

Ethical Dilemmas in African American Faculty Representation

Author(s): *J. Luke Wood*

Affiliation:

2008

Ethical Dilemmas in African American Faculty Representation

Author: *J. Luke Wood*

Affiliation: Arizona State University, Tempe Campus

The under-representation of African-American[1] faculty in public higher education is one of the most important ethical dilemmas facing colleges and universities today. Black faculty facilitate the academic preparation and success of all students, but particularly African American students. Research illustrates that there is a lack of representation of African American faculty in institutions of higher education (Anderson, Astin, Bell, Cole, Etzioni, Gellhorn, Griffiths, Hacker, Hesburgh, Massey, and Wilson, 1993; Gregory, 1998; Tillman, 2001). Black faculty represented merely five percent of the professoriate in 2003 (NCES, 2006a). However, when viewed in light of the percentage of African American students, a disparity is seen in that African American students accounted for 12.5% of the enrollment of colleges and universities in 2004 (NCES, 2006b). Additionally, while African American faculty represent nearly the same numbers as they did more than two decades ago (Trower and Chait, 2002), the total percentage of the Black population in the United States has increased from 11.7% in 1980 to 12.3% in 2000 (Hobbs and Stoops, 2002).

Umbach (2006) found that African-American faculty are more likely than White faculty to interact with all students, utilize engaging and collaborative teaching strategies, highlight higher order cognitive experiences, and take on diversity related activities. He notes that these factors are critical for preparing students to work and live in a diverse society. African American faculty also spend more time reflecting on ways to improve their teaching strategies and spend more time advising students than their White counterparts (Johnson, Kuykendall and Laird, 2005).

The presence of African American faculty on college campuses is important to the academic success of African American students (Allen and Haniff, 1991; Roach, 1999; Stith and Russell, 1994). This success can be attributed to enhanced mentoring relationships (Lee, 1999; Malone and Malone, 2001) which are seen as more "student-centered" than non same-race mentoring (Guiffrida, 2005), and an advanced African American cultural knowledge/experience of issues confronting African American students (Cornelius, Moore and Gray, 1997). In an educational era in which graduation rates for African American students remains low, ethical issues of equity in relationship to proportional representation[2] must be considered. For instance, in 2001 the California State University system-wide four-year graduation rate for African American entering as first-time freshmen was 5.6 %. In fact, between 1999 and 2005, an average of 28.4 % of African American first-time freshman were not retained after one year in the system (CSRDE, 2005). Bearing this in mind, this paper argues for the proportional representation of African American faculty in the academy and by rank based upon the ethical concepts of equity and fairness, and advocates for ethical-decision making from public leaders (legislators and administrators) in order to achieve this goal.

First and foremost, it is important to recognize that academic departments have substantial autonomy in hiring the faculty that they desire; however, public leaders can also influence the direction of the hiring processes. Often, academic departments and public leaders shy away from using this role to increase faculty diversity due to issues regarding the legality of affirmative action as promoting preferential treatment based upon race and ethnicity. The affirmative action debate remains an area of intense focus in higher education, especially in light of: (a) recent Supreme Court rulings in the State of

Michigan (see the *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003) and *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) which simultaneously struck down student admissions policies at the University of Michigan which provided minority applicants with additional points and affirmed the need for affirmative actions policies, (b) the passage of the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative of 2006, which prevented preferential treatment of minority groups in public institutions; and (c) new efforts to bring Civil Rights Initiatives to Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma by 2008 (Antonio and Mujiz, 2007; *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003; Ryman and Benson, 2007). However, the *Grutter* decision should be seen as a positive step towards faculty inclusion in that it recognizes the clear societal interest and benefit in diversity, allows for the legal incorporation for diversity into educational institutions, and maintains the Supreme Courts deference to educational decisions to educators within context (Sánchez, 2007). Thus, steps toward faculty diversity can be taken within the law which will increase the quality of the current professoriate providing that: a) faculty diversity is broadly defined; b) faculty are considered based upon person merit; c) non-rationally based method of diversification are considered; and d) programs and policies for faculty diversification recognize the Supreme Courts desire to see their elimination within the next 25 years (Springer and Westerhaus, 2006).

Often, the method of increasing African American faculty representation has been relegated to placing affirmative action representatives on hiring committees and diversifying the hiring committee. While these actions are essential to increasing representation, these single-focused linear measures are not sufficient alone in addressing the socially imbedded and complex power of institutional racism and institutional culture. A multi-faceted approach to the increased hiring of African American faculty must include public leaders who can greatly impact the hiring and promotion process by: 1) fostering and cultivating an institutional culture which values and affirms faculty diversification 2) enacting policies which reduce discrimination and other obstacles in the academy; and 3) through policy, influence and initiatives that set African American faculty diversity targets with achievable timelines as well as funding allocations/ incentives for reaching those targets.

Public leaders must recognize the important benefits of African American faculty. African American faculty can facilitate the increased academic success of all students, specifically African American students. By increasing the academic gains of students, there is a strong likelihood the more students will graduate. A substantial benefit of improved graduation rates will be the increased financial prosperity for the state and national economies through: 1) the reduction in public monies dedicated to social service programs; 2) an increase in taxes on a federal, state and local level; 3) an increase in spending capability; and 4) a decrease in inter-ethnic economic disparity (Vernez and Mizell, 2001).

Beyond viewing proportional representation from the lens of policy which can serve as a barrier for greater representation, it is morally imperative that institutions make efforts to increase the diversity of faculty which reflects the diversity of students. African American faculty exhibit a passion for African American student success that exceeds traditional expectations of teacher support of students (Corbin, 1998). As a result, research indicates that there is a positive relationship between faculty diversity and increased graduation rates for student of color (Opp, 2002). Thus, the lack of black faculty in the academy should be seen as an ethical dilemma, especially in consideration of the barriers to equitable academic, personal, and social success of students that are made more evident without the presence of these faculty. An ethical and moral directive which understands and addresses the ramifications of faculty underrepresentation on an individual and societal level should be promoted in a manner which desires to make society more just for all (Brewer, Selden and Facer, 2000; Jones, 2001).

Proportional representation can be achieved through the promotion of ethical decision-making that focuses upon advocacy and social justice for, "fairness, equity, and support for individual rights through ... affirmative action" (Goss, 1996, p. 581). These principles must to be utilized by public leaders in order to ensure that equality of representation of various groups (race/ethnicity, class, gender etc.) is present in all public institutions by replicating the demographic makeup of a representative body with that of the constituency that it serves (Ricucci and Saidel, 1997; Rai and Critzer, 2000). In this case, the promotion of policies and regulations that embrace faculty diversity in higher education as an ethical, economic and academic imperative will aid public institutions in diversifying the professoriate. As

such, an examination of the ethical decision making concepts of 'fairness' and 'equity' as raised by Goss (1996) is needed in order to promote parity in representation of African American faculty.

The erroneous reasoning rendered at many colleges and universities to justify the numerical under-representation of African American professoriate in faculty positions is often based upon the pipeline argument. The pipeline argument purports that there is not enough qualified African American doctorates to fill the faculty ranks (JBHE, 2001). However, the "pipeline" argument does not take into account that the current faculty ranks are not reflective of the number of qualified African American degree holders (Trower & Chait, 2002). Or, that these individuals are receiving doctoral degrees in record numbers (Cross, 1998).

The pipeline argument is merely one of many arguments used to justify Black faculty underrepresentation. Turner (2002) discusses the need to address myths and stereotypes that persist regarding the hiring of faculty of color including the following statements: "our institution cannot compete for doctorates of color because everyone wants them"; "we cannot match the high salaries offered to faculty of color"; "there are no qualified candidates of color for our open faculty positions"; "faculty of color would not want to come to our campus"; "faculty of color will leave for more money and prestige"; "recruiting [of] color takes away opportunities for White faculty" (p. 16). During the researcher's time and experience in academia other false arguments have been perpetuated (including the majority of the following from a current university president); "we hired one faculty of color, it didn't work out"; "faculty of color don't want to be here" and "we advertised the position and no faculty of color applied".

These aforementioned myths also have pervasive and polarized counterparts including: "in hiring, only diversity counts" and "White faculty members are losing job opportunities to members of minority groups". However, these myths are dispelled with findings which illustrate that minority faculty hires usually replace previous faculty of color rather than increasing faculty diversity (Smith and Moreno, 2006, p. B22). Additionally, research illustrates that institutional bias hampers the success of the hiring process. The demographic makeup of search committees, the position descriptions, and the advertisement of positions can all play a role in eliminating the potential recruitment of faculty of color (Turner, 2002). Furthermore, Moody (2004) notes that majority search committees require higher expectations for faculty of color than for White faculty. She notes that "their fear [White faculty] leads them to compulsively double-check the minority's credentials and even to read, word by word, his/her peer-reviewed articles to determine their soundness- a precaution never felt necessary for majority candidates" (p. 37). Clearly, all myths regarding the hiring of faculty of color must be eradicated and replaced with research and facts that either prove or disprove their worth.

Even more alarming than the lack of African American faculty in the academy is the deficient numbers of these individuals who are tenure or tenure track (Leap, 1995). Promotion and tenure is an issue of fairness in the academy with regard to the practices and policies of this process. There are unwritten rules and practices regarding the tenure process that are designed to uphold the hegemonic power structure in the academy which is controlled by the dominant Eurocentric professoriate (Fenelon, 2003; Stanley, 2006). Marbley (2007) in a description of her experience in the tenure process, discusses how great peer reviews were overrode by her department tenure and promotion committee. With regard to fairness in the tenure process, she concludes by noting that future progress is contingent upon White and male faculty.

Promotion concerns are a major stress factor for African American faculty who are often marginalized in institutions of higher education (Thompson and Dey, 1998). According to Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, and Bonous-Hammarth (2000) African American faculty do not benefit from the educational promotion system due to the fact that they inherently benefit Caucasian faculty. Furthermore Allen et al.(2000) states:

As a rule, African American faculty members are less often tenured, earn less, work at less prestigious institutions, have lower academic rank, and have less academic stature compared to their White peers (p.125).

Racial Discrimination is still an issue that plagues institutions in the United States (Haugabrook, 1998; McElroy, 1998). Baez (1998) found that African Americans felt 'victimized' throughout the promotion and tenure process as a result of their racial identity. He noted that Black faculty members (regardless of faculty rank) experienced both individual and institutional racism which was the lens in which their academic experience (including tenure processes) was viewed.

Turner (2002) notes that faculty of color: have more stringent performance expectations than White faculty; are held to a hiring standard with regard to their academic credentials; are viewed as tokens; "lack support or validation" for their research; and are "expected to handle minority affairs" (p. 24). Cornelius et. al. (1997) notes that the absence of tenure attainment for African Americans comes as a result of socialization and support issues that impact the successfulness of tenure applications. Further Cornelius et. al explains that African Americans are not part of the campus "informal network system" and therefore do not have access to information regarding the political nature of tenure appointment (p.150). Consideration these issues, the minute faculty of color that exist in full professorships and with tenure (in the uneven playing field) can be more clearly understood.

This paper has argued for proportional representation of African American faculty in the academy through the ethical concepts of equity and fairness. Reasoning provided for this increase has included: a) economic benefits of an educated populous; b) the ability of student to participate in a pluralistic society; and c) the educational benefits for all students, especially African American students. Additionally, two primary points regarding these concepts were advanced: 1) equity for academic success of students and 2) fairness for the tenure and promotion of faculty of color. Overall, higher education is in an era "where a highly diverse faculty... is essential for maintaining institutional integrity with legislators, parents, employers, and most importantly students" (Jackson and Terrell, 2003, p. 21). Public leaders must respond to the call to advance policies that will increase the proportional representation of African American faculty.

It is the belief of the researcher that many public leaders will not respond to the call for increase representation of African American faculty, especially for reasoning based primarily upon a philosophical pursuit of equity and fairness. The socially engrained direct and indirect racism that permeates American society will undoubtedly hinder such action until the true economic ramifications of the current faculty homogeneity are realized and actualized. The public leaders who do respond to this call will most likely be limited to those who are themselves African American or persons of color. It is the hope of the researcher that the dominant White public leadership will have the foresight to promote the proportional representation of African American faculty prior to that time.

Due to retirement projections which show that more than one third of the current national professoriate will retire between 1991 and 2010, some researchers have advanced the argument that the timing for faculty diversification efforts is favorable (Nevarez and Borunda, 2004). Policymakers can and should play an integral role in ensuring that this process takes place. As a result, it is imperative that current policymakers have the foresight to understand the depth of this issue. Diversifying the professoriate means going beyond rhetoric and taking action. There are four key things that policy makers can do to in this regard, they can: 1) require institutions of higher education to infuse diversity-related objectives in their strategic plans in order to place morally motivated objectives of faculty representation at the forefront of all planning processes; 2) support policies that address ethical issues regarding the equitable treatment of all institutional faculty, students, administrators and affiliates in a non- racist and discriminatory fashion. Much of the progress intended to increase faculty diversity is impeded by direct and indirect forms of racism which permeate the culture of many institutions of higher education; 3) set diversity goals that contain timeframes to meet ethical and equitable bench markers. Policymakers can publicly demand that these institutions make goals to increase racial diversity. They can also require public universities to advertise recruitment in certain publications to alert people of color to open positions; and 4) use their fiscal influence to ensure that ethical diversity targets are reinforced with funding restrictions and incentives in order to achieve desired goals.

REFERENCES

- Allen, W. R., Epps, E. G., Guillory, E. A., Suh, S. A., & Bonous-Hammarth, M. (2000). The Black academic: Faculty status among African Americans in U.S. higher education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1/2), 112-127.
- Allen, W. & Haniff, N. (1991). Race, gender and academic performance in U.S. higher education. In W.R. Allen, E.G. Epps, N.Z. Haniff (Eds.), *College in Black and White: African American Students in Predominantly White and In Historically Black Public Universities*, (pp. 95-109). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Anderson, M., Astin A. W., Bell, D. A., Cole, J. B., Etzioni, A., Gellhorn, W., Griffiths, P. A., Hacker, A., Hesburgh, T. M., Massey, W. E., & Wilson, R. (1993). Why the Shortage of Black Professors? *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 1, 25-34.
- Antonio, A.L., & Muniz, M.M. (2007). Sociology of Diversity. In P.J. Gumpert (Ed.), *Sociology of higher education: Contributions and their contexts* (pp. 266-294). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Baez, B. (1998). *Negotiating and resisting racism: How faculty of color construct promotion and tenure*. Eric Document Report Number 430-420. Retrieved January 12, 2008, from: http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/17/91/4e.pdf
- Brewer, G. A., Selden, S. C., & Facer, R. L. II. (2000). Individual conceptions of public service motivation. *Public Administration Review*, 60(3), 254-264.
- Corbin, S. K. T. (1998). Role perceptions and job satisfaction of community college faculty. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, the Catholic University of America, Washington DC.
- Cornelius, L.J., Moore, S.E., & Gray, M. (1997). The ABCs of tenure: What all African-American faculty should know. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 21(3), 150-155.
- Cross, T. (1998). The Black faculty count at the nation's most prestigious universities. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 19, 109-115.
- CSRDE-Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange. (2005). *First-time full-time freshmen: 1995-2005 degree-seeking FTF campus reports*. Retrieved May 29, 2007, from: <http://www.asd.calstate.edu/csrde/ftf/2005htm/sys.htm>
- Fenelon, J. (2003). Race, research, and tenure: Institutional credibility and the incorporation of African, Latino, and American Indian faculty. *Journal of Black Studies*, 34(1), 87-100.
- Gregory, S. T. (1998). Faculty diversity: Effective strategies for the recruitment and retention of faculty of color. In J. Jennings & H. Horton (Eds.), *Trotter Review: Diversity, Pedagogy, and Higher Education: Challenges, Lessons and Accomplishments* (pp. 5-7). Boston, MA: The William Monroe Trotter Institute.
- Goss, R. P. (1996). A Distinct Public Administration Ethics. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 6(4), 573-97
- Guiffrida, D. (2005). Othermothering as a framework for understanding African American students' definitions of student-centered faculty. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76(6), 701.
- Gratz v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 244 (2003).
- Gutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306 (2003).
- Haugabrook, A.K. (1998). Leadership for diversity: Effectively managing for a Transformation. In J. Jennings & H. Horton (Eds.), *Trotter Review: Diversity, Pedagogy, and Higher Education: Challenges, Lessons and Accomplishments* (pp. 17-19). Boston, MA: The William Monroe Trotter Institute.
- Hobbs, F. & Stoops, N. (2002). *Demographic trends in the 20th century: Census 2000 special reports*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved May, 23, 2007, from: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf>

- Jackson, J.F.L., & Terrell, M. C. (Eds.). (2003) Diversifying student affairs: Engaging, retaining, and advancing African Americans in the profession [Special Issue]. *National Association of Student Affairs Professionals Journal*, 6(1). Retrieved January 6, 2008, from <http://nasap.net/NASAPJOURNAL.pdf>
- Johnson, S.D., Kuykendall, J.A., & Laird, T.F.N. (2005). An Examination of Workload of Faculty of Color by Rank. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, November 17-19, 2005 Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved May, 23, 2007, from: http://nsse.iub.edu/pdf/conference_presentations/2005/ASHE%202005%20Faculty%20of%20Color-FINAL%20DRAFT.pdf
- Jones, L. (Ed.). (2001). *Retaining African Americans in Higher Education: Challenging Paradigms*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- JBHE-Journal of Blacks in Higher Education. (2001). No blacks in the pipeline: The standard explanation for low percentage of Black faculty continues to be much of a red herring, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 33, 77-78.
- Leap, T.L. (1995). Tenure, discrimination, and African-American faculty. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 7, 103-105.
- Lee, W. (1999). Striving toward effective retention: The effect of race on mentoring African American students. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 74(2), 27-43.
- Malone, R.M. & Malone, J.A. (2001). African American faculty as part of the problem or part of the solution in the retention of African American students on White college campuses. Eric Document Report Number 455-353.
- Marbley, A.F. (2007). Finding my voice: An African-American female professor at a predominantly White university. *Advancing Women in Leadership Online Journal*, 22. Retrieved May 20, 2007, from: http://www.awnettech.advancingwomen.com/awl/winter2007/finding_my_voice.htm
- McElroy, K. (1998). Obstacles facing new African-American faculty at predominantly White colleges and universities. In J. Jennings & H. Horton (Eds.), *Trotter Review: Diversity, Pedagogy, and Higher Education: Challenges, Lessons and Accomplishments* (pp. 14-16). Boston, MA: The William Monroe Trotter Institute
- Moody, J. (2004). *Faculty diversity: Problems and solutions*. New York: Routledge.
- Nevarez, C., & Borunda, R. (2004). *Faculty of color: Contesting the last frontier*. Sacramento: Serna Center. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.csus.edu/sernacenter/assets/scholar_reports/nevarez_borunda.pdf.
- Opp, R. D. (2002). Enhancing program completion rates among two-year college students of color. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 26(2), 147-163.
- Rai, K. B., & Critzer, J. W. (2000). *Affirmative action and the university: Race, ethnicity, and gender in higher education employment*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Riccucci, N.M. & Saidel, J.R. (1997). The representativeness of state-level bureaucratic leaders: A missing piece of the representative bureaucracy puzzle. *Public Administration Review*, 57, 423-430.
- Roach, R. (1999). Succeeding on White campuses. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 15 (26), 42-43.
- Ryman, A., & Benson, M. (2007, November 5). Petition drive launched to ban some race, gender preferences. *The Arizona Republic*, Retrieved November 9, 2007, from <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/1105affirmaction1105-ON.html>
- Sánchez, R. (2007). Diversity...as a matter of law. Paper presented at the Keeping our Faculties of Color Symposium, Minneapolis, MN.
- Smith, D.G., & Moreno, J.F. (2006). Hiring the next generation of professors: Will myths remain excuses? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53(6), B22.

- Springer, A., & Westerhaus, C. (2006). *How to diversify the faculty*. Washington, DC: American Association of University Professors.
- Stanley, C.A. (2006). Coloring the academic landscape: Faculty of color breaking the silence in predominantly White colleges and universities. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(4), 701-736.
- Stith, P.L. & Russell, F. (1994). Faculty/student interaction: Impact on student retention. Paper presented at the 34th Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, New Orleans, LA.
- Thompson, C.J. & Dey, E.L. (1998). Pushed to the Margins: Sources of Stress for African American College and University Faculty. 69 (3), 324-345.
- Tillman, L.C. (2001). Mentoring African American Faculty in Predominantly White Institutions. *Research in Higher Education*, 42 (3), 295-325.
- Trower, C. A., & Chait, R. P. (2002, March/April). Faculty diversity: Too little for too long. *Harvard Magazine*, 98, 33-37.
- Turner, C. (2002). *Diversifying the faculty: A guidebook for search committees*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities.
- Umbach, P. D. (2006). The unique contribution of faculty of color to undergraduate education. *Research in Higher Education*, 47, 317-345.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2006a). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2005* (NCES 2006-030), Chapter 3
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2006b). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2005* (NCES 2006-030), [Table 205](#).
- Vernez, G., & Mizell, L. (2001). *Goal: to double the rate of Hispanics earning a bachelor's degree*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Education, Center for Research on Immigration Policy.

[1] The terms "African-American" and "Black" are used interchangeably to refer to the descendants of African slaves in the United States.

[2] Proportional Representation is a relative numerical or percentage comparison between the racial/ethnic background of students, administrators, teachers and other school personnel nationwide.