Retaining Black Women Faculty: Cultivating an Equitable Teaching Environment

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April 24, 2022

“To be Black, a woman and an academic is a metaphysical dilemma.”
(Chancellor, 2019, p. 187)

What We Know

▪ Inequities and discrimination are built into the systems and structures of higher education.
▪ Despite diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, many Black women faculty still face difficulties.
▪ These difficulties are many of the reasons why some Black women faculty leave the professoriate and/or the academy. However, many persist.

Phase 1

▪ We used existing data from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) to examine the experiences of Black women faculty
▪ More time advising and meeting with students, and on service commitments
▪ Reflecting on how to improve their teaching and class structure
▪ Underrepresented at Full professor ranks and in tenured positions
▪ Report less stress, depression, and anxiety
▪ Less reporting of noticing discrimination and harassment

Phase 2

▪ Guiding Frameworks
  ▪ Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989)
  ▪ Equity Theory (Bess & Dee, 2008)
  ▪ College + University Teaching Environment (CUTE) Framework (BrckaLorenz, 2021)
  ▪ Interviews with 15 Black women full professors
  ▪ Contextualized results from phase 1
  ▪ Explore the strategies participants used for navigating the professoriate

Phase 2

▪ Four themes emerged
  ▪ Processes and policies of professoriate are specifically problematic for Black women
  ▪ Network of support is instrumental to success
  ▪ Institutions should be doing more
  ▪ Motivations to persist are a function of caring
Theme 1: Processes and policies of professoriate are specifically problematic for Black women

- “I feel like especially as a Black woman the amount of work I do around here, I’m already following the footsteps of a full professor without the pay, and without the title.”
- “…you should always be at some point in the pipeline of production. You’re either thinking of the question and writing about the question, doing research, you’re collecting data, you’re analyzing data, you’re doing a draft of the report on the data, you’ve sent the data out in a report to be reviewed, or you are revising the report to submit again. This is the pipeline that makes your life.”
- “…not only documenting what you had to do in terms of [the] process itself, but documenting conversations, emails, correspondence, your response to things…”
- “You have to be healthy, exercise, food, making sure you take time to download, get yourself organized so you feel at peace. You have to do whatever spiritual or religious practices you’re going to remind you that you are more spirit than body. You’re a spirit in a body. You have to feed the spirit so that the body can do its work.”

Theme 2: Network of support is instrumental to success

- “It’s important to have a mentor within the department so that you could know about departmental culture.”
- “I’ve always had super-secret meetings with groups of women of color, always super-secret meetings that aren’t so secret. But being in community with other women of color in the academy has always been really important to me.”
- “When I was at the [redacted], I was assigned a mentor, but there wasn’t any real support. And I didn’t find the support that really jump started my career until I connected with NCFDD.”

Theme 3: Institutions are failing to support

- “In my experience, I didn’t have a black faculty organization for incoming professors or … If there was, I didn’t know about it. I made my own club. I made my own ways of staying afloat. I was just that kind of girl. If you don’t have it, make it.”
- “…we know that there are challenges that all faculty members face and then there’s some unique challenges that don’t have anything to do with anything other than systemic oppression.…”
- “Part of my remedy includes training for administrators, including the provost, the president, and anyone in a managerial role. So that they are informed, or they are aware of how they might back some those faculty of color who are seeking theirطالب. And of course they don’t know what to do when they don’t know how to handle it or the response is inadequate. So, they’re so afraid of being seen as not nice or racist, or whatever the case may be that they’re really not helpful.”

Theme 4: Persistence as an Act of Care

- “I don’t want you to hear that I’m staying for the academy because I’m absolutely not. I’m staying for the people who look like me so that they can have a chance to make a contribution, to do great things.”
- “What keeps me is having students that bring me joy. What keeps me is knowing that I am doing something that is changing the world and impacting the world. At the point when that’s not happening anymore then I need to find something else to do with my time.”

Conclusion

Through the vivid descriptions of their experiences, the findings of this study point to some specific ways that institutions can improve the teaching environments of Black women faculty. Adjusting policies and processes to recognize their unseen labor, supporting their membership in professional organizations, and fine-tuning mentoring programs to be more focused are just some examples. Most importantly, however, this study recognizes the strengths and sacrifices of these women to support future generations of Black women.

Thank you!

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You can find our slides and more information about the project at our website: [https://cutesurvey.iu.edu/success-siloed-black-women.html](https://cutesurvey.iu.edu/success-siloed-black-women.html)