

Faculty Diversity in Review, Promotion, and Tenure

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At the very base of achieving faculty diversity in review, promotion, and tenure (RPT), there must be an institutional and departmental commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion that goes beyond lip service. This commitment begins with recruitment and hiring and rests within the administration's ability to formulate and carry out explicit plans and efforts to retain and promote faculty who represent diverse backgrounds and communities across the spectrum.

For a long time, higher education institutions and departments have pointed to a "pipeline" problem to account for majority white and/or majority male makeup of the faculty. Many higher education institutional diversity plans involve changes in faculty search procedures to increase the hiring of individuals from underrepresented demographic groups.

While broadening and deepening the pipeline of professors remains a key area of focus for those working to diversify faculty, this white paper will focus on the similarly vital efforts of retention and institutional support needed to accomplish college and university diversity plans and goals. We outline recommended practices to diversify the faculty and demonstrate, both qualitatively and quantitatively, dedication to diversity and inclusion in RPT.



When we start to take in consideration tenure and promotion rates, retention rates, percentages of minoritized faculty in contingent positions compared to tenure-line positions and then factors such as invisible labor that affect women in particular and other minoritized groups, I think we're still on the very steep end of changing these aspects of our profession.



Dr. Christy Pichichero,
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¹ For the sake of this paper, diversifying faculty at a macro-level includes increasing members of faculty in an institution and/or particular department such that there is representation that includes more diversity from demographic groups such as race, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and other backgrounds.

Cultural Change to Boost Retention

Even diverse institutions have had difficulty retaining their minority faculty and staff.² A shift in institutional or departmental academic culture—in the very thinking about RPT—will be required to ensure faculty who belong to underrepresented minority groups do not feel alienated, undervalued, or treated unfairly along their career path. This is because the experience of faculty in their jobs and as they strive for promotion and tenure will influence whether or not they stay at an institution or even within academia.

Since recruitment alone does not guarantee retention, faculty diversification efforts must address improving institutional culture to combat a high rate of attrition that the American Federation of Teachers Higher Education has referred to as a “culture that sometimes breeds a sense of isolation and exclusion, creates confusion about how to meet job responsibilities and advance professionally, and imposes unreasonable work burdens on faculty from racially and ethnically underrepresented groups.”³

Isolation of minority faculty, both professional and social, can lead to their marginalization from colleagues, decisions, and inclusion in the department/college.⁴ Underrepresented minority faculty, particularly those at predominately white institutions, experience marginalization and isolation that are reinforced through institutional structural

Faculty Retention Best Practices

- Provide collaborative work environment that appeals to diverse candidates
- Provide institutional support and access to supportive communities
- Offer professional development opportunities, including leadership training
- Provide access to funding through grants related to and supportive of diversity
- Provide mentoring and guidance from senior faculty
- Implement policies that support diverse faculty (e.g. those that encourage dual-career couples; offer flexibility in faculty use of institutional family leave policies)
- Perform exit interviews to understand why faculty leave
- Hold leadership accountable for change
- Fix salary inequities related to gender, race, or other factors

² Moreno, J., Smith, D., Clayton-Pedersen, A., Parker, S., & Teraguchi, D. H. (2006). The Revolving Door for Underrepresented Minority Faculty in Higher Education: An Analysis from the Campus Diversity Initiative.

³ “Promoting Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Faculty: What Higher Education Unions Can Do,” American Federation of Teachers, 2010, p. 6.

⁴ Ngunjiri, F. W., & Hernandez, K.-A. C. (2017). Problematizing Authentic Leadership: A Collaborative Autoethnography of Immigrant Women of Color Leaders in Higher Education. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 19(4), 393- 406; Turner, C. (2003). Incorporation and Marginalization in the Academy: From Border toward Center for Faculty of Color? *Journal of Black Studies*, 34(1), 112-125.

Faculty Diversity in Review, Promotion, and Tenure

issues. These include such patterns as white privilege, isolation, microaggressions committed toward minority faculty, and a “diversity tax” levied on them to carry the burden of institutional diversity initiatives.⁵ The elements of a workplace culture marked by these negative features lead to high rates of stress that may drive faculty members to leave. The key to faculty retention is to create an inclusive, equitable, and respectful culture for all.

Institutional Support and Engagement

Institutions most successful in increasing diversity employ proactive programs that address campus climate and support diversity. A sense of belonging is critical for retaining faculty members. To nurture this, particularly with new and junior faculty members, specialists recommend setting up systems/activities to engage faculty from under-represented groups with the broader academic life across campus.⁶

Fostering intentional engagement could be both formal and informal, such as creating minority faculty associations, task forces to address specific issues or build community of specific demographic groups, peer networking groups, training on best practices, as well as regular meet-ups or meetings and events with mentors and informal chats that allow for authentic, less-guarded discussions around diversity and inclusion.⁷

Dr. Zulema Valdez, Associate Vice Provost for the Faculty and Professor of Sociology at University of California (UC) Merced, recommends getting creative to build community, either in-person or remotely. “We wanted to create more inclusivity and connections, especially with our first year faculty members, since they can feel somewhat isolated,” she explains. So, the administration started to do a very informal weekday “coffee accountability check in” with women of color and first year professors. Senior faculty members volunteered to participate to talk to new faculty members about how they’re doing. “We created a really nice community through friendly outreach,” she says.

Technology is another mechanism to support online disciplinary communities for academic growth and connection. Dr. Genyne Boston, Associate Provost at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, says that virtual communities housed on learning management systems can share research or scholarship and help to better prepare colleagues as they are getting ready for promotion or tenure. “We should brainstorm how we can support our faculty within their disciplines to give them a sense of possibility, place in field,” she said.

Leadership by and for a Diverse Academy

Leadership, as in who is in charge and the actions they take, has a significant impact

⁵ Edwards, W. J., & Ross, H. H. (2018). What are they saying? Black faculty at predominantly white institutions of higher education. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 28(2), 142-161; Brayboy, B. M. J. (2003). The Implementation of Diversity in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities. *Journal of Black Studies*, 34(1), 72-86; Lechuga, V. M. (2012). Emotional Management and Motivation: A Case Study of Underrepresented Faculty. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2012(155), 85-98.

⁶ Cole, E. R., McGowan, B. L., & Zerquera, D. D. (2017). First-Year Faculty of Color: Narratives about Entering the Academy. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 50(1), 1-12; Ngunjiri, F. W., & Hernandez, K.-A. C.

⁷ Cole et al; Kelly, B. T., & Winkle-Wagner, R. (2017). Finding a Voice in Predominantly White Institutions: A Longitudinal Study of Black Women Faculty Members’ Journeys Toward Tenure. *Teachers College Record*, 119(6).

on both recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority faculty members. Holding all leaders accountable for their practical work in diversity will illustrate to faculty and students that the higher education institution is putting the words of its diversity plan into action. All faculty leaders should be evaluated on their experience and impact with regards to diversity.⁸ To further demonstrate commitment to diversity, institutions should involve diversity committees and underrepresented minority faculty/staff in policy-making and grant them access to top administrators/leadership.⁹

Moreover, providing leadership opportunities to minority faculty members serves to strengthen inclusivity and improve the culture, and consequently increase retention of minority faculty members. Leadership opportunities may include mentorship by a senior faculty mentor, or an important role on a university committee. However, because underrepresented faculty are often overburdened with service obligations, it is important that leadership opportunities come with a reduction in, or enhanced support for, their other duties so as not to derail their professional career progress.

Implicit and Explicit Bias

Eliminating bias can go a long way in increasing representation of underrepresented minorities among U.S. faculty. Because of this, implicit bias training is an established recommended practice to promote faculty diversity in faculty recruitment, since research demonstrates the negative ways implicit bias

Promotion/Tenure Best Practices

- Establish more inclusive standards for evaluating faculty performance in tenure/promotion reviews
- Define and provide formal promotion support path for new faculty, including goals, mentoring, individual professional development plans and grants
- Include underrepresented minority faculty in policy-/decision-making
- Develop institutional/departmental/campus-wide culture and policies that value different personal and research cultures equally
- Provide training on underrepresented minority faculty issues and bias
- Share responsibility for diversity and diversity teaching equally with white faculty
- Critically scrutinize faculty evaluations for veiled biases

affects minorities and women in hiring.¹⁰ Training search committee members about implicit bias both in search and RPT processes helps make evaluation circumstances more fair by reducing or removing bias that may inadvertently result in rejection of qualified candidates and a less diverse applicant pool during different hiring stages.

⁸ Morimoto, S. A., Zajicek, A. M., Hunt, V. H., & Lisnic, R. (2013). Beyond Binders Full of Women: NSF ADVANCE and Initiatives for Institutional Transformation. *Sociological Spectrum*, 33(5), 397-415.

⁹ Han, K. T., & Leonard, J. (2017). Why Diversity Matters in Rural America: Women Faculty of Color Challenging Whiteness. *The Urban Review*, 49(1), 112-139.

¹⁰ State of the Science Implicit Bias Review 2015, <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias>.

Faculty Diversity in Review, Promotion, and Tenure

However, implicit bias training is not enough to address current issues of bias in higher education that keep underrepresented minorities from advancing in the academe, according to Dr. Christy Pichichero, Associate Professor and Director of Faculty Diversity in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at George Mason University.

Dr. Pichichero says that implicit bias training is important, but that it is also becoming “passé in many ways because people’s biases are explicit. I think we need to be willing now to lean into discomfort, to gain a vocabulary about the many types of bias that exist—ones that have to do with race and gender, sexuality, or social class, but also institutional bias, disciplinary bias, or methodological bias,” she says. “These are also ways in which people of different backgrounds or who have had different career trajectories are weeded out of search processes or promotions.”

Unraveling these types of biases will require major cultural change within institutions and departments, since traditionally RPT processes have influenced academic life by pointing to where faculty should focus their attention, which activities they should pursue, and where to publish their work or direct their research program, especially during the pre-tenure period.¹¹

“Data is a linchpin in fostering institutional change because data used correctly and transparently, creates accountability...institutions should know the demographic breakdown of contingent and tenure-line faculty as well as rates of renewal, tenure, and promotion. I think this data is powerful in so many ways, and we’re still discovering the ways in which this data can be powerful.”

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¹¹ D. Harley, S.K. Acord, S. Earl-Novell, S. Lawrence, C.J. King, “Assessing the Future Landscape of Scholarly Communication: An Exploration of Faculty Values and Needs in Seven Disciplines,” Center for Studies in Higher Education, 2020

(Re)assessing Review, Promotion, and Tenure Processes

A wholesale review of the promotion and tenure process will enable analysis of the implicit and explicit biases within. Evaluating—or re-evaluating—the weight and merit given to research, service, and teaching will proactively work against common biases that minority faculty encounter.

Underrepresented minority faculty members encounter challenges that may set the stage for them—both in not meeting the established “ideal” candidate and in the standards that have conventionally been used by academic institutions and departments to evaluate promotion and tenure.

Until leadership and decision-makers truly understand these challenges and change the process to account for the experiences of diverse faculty members, the process may exclude them from promotion and tenure. Research has shown that in their promotion and tenure reviews, minority faculty members are commonly negatively impacted by such biases as:

- Biased student interactions and evaluations/complaints
- Biases against service within institutional definitions of merit, when minority faculty are often relied upon to participate in diversity-related service
- Biases related to merit for those faculty who perform diversity research, because

it is often not as valued as other research endeavors

- Biases related to journal publications that may not publish the work of minority scholars¹²

Since underrepresented minority faculty members are often asked to serve on diversity committees, advise minority students, and generally carry the emotional and actual workload of campus (and off-campus) diversity work, it is recommended that leadership also monitor individual service load to protect these faculty members from being overloaded. It is also recommended that minority faculty members be allowed to say no to service requirements without repercussions to their quest for tenure or promotion.¹³

Other parts of the process, including who is allowed to vote during personnel deliberations, should be analyzed, since there tend to be lower numbers of higher ranking underrepresented minority faculty members and thus potentially not a diverse set of perspectives with decision-making input in the RPT process.

¹² Baez, 2000; Han & Leonard; Fries-Britt, S. L., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Perna, L. W., Milem, J. F., & Howard, D. G. (2011). Underrepresentation in the Academy and the Institutional Climate for Faculty Diversity. *Journal of the Professoriate*, 5(1), 1-34; Jayakumar, U. M., Howard, T. C., Allen, W. R., & Han, J. C. (2009). Racial Privilege in the Professoriate: An Exploration of Campus Climate, Retention, and Satisfaction. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(5), 538-563.

¹³ Baez.

Using Data and Documentation to Drive Success

Data is critical in fostering institutional change because it creates accountability and transparency. Careful documentation of faculty member’s work towards and within the promotion and tenure process also enables more fair and equitable treatment—and thus improves the chances of retaining diverse faculty members.

Measuring Success

Ongoing data collection, beginning at the faculty search stage, can ensure higher education institutions are meeting stated diversity and inclusion initiatives. For example, by monitoring demographic data of the applicant pool, search chairs and committees can proactively work to ensure that there is a diverse applicant pool, and if not, use other strategies to widen the search and attract candidates of different backgrounds. (We further discussed such strategies in Interfolio’s Modern Faculty Recruitment Playbook.)

Data provides useful information about the demographic breakdown of contingent and tenure line faculty as well as rates of renewal, tenure, and promotion. With information comes the power to analyze trends, successes, and failures related to diversity aims. Faculty data can also include the demographic information of those who are transitioning into leadership roles.

Analyzing faculty data will provide extremely valuable insight into equity in promotion, tenure, and income by demographic groups. Dr. Boston says the data that outlines inequities will help administrators and others to extrapolate important information about the campus climate and how people may be feeling about disparities; their feelings about the work environment and campus climate often account for their reasons for leaving.

Dr. Valdez expanded on this topic: “We need to feel valued. When there are disparities in who is tenured or who is awarded an endowed



When you think about how faculty are feeling, why there are certain disparities among faculty who may have come in around the same time, it’s important to look at who has been chairing the department, who has been the director of a center, who are the individuals in leadership roles making decisions. There needs to be a certain level of diversity and inclusion in the area of leadership.



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chair, we ask, “why are there significantly more men or more white professors in these ranks, or in these positions?” Such differences tell us how we are valued, integrated, celebrated in our campuses.”

When faculty members observe equitable reward structures and a positive work environment, they convey higher levels of organizational commitment, which in turn fortifies their intent to stay.¹⁴

Creating a Record

To make sure the full set of information on each candidate for review and promotion is available to evaluators, a dossier of both the work the candidate has done leading up to the review and all actions taken as part of the review is critical.

As discussed above, underrepresented faculty members often shoulder a heavy load of service work, based on expectations and interest in their helping with institutional or other diversity initiatives and student advising. A transparent, accurate, and current source of information housed within a common faculty information system that details all of faculty members’ activities at any given time provides an easy way for leadership to more fairly evaluate a faculty member’s workload.

The faculty information system also can be used as a repository of artifacts that can tag diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) activities as part of the RPT process to include criteria based on institutional and departmental diversity plan goals.

Individualized Tenure Track/Promotion Support for New Faculty

To increase the tenure track/promotion success of new minority faculty members, experts recommend providing a formalized promotion support path that defines individualized pathways that establish goals, mentoring, clear guidance, and tenure track evaluations. The idea is to make the process clear so that faculty members can plan their goals and requirements within an approved (by the tenure committee) framework so that the future evaluation of their performance is more just.¹⁵

It is easier to meet objective, well-defined goals than subjective ones, obviously, and the more straightforward the process, the more likely it will be equitable and support the goal of faculty retention. Setting up an unambiguous pathway towards tenure or promotion also allows documentation of performance for the individualized plans, which creates a paper trail that can also be used to ensure more fair-mindedness in the review process.

If individualized tenure and promotion plans are created for faculty members on their track to promotion or tenure, the full set of information—the plan itself, the faculty committee sign off at milestones, and the work supporting the plan—should also be housed in a candidate-specific record. This will bring more transparency and accuracy

¹⁴ Daly, C., & Dee, J. (2006). Greener pastures: Faculty turnover intent in urban public universities. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77(5), 776-803; Lindholm, J. (2003). Perceived organizational fit: Nurturing the minds, hearts, and personal ambitions of university faculty. *Review of Higher Education*, 27(1), 125-149.

¹⁵ Kelly & Winkle-Wagner.

Faculty Diversity in Review, Promotion, and Tenure

to the process, while by design encouraging evaluators to consciously work against biases when it comes time for review.

During the review, full documentation of each action taken by review committee members is imperative to maintain and promote a fair and equitable assessment of each candidate. With full documentation, reviewers can better objectively assess a candidate for promotion or tenure, and non-reviewers can use the information to audit decisions should they be deemed unfair or biased in any way. Documenting all review actions also enables a consistent process (based on consistent actions) for each candidate.

Tracking Retention

Tracking retention data allows institutions to compare how long minority employees stay at their institution as opposed to their majority counterparts. Collecting accurate and timely retention data enables identification of weaknesses in retaining certain demographic groups and assess how well institutions are meeting established diversity goals. The collected data will highlight the job groups or departments that experience the most difficult ability to retain certain minority groups. Institutions can harness this information to focus their efforts on addressing these weaknesses to decrease attrition.

To promote and retain a broader, more diverse set of faculty members and leaders, Dr. Pichichero recommends listening to people more, building coalitions across administration and faculty, and being “very creative in new training, new teachings, new approaches together” to work against the history of white supremacy and exploitation of minority groups in higher education.

Additionally, documenting the reasons people leave through structured and thorough exit interviews will provide useful information that can be used to revisit and/or revise retention efforts. When institutions of higher education see high turnover in certain departments, of certain demographic groups, or other trends, there are typically underlying reasons and trends that exit interviews can uncover. Subsequently understanding why faculty stay in their positions through annual reviews will contribute to a clearer picture of the institutional or departmental climate and how it affects underrepresented minority and other faculty members, as well as overall diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

Dismantling the institutional and faculty norms to remove bias in the RPT process requires vigilant work at the institutional, departmental, committee, and faculty levels. To show dedication to diversity and inclusivity, institutions should vigorously implement the practices recommended here to drive culture and policy changes that mandate fair and equitable treatment of faculty members by requiring inclusivity and reducing bias.

About Interfolio

Conceived by academics for academics, Interfolio is an education technology company headquartered in Washington, DC, USA and in Cambridge, England, UK. Founded in 1999, Interfolio operates the acclaimed Faculty Information System for colleges and universities, the Researchfish impact assessment platform for funders and research organizations, and the widely used Dossier service for individual scholars. Over 400 clients based in 15 countries choose Interfolio's technology for hiring and recruitment, academic appointments and timelines, activity data reporting, faculty reviews and promotions, and research impact analysis. Interfolio provides scholar-first products for the full academic lifecycle—from job seeking to professional accomplishments, committee service, funding award compliance, career growth and advancement, administrative leadership, and beyond.

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