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Building Support for Faculty Women of Color in STEM

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Given the national climate, higher education must continue to serve a vital role for our future, just as it has in our past. For historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions, their mission-driven role is even more urgent. Communities of color depend on these institutions to be gateways for access to jobs with higher incomes for graduates in growing fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Just as these institutions are vital, male and female faculty members of color are valuable to their institutional missions. Still, STEM fields can be isolating places for faculty women of color, even at minority-serving institutions. Yet, women of color faculty in STEM provide groundbreaking teaching, tireless service, and, yes, innovative scholarship. Their students deserve to see successful STEM women of color who look like the women in the students' families and communities.

Hence, it is critical for these faculty women of color in STEM to have environments and networks that will help them to succeed. Strategies are direly needed for planned mentoring and scholarly communities and networks to encourage their scholarship.

Seeing this need, the National Science Foundation (NSF) addressed women of color at HBCUs. These awards include a 2010 NSF Grant to Transform the Climate and Advance STEM and Social and

Behavioral Sciences (SBS) Women at Jackson State University (JSU), an HBCU in the South (JSU ADVANCE). One component of JSU ADVANCE was the Summer Writing Retreat to help JSU female STEM and SBS faculty make scholarly writing and publishing a priority. These experiences provided an environment conducive to focusing on scholarship and created a more inclusive academic community of scholars at JSU.

Given the great success of JSU ADVANCE, JSU sought ways to make the valuable experiences available to more academic women of color and to broaden the community of scholars to other institutions. Recently, JSU received an additional grant from NSF to expand its Summer Writing Retreat to other minority-serving institutions and their women of color faculty in STEM and SBS.



The NSF funded Partnerships for Learning and Adaptation Network-Institutions of Higher Education (PLAN-IHE) granted an award that allows JSU to support six partner institutions through the process of planning and implementing Summer Writing Retreats designed specifically to increase participants' scholarly productivity and provide opportunities for strategic collaborations across disciplinary and institutional boundaries. The new project is titled Expanding the Network of STEM Scholars through the JSU ADVANCE Women of Color Summer Writing Retreat (SWR). The grant facilitates the creation of a five-year learning network between JSU and six institutions: Tennessee State University, Tougaloo College, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Norfolk State University, Winston-Salem State University, and the University of the Virgin Islands.

As the initial JSU ADVANCE retreat component was structured particularly with the needs of women at JSU in mind, the SWR affords each of the partnering institutions a model while encouraging each institution to design a retreat conducive to the particular needs of the women of color in their institution. All of the retreats give women of color faculty the opportunity to excel in their scholarship through peer support, ongoing accountability, conducive environments, community encouragement, and access to an extended network of scholars.

The SWR project will continue to transform these linked academic communities, enhancing the scholarship of women of color scholars in STEM and SBS. Participants will enjoy the opportunity to connect with women of color scholars at their own institutions and will benefit from viable network connections to women of color in STEM and SBS at other minority-serving institutions.

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