem than failed retention. One article they cite argued that universities should cancel positions “when people of color are not in the candidate pool” and that the state should target funds for improving recruitment of faculty of color, institutions should hire more faculty of color as chief academic administrators, and more minorities should sit on the boards of trustees of institutions.

Sotello, Turner, and Myers recommend special orientation programs for new faculty of color, and the establishment of special seminars that focus on publishing and gaining tenure. They cite two very good videos—*Racism 101* and *Shattering of Silences*—which depict racism in America's colleges and universities. (I strongly suggest using these videos in the classroom as well.) The authors also recommend addressing workplace environment issues and fixing deficient promotion and tenure practices.

The book provides several minority-specific recommendations. For instance, because only 0.4 percent of full-time faculty in higher education is American Indian, the authors suggest “nurturing young, talented tribal members” to boost this exiguous figure. Hispanic faculty are relative newcomers to higher education and less than 3 percent of full-time faculty, so mentoring is critical to their success from undergraduate through graduate studies, as well as for junior faculty seeking tenure. Black female faculty still remain predominantly in the lower, non-tenured echelons, earn less, and receive promotions more slowly than their male and white counterparts. Hence the authors recommended redefining “scholarly activity” to place greater emphasis on teaching, service, and curriculum development.

Finally, the authors propose recognition and reward for the additional demands placed on faculty of color, for those faculty—often faculty of color—who may invest more of their time in teaching and service activities, and for the research of faculty of color.

This book's subtitle is *Bittersweet Success*, but the success of the book itself is unadulterated. Those interested in promoting faculty of color in higher education must read it. 

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