



# SUCCESS OF THE SILOED BLACK WOMEN IN THE PROFESSORIATE

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# PHASE 1

In the first phase of our project, we used existing data from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE). FSSE is an annual survey of instructional staff at four-year colleges and universities. Around 100 institutions participate in FSSE each year, resulting in over 350,000 respondents from over 900 institutions in the United States and Canada since its inception in 2003. Participating institutions use FSSE results to stimulate discussions about teaching and learning at their institution.

Researchers also use FSSE data to inform the field of higher education on matters relating to faculty. Each year FSSE staff append sets of questionnaire items that ask about a variety of topics understanding policies and perceptions of support pertaining to the tenure and promotion process, perceptions of sense of belonging and community at their institution, and how satisfied faculty are with their basic psychological needs for scholarly work (the tenets of Self-Determination Theory). We used this previously collected data to focus on the perceptions and experiences of Black women faculty.

We conducted many analyses with existing FSSE data, but here we report the most salient findings from this phase of the study. Black women faculty spend over two more hours per week advising students (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .41$ ), over an hour more per week on service activities (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .17$ ), over an hour more per week meeting with students outside of class (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .30$ ), nearly two more hours per week on administrative duties related to teaching (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .41$ ), and over an hour and a half more per week on working to improve their teaching (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .41$ ) than their colleagues.





Black women faculty find it more important that their students participate in reflective and integrative learning activities (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .45$ ), more frequently interact with the students they teach or advise (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .37$ ), more substantially display teaching practices that are clear and effective for student learning (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .21$ ), and intentionally structure their courses for student learning and development in a variety of domains (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .44$ ). We found these results using t- tests and Cohen's d effect sizes.

Using  $\chi^2$  analyses and adjusted standardized residuals (AR), we found that Black women faculty are underrepresented in Arts & Humanities (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ , AR = -5.1), Biological Sciences (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ , AR = -2.6), Physical Sciences (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ , AR = -5.6), and Engineering (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ , AR = -2.2) fields. They are underrepresented in full professor academic ranks (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ , AR = -5.0) and tenured positions (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ , AR = -7.2), but they are overrepresented in non-tenure track positions at institutions with tenure systems (FSSE 2020,  $p < .001$ , AR = 5.0). In examining t- tests and Cohen's d effect sizes, we found that Black women felt that their overall level of stress (FSSE 2019,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .20$ ), feelings of depression (FSSE 2019,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .31$ ), and feelings of anxiety (FSSE 2019,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .28$ ) less strongly interfered with their ability to succeed as a faculty member than their peers.

Most (70%, FSSE 2015) Black women faculty felt their institution was *very much* or *quite a bit* supportive of people based on gender identity and similarly most (71%, FSSE 2015) felt the same about support based on peoples' racial or ethnic identification. Close to three-quarters (73%, FSSE 2015) of Black women faculty felt they had not experienced offensive behavior, discrimination, or harassment at their institution. Although these findings show a majority of Black women faculty feel positively about their institution and experiences, there are still a large portion of Black women faculty that are not having such positive experiences.



## PHASE 2

In phase two, we conducted 90-minute semi-structured interviews with 14 Black women full professors. The central process we explored are the strategies Black women have for navigating the professoriate as well as contextualizing the results of our pre-existing FSSE data collection and analysis from phase one. The results from phase 1 resulted in the following summary being shared with Black women interviewees, asking them what they thought about our findings:

*We see, from the findings from our center's work, that largely Black women do great work: they spend notably more time on advising students, on service commitments, meeting with students outside of class, reflecting on how to improve their teaching, providing opportunities for diverse discussion, intentionally structuring their courses for student learning and development, etc. Yet they're far underrepresented in full professor ranks and tenured positions. But they seem...rather unperturbed about things. They report less stress, depression, anxiety; they don't report noticing more discrimination or harassment; they on average report their institutions to be supportive of women and racial diversity.*

In addition to their reaction to the above statement, the interviews also explored topics such as their career paths, experiences with discrimination and bias, mentorship opportunities, the tenure and promotion process, and strategies for success. The following four themes emerged from the interviews, and this phase of the overall project was submitted and accepted as a book chapter for a forthcoming book on Black women faculty and their experiences with tenure.





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# PHASE 3

Based on the findings from the second phase, the below five items were added to the 2021 administration of the College + University Teaching Environment (CUTE) Survey. The items focused on how often faculty used the same strategies and support structures raised by the faculty participants from the qualitative interviews.

**Have you participated in, or are you aware of, a formal mentorship program at your institution? (Select all that apply, if applicable.)**

- Yes, as a mentor
- Yes, as a mentee
- Yes, but I did not participate as a mentor or mentee
- No

**[If yes, as a mentee] How important has your mentor been to you with respect to the following?**

Response options: 4 Essential, 3 Very important, 2 Important, 1 Somewhat important, 0 Not Important

- Feeling a sense of belonging
- Socializing you to the norms of your institution
- Navigating your institution's tenure, promotion, or merit processes
- Improving your teaching practices
- Achieving your research goals

**During your faculty career, how often have you seriously considered the following?**

Response options: 4 Very often, 3 Often, 2 Sometimes, 1 Rarely, 0 Never

- Leaving your institution
- Leaving the professoriate
- Leaving academia



**[If Very often, Often, or Sometimes to any of the above] How much did your considerations for leaving have to do with the following?**

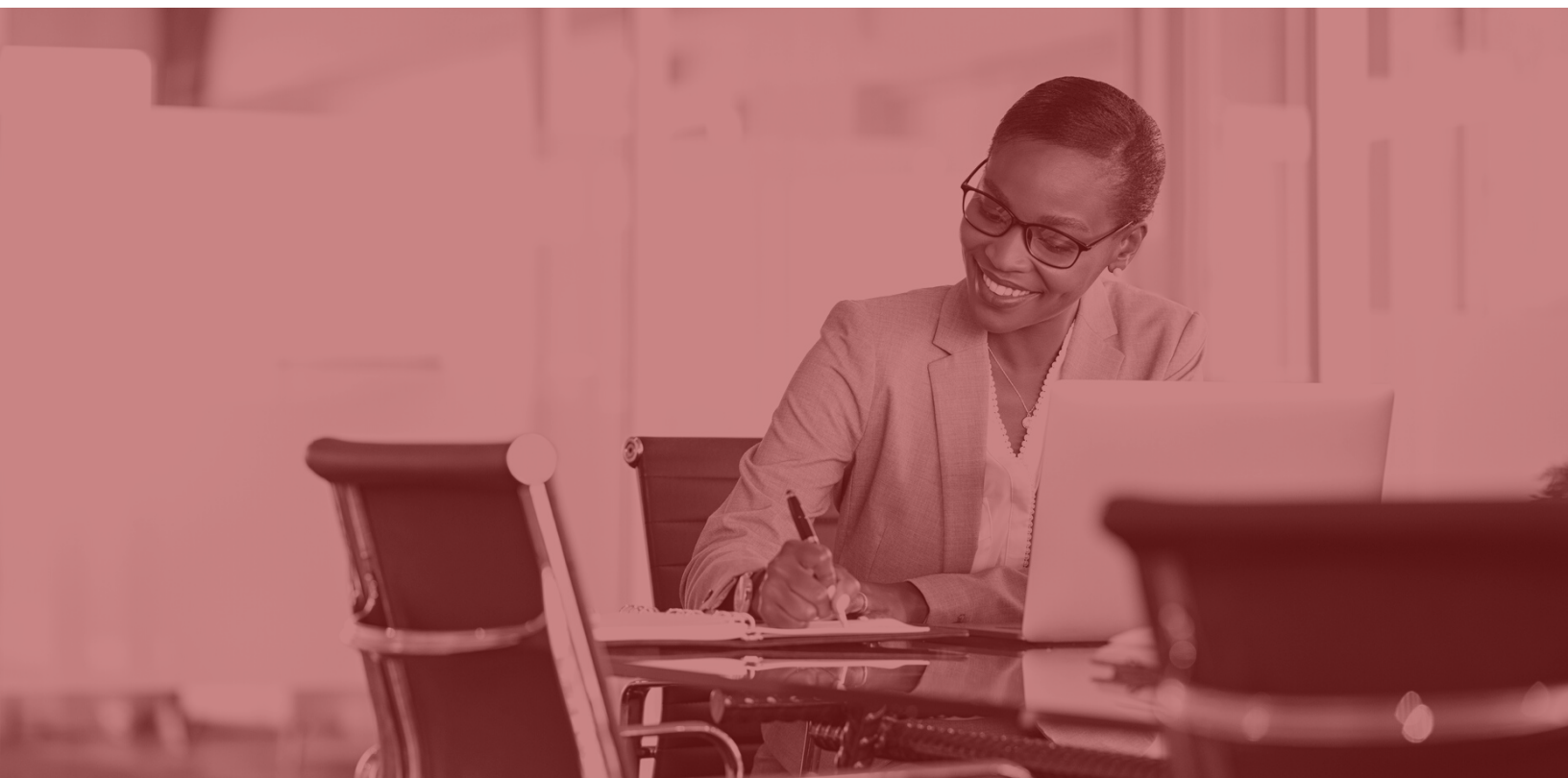
Response options: 4 Very much, 3 Quite a bit, 2 Some, 1 Very little, 0 Not at all

- Inequity in institutional processes and policies
- Balance and flexibility for work and life
- Access to resources or opportunities for professional development
- Relationships with colleagues
- Feeling a lack of respect or belonging
- Institutional climate for diversity

**In a typical school year, how often have you done the following?**

- Reached out to an institutional colleague for support
- Engaged with a campus-based faculty or staff affinity group
- Reached out to a non-institutional colleague for support
- Engaged with a professional association network for support
- Used health and wellness practices to address work-related stress

One of the researchers on this project, Dr. Josclynn Brandon, analyzed the data from the 2021 CUTE Survey administration for her dissertation. There were 128 Black women faculty in the sample. For more on the findings from the above items, Dr. Brandon's dissertation titled, "Keep It CUTE or They Might Just Leave: A Quantitative Analysis On Black Women Faculty's Success Strategies, Collegiality, and Persistence," can be found by [clicking here](#).





## IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTITUTION POLICY

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This study reinforced the need for institutions to take action to support Black women faculty. Several implications came from this study, which are listed below.

### ENHANCED HEALTH AND WELLNESS SUPPORT

It is important to note that supporting the mental health and wellness of Black women faculty members is not only a matter of equity and inclusion, but it is also essential for the overall success of the institution. When faculty members are supported and feel valued, they are more likely to be productive, engaged, and motivated. On the other hand, when faculty members face stress, burnout, and mental health challenges, it can negatively impact their work, their students, and the institution as a whole.

Access to free or low-cost health benefits such as counseling services and fitness facilities is crucial for Black women faculty members who may face additional challenges related to their identities. Institutions should also be intentional about creating spaces for prayer and meditation, which can be especially important for those who follow religious practices. Furthermore, institutional policies should communicate support for religious and cultural holidays that faculty may observe, allowing them to take time off without having to use additional vacation days.

### SUPPORT FOR AFFINITY GROUPS AND NETWORKS OF SUPPORT

Institutions should prioritize the creation and/or support of affinity groups and networks of support for Black women faculty. This includes providing funding, resources, and institutional recognition and support for these groups. Spaces like these can help Black women faculty navigate institutional politics, provide mentorship opportunities, and offer career advice. They can also serve as a platform for advocating for institutional change and working towards greater equity and inclusion.

In addition to ensuring there's an opportunity to connect with a network of support, such as an affinity group, on campus; institutions should provide adequate support for professional development funds so that Black women faculty can engage in those network of supports that exist outside of the institutional walls, such as conferences and professional associations.

## **INCORPORATE EQUITY ADVOCATE IN TENURE AND PROMOTION PROCESS**

Research has shown the value of incorporating equity advocates into faculty searches to mitigate bias, and a similar approach could be taken in tenure and promotion evaluations. Bias can occur at every stage of the tenure and promotion process, from the initial evaluation of the faculty member's research and teaching to the final decision-making process.

The equity advocate can bring a fresh perspective to the evaluation process and provide insight into potential biases that may have been overlooked. They can also help ensure that the evaluation criteria are clear and transparent, and that all candidates are evaluated fairly based on their merits. Additionally, the equity advocate can serve as a resource for candidates who have questions or concerns about the process.

Incorporating an equity advocate into the tenure and promotion process can help institutions promote equity and diversity and ensure that all faculty members have a fair and equitable opportunity to advance their careers.

## **EVALUATION OF SERVICE CATEGORY**

One of the challenges faced by Black women faculty in the tenure and promotion process is the unfair evaluation of their service contributions. To address this issue, institutions must evaluate and revise their tenure and promotion policies to ensure that the contributions of Black women faculty are weighed equally, and that their service contributions are valued and rewarded. Some institutions have already begun to revise their policies to center DEI-related service, but more needs to be done to ensure that Black women faculty are treated equitably in the evaluation process.

In addition, institutions can also provide resources and support to help Black women faculty manage their service responsibilities. This can include providing additional funding and resources to DEI-related committees, as well as providing mentorship and support networks for Black women faculty to help them navigate the service expectations of the institution. By addressing the unfair evaluation of service contributions for Black women faculty, institutions can help promote equity and ensure that all faculty members have a fair and equitable opportunity to succeed in their careers.

## TRIUMPHS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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More than what could have ever been expected, can be recognized as triumphs and accomplishments of this research project.



There was a roaring response and support once the grant award announcement was made; from an array of personal emails sent by colleagues to social media reactions and engagement. This not only indicated an interest in the topic, but a need for the research.



The response from the announcement, garnered an outpouring of support by potential interview participants. With an original goal to conduct interviews with 8 to 10 participants, we concluded phase two of the project by conducting interviews with 14 Black women faculty at the full professor rank, and even more Black women faculty of other varying ranks submitted their interest in sharing their stories.



Lived experience and dialogical knowledge are two tenets of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and were very present throughout the duration of conducting this research. Engaging in this project created the space for both those being interviewed and those doing the interviewing to share about their lived experiences in the academy and in life, resulting in that exchange of dialogical knowledge. What grew as a result was the foundation for cross generational mentorship and sisterhood connection. In addition to these tenets being present while conducting the research, they were also espoused when the researcher had the opportunity to present at a national conference. For instance, while being the only graduate student presenter among all full-time faculty presenters at the conference, the faculty rallied around the grad student with words of encouragement and affirmation. Many shared about how their own experiences in the academy related to the study's participants, and how needed they believed the work to be.



Another triumph and accomplishment the researchers celebrate, was the opportunity to present at various conferences. The researchers were able to present this specific research at the following conferences:

- Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network Annual Conference
- American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting



Other presentations, that were not directly aligned to the population but still adjacent to the work were presented at:

- Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Annual Meeting
- American Associations of Colleges and Universities (AACU) Annual Meeting
- American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting

Yet, the biggest triumph was the ability to share the stories and elevate the voices of Black women faculty. Those of the 14 participants who lent their voices via interviews, and those of the 128 Black women faculty who completed the College + University Teaching Environment (CUTE) Survey. In addition to the findings serving as recommendations and implications for institutional transformation to better support this population, above all, it is the researchers hope that the participants felt and continue to feel heard, valued, and supported through their engagement with this project.

