The University as a Pluralistic System: The Case of Minority Faculty Recruitment and Retention

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Recently there has been considerable emphasis placed in higher education on the recruitment and retention of minority faculty. There is an expanding literature indicating the problems relating to the inadequate pool of such faculty and strategies and approaches related to effective recruitment and retention.[1] It is apparent that there is considerable interest in this area. Given the predicted demographic patterns and characteristics in the population during the remainder of this century, it is understandable that colleges and universities are pursuing a more diverse faculty. The recruitment and retention of minority faculty, however, is only one component—though a critically important one—of the total university environment. The extent of effectiveness in this area will depend upon the totality of the other components in which it is embedded and that characterize the university as a whole.

The present paper presents a conceptual model that can be used in analyzing the university system and relates this model specifically to the issue of minority recruitment and retention. The main thesis of the present paper is that effective recruitment and retention of minority faculty will be maximal in a university that has the components of a pluralistic system and minimal in a university that has the components of a monolithic system. Basically, these are the same conditions discussed by Amir as leading to positive inter-racial group relations.[2] The differences between these two types of general systems have been discussed previously and are presented here within the specific context of a university system.[3]

The Monolithic University System

The discussion will begin with the monolithic university system, since unfortunately it is this system that characterizes the condition of many

American universities at this time. It is also the system from which we need to move away, if effective minority faculty recruitment and retention is to occur. A monolithic university system is one in which:

1. Those individuals in the system—faculty, staff, students, administrators—are primarily or solely of the dominant ethnic, racial, and/or cultural group.
2. There is limited or no contact or interaction among the various ethnic, racial or cultural groups that do exist in the system.
3. There is limited or no opportunity for the diverse groups to learn about each other's cultures, values, and customs.
4. The power relations between groups are unequal and asymmetric, with members of the dominant cultural group in the position of faculty and administrative leadership and authority.
5. The inter-racial relations that do exist within the faculty, student, and staff groups are formal, and limited to certain structured contexts.
6. There is negative interdependence among the groups; the diverse groups have competing and often mutually exclusive goals.
7. The hierarchy and stratification within the system is maximal and related to racial and/or cultural group membership.
8. The monolithic norms of the university are sanctioned by institutional supports (policies, customs, values) and institutional leadership and authority.
9. The analysis and understanding of human experience is from the normative perspective of one cultural, racial, or ethnic group.
10. The institutional structure promotes assimilation, acculturation and cultural uniformity.

The components listed above are not mutually exclusive, but closely inter-related. Typically, if two or three are found to exist in a university, one might expect some of the other conditions to also prevail, since these are based on a congruent, unidimensional value-belief system. To the extent that a university is characterized by the above ten components of a monolithic system, there will be little impetus to recruit minority faculty, or if such impetus does exist, little effectiveness in such efforts. a monolithic system, as defined above, is primarily a racist system. Minority faculty will not be attracted to such a monolithic university system, no matter what efforts the institution may engage in to recruit the person.

The Pluralistic University System

Minority faculty recruitment and retention will be most effective in a pluralistic university system. A pluralistic university system is one in which:

1. Those individuals in the system—faculty, staff, students, administrators—are from the multiple ethnic, racial, and cultural groups of our society.
2. There is extensive contact and interaction among these diverse groups on campus.
3. There is extensive opportunity for the diverse groups to learn about each other's cultures, values, and customs.
4. The power relations between groups are equal and symmetric-power and leadership are not dependent on race or ethnicity; members of minority groups are in the position of faculty and administrative authority.
5. The inter-racial relations within the faculty, student, and staff groups are informal, intimate, and multi-contextual.
6. There is positive interdependence between the diverse groups, such that they have mutually compatible goals.

7. The hierarchy and stratification within the system is minimal and independent of race, ethnicity, or cultural group membership.
8. The pluralistic norms of the university are sanctioned by institutional supports (policies, customs, values) and institutional leadership and authority.
9. The analysis and understanding of the human experience is from multiple ethnic and cultural perspectives.
10. The institutional structure promotes multiculturalism and cultural diversity.

To the extent that a university is characterized by the above components of a pluralistic system, there will be energetic efforts to recruit minority faculty, and such efforts will be more likely to lead to effective outcomes. A pluralistic system is an open, diverse system, and therefore will be one to which minority faculty will be attracted.

From Monolithic to Pluralistic

Most universities have components within them from the two systems; most institutions are not completely monolithic or totally pluralistic. It is clear, however, that if universities wish to recruit and retain a greater number of minority faculty, they must engage in institutional change strategies in the direction towards becoming pluralistic systems. In order to address condition #1, there must be systematic and programmatic efforts to recruit faculty, staff, and students from the multiple ethnic, racial, and cultural groups that make up contemporary American society. No university can aspire to be a pluralistic system if the plurality that represents the broader social fabric is not to be found within its walls. Innovative and active programs to recruit minorities must be developed and implemented. But mere presence on campus is not enough—there must be extensive contact and interaction among all of these diverse groups, both among themselves and with the broader community (condition #2). Programs on campus that foster and promote this type of interaction need to be initiated and developed. With effective and meaningful interaction, the opportunity for the diverse groups to learn about each other's cultures, values and customs will be enhanced (condition #3). This type of learning experience needs to exist in the classroom, imbedded in the curriculum, as well as the other components of the university, i.e. the dormitories, clubs and organizations, special seminars and workshops, etc.

Although the above conditions are important, from the perspective of the present writer, condition #4 is one of the most important—if not the singular most important—criterion for developing a university environment that is pluralistic. It is essential that the existing power relations between the groups be equal and symmetric.[4] Power and leadership in the system must not be a function of race and ethnicity. Members of minority groups need to also be in positions of power and authority and to be involved in the decision-making policies of the entire university, not just those relating to minority affairs. Minority faculty and administrators must be in positions to define what is meant by "excellence"; this is critical to the development of a pluralistic university. Funds and programs

supporting multicultural research, scholarship, and teaching have to be available, particularly so that minority faculty can better pursue their intellectual and academic interests. Such a program at the University of Colorado at Boulder, called IMPART (Implementation of Multicultural Perspectives and Approaches in Research and Teaching), has been quite successful in this regard.[5] The legitimacy of minority faculty must be seen on an equal par as that of non-minority faculty. This is especially important with respect to their research, scholarship, and creative work, which, especially in the humanities and the social sciences, may be quite distinct from the traditional and mainstream perspectives of those disciplines.

Only when equal power relations exist can there be inter-racial contact that is informal, intimate, and multi-contextual, condition #5. Dominant-subordinate relationships are not conducive to the types of personal bonds that are linked to patterns of friendship, partnership, collaboration and collegiality. Minority faculty who sense unequal and asymmetric power relations with non-minority faculty, and whose interaction with such faculty is solely formal and limited to faculty meetings or committee assignments, will not feel a part of the university community. Consequently, their retention rate will be minimal; they will be recruited by more pluralistic universities.

Positive interdependence between the diverse ethnic, racial and cultural groups is essential (condition #6). Such a relationship exists when the various groups share super-ordinate goals and recognize that the only way to achieve such goals is by mutual cooperation. In a pluralistic system, the goals of affirmative action and commitment to academic and cultural diversity are mutually shared by all segments of the university community; the link between academic and institutional excellence and diverse faculty and curriculum is acknowledged and valued. There is a recognition that, in order to reach this and related goals, the cooperative involvement of all faculty, department chairs, deans and other administrators must be achieved.

If the above conditions are met, it is more likely that the heirarchy and stratification within the university system will be minimized and be independent of race, ethnicity or cultural group membership (condition #7). Additionally, it is likely that the norms of the pluralistic system will be sanctioned by institutional supports—policies, customs, values—and institutional leadership and authority (condition #8). The importance of this condition can not be overemphasized. In institutions that have developed effective minority faculty recruitment and retention efforts, such efforts have been based on policies, procedures, and programs endorsed or developed by the campus leadership. Target of Opportunity positions, for example, have been utilized to increase the number of minority faculty. In most cases, the commitment to and execution of such strategies has originated within the academic leadership structure of the institution. Diversity has to be perceived and recognized as an

institutional goal, a priority that is incorporated into the institutional strategic plan.[6] The incentive and reward structure of the university incorporate this priority: FTEs, funds for recruitment and retention, and allocation of resources.

Finally, in a pluralistic university the analysis and understanding of the human experience is from multiple ethnic and cultural perspectives (condition #9), and the institutional structure promotes multiculturalism and cultural diversity (condition #10). There exist ethnic studies programs and/or centers that focus on these areas. The curriculum is not ethno-centric—reflecting primarily a white, Western European perspective—but ethno-diverse.

One final point needs to be made about "minority" faculty. An analysis of the ten conditions/components of a pluralistic system suggests that in such a system the term "minority" is not only inappropriate, but invalid. As discussed in a previous paper, the term "minority" connotes unequal status and power, as well as a number of other negative attributions such as, "inferior," "less than," "deprived,"and "disadvantaged."[7] A common example in academia as it relates to this term is the reference to "qualified" minorities, an assumption that somehow being minority and being qualified are mutually exclusive. The only time "qualified" is used in faculty recruitment is in reference to the recruitment of minority faculty. Such negative associations and attributions reflect a monolithic perspective, not a pluralistic one. The present author has a preference for the term "plurality." In the earlier paper, a case has been made for moving away from minority and towards plurality. Within this concep-tualization, "pluralities" in contemporary American society consist of black Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans who, because of their racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity—and their socialization and experiences in this society—can be active contributors to the development of a culturally pluralistic society. The term minority has emphasized the negative characteristics of these individuals and groups; plurality emphasizes what these have to offer in achieving a more open society.

Given the above discussion concerning characteristics of pluralistic university systems and the term "minority," a more appropriate title for this paper is "The University as a Pluralistic System: The Case of Plurality Faculty Recruitment and Retention." If real commitment exists for transforming our colleges and universities from ethnic, racial and cultural monolithic institutions to pluralistic institutions, this can best be achieved by the recruitment and retention of plurality faculty.

Notes

[1]M.F. Green, ed., *Minorities on Campus: A Handbook for Enhancing Diversity* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1989); James G. Blackwell, *Networking and Mentoring: A Study of Cross-Generational Experiences of Blacks in Graduate and Professional Schools* (Atlanta: Southern Education Foundation, 1983; Shirley Vining Brown, *Increasing Minority Faculty: An Elusive Goal* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1988); Carolyn J. Mooney, "Affirmative-Action Goals, coupled with Tiny Number of Minority Ph.D.'s Set Off Faculty Recruiting Frenzy," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 35, 47 (August 2, 19889); J.E. Fleming, G. Gill, and D.H. Swinton, *The Case for Affirmative Action for Blacks in Higher Education* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1978); *Meeting the National Need for Minority Scholars and scholarship: Policies and Actions (*Stony Brook: State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1989); *The University of California in the Twenty-first Century: Successful Approaches to Faculty Diversity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987); *Achieving Faculty Diversity: A Sourcebook of Ideas and Success Stories (Madison: University of Wisconsin System, 1988).*

[2]Yehuda Amir, "The Role of Intergroup Contact in Change of Prejudice and Ethnic Relations," in *Toward the Elimination of Racism,* P.A. Katz, ed. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1976): 245-308.

[3]Albert Ramirez, "Racism Towards Hispanics: The Culturally Monolithic Society," in *Eliminating Racism: Profiles in Controversy,* P.A. Katz and D.A. Taylor, eds. (New York: Plenum Press, 1988) 137-157; Albert Ramirez, "From Monolithic to Pluralistic Systems: An Asymmetric Unequal Power Analysis" *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* (1990): 43-49.

[4]Erika Apfelbaum, "Relations of Domination and Movements for Liberation: An Analysis of Power Between Groups," in *The Social-Psychology of Intergroup Relations,* W.G. Austin and S. Worchel, eds. (Monterey: Brooks/Cole, 1979): 188-204.

[5]*Faculty Review on Equity and Excellence* (FREE) (Boulder: University of Colorado at Boulder, 1987).

[6]*Challenging the Summit: Strategic Plan Update of the 1987-88 Strategic Plan* (Boulder: University of Colorado at Boulder, 1989).

[7]Ramirez (1990).