Faculty of Color in the Academy: A Perspective on Cross-cultural Mentoring

Sherrise Y. Truesdale-Moore
Minnesota State University, Mankato, sherrise.truesdale@mnsu.edu

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Aligned with the principles of Vincent Tinto's (1987) model on student retention, research has indicated that students' race and their experiences and sense of belonging are associated with the racial characteristics of the faculty. This highlights the importance of recruitment and retention for faculty of color (FOC) in higher education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), the number of faculty employed in higher education totaled 1.5 million in the fall of 2020 – an increase from 1.4 million since the fall of 2009. Considering only the full-time population (836,597), FOC comprises an estimated 26%, an increase from 24 % since the fall of 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Although data indicate a slight increase in full-time faculty in higher education, the task of recruiting and retaining vibrant, bright, and diverse faculty remains challenging for many institutions of higher education in the United States (Settles et al., 2022; Han et al., 2020; Hartlep & Ball, 2020; Kapan et al., 2018; Scott, 2018). This article provides the following: 1) an understanding of the challenges higher education has with retaining FOC, 2) an understanding of FOC's experiences within higher education, and 3) a culturally responsive approach to assist higher education in retaining FOC.

Kaplan and colleagues (2018) present four essential reasons for challenges for recruitment and retention in higher education: Critical mass, programs and resources, senior leadership, and climate. First, the absence of a critical mass suggests no community with which a diverse person can relate. This also suggests that a limited number of faculty are likely to feel overworked or exhausted from increased responsibilities, which leads to cultural taxation.

Second, when faculty are recruited, institutions often lack programs, resources, and appropriate mentoring that nurture the faculty's professional development. Not making these developments and investments reflects poorly on the institution. Third, the institution's climate is significant as it sheds light on how minorities feel about their sense of belonging. The question often asked is whether the institution is welcoming or feels part of the organization's fabric. Fourth, institutional champions are essential to cultivating an environment vested in diversity. Senior leadership must ensure that everyone on all levels is informed to support diversity efforts and instill a favorable climate.

Phillips and Dennison (2015) argue that recruitment and retention are attained by formalizing faculty mentoring programs. The purpose is to develop an academic atmosphere that nurtures, supports, and develops faculty members' teaching and research skills and assists them in feeling a sense of belonging within the university community (Phillips & Dennison, 2015). However, what these scholars are suggesting is not unusual; faculty mentoring programs have existed for years throughout the United States in many colleges and universities and are known to impact faculty performance in higher education of various disciplines positively (Bradley& Mead, 2022; Minshew et al., 2021; Efstathiou et al., 2018).   However, finding the right mentoring program that addresses the daunting challenges among FOC is challenging. Although teaching, research, student growth, faculty growth, and university and community work make up the fabric for which faculty are promoted, FOC must deal with the intersectionality of much deeper experiences that traditional mentoring models are not

structured to address. These issues often go unresolved, are stressful, and harm faculty

careers.

Racial Battle Fatigue Among Faculty of Color

Racial Battle Fatigue refers to the stress members of racially marginalized populations

experience; it is an accumulative effect of coping with everyday racism (Chancellor, 2019;

Smith, 2008, as cited in Harlep & Ball, 2020, p. xxiii). The mundane tensions and the constant

extreme stressors stem from fighting against racism, which often causes physical or

psychological harm to faculty's well-being (Chancellor, 2019; Harlep & Ball, 2020; Gorski, 2019).

These symptoms are often recognizable (but not limited to) tension headaches, constant

anxiety, ulcers, increased swearing and complaining, insomnia, rapid mood swings, difficulty

thinking or speaking, and social withdrawal (Chancellor, 2019). Racial Battle Fatigue is also the

physical, mental, and emotional manifestation of racial microaggressions (Chancellor, 2019;

Gorski, 2020). Microaggressions are subtle, unconscious, spoken, and unspoken insults

directed at people of color based on their race and other distinguishable characteristics that

cause unnecessary stress (Chancellor, 2019). The constant stressors of these microaggressions

will begin to affect the faculty's mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Chancellor, 2019).

Racial Battle Fatigue gained attention in academic research within the last fifteen years

to understand the experiences of FOC at predominately white universities, particularly involving

the tenure and promotion process. Several significant findings have been uncovered. First,

FOC reported being marginalized and finding their research discredited, mainly when it

concerns minority issues. In this regard, Sue, Sue, Neville, and Smith (2022) would argue that

this happens when white faculty are culturally insensitive to the value the FOC is bringing to the academic community by not accepting, respecting, or understanding his/her methodology due to cultural differences, ignorance, or prejudices. These encounters are guided by Eurocentric worldviews that dictate white middle-class values and beliefs assumed to be universal for all faculty in higher education institutions (Sue et al., 2022).

Second, FOC reported experiencing cultural taxation. This is where FOC are experiencing workload imbalance that is a tremendous burden placed on faculty, which is often tokenism and seen as an expectation to serve on diversity-related committees, teach diversity-related courses, and feel obligated to mentor and advise same-race students. Not only does this work go unrewarded, FOC work twice as hard to be productive, which unfortunately leads to a discriminatory process in their tenure and promotion, which is the third experience (Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022; Gonzalez, 2022; Salinas et al., 2020). For example, Ward and Hall (2022) examined four tenure and promotion denial lawsuit cases against historically white institutions by Black professors. The data reviewed included 1,697 pages of complaints, institutional responses, depositions of tenure committee members, and court decisions. The results identified intersectional barriers to tenure for Black professors, such as inadequate institutional support, divergence from established institutional tenure policies, inconsistent application of tenure and promotion guidelines, and problematic academic politics. Haphazard tenure and promotion processes were evident, but the courts still ruled on the institution's side.

Fourth, faculty report experiencing psychological abuse by department colleagues and administration (Ward, & Hall, 2022; Salinas et al., 2020, p. 122; Truesdale-Moore, 2023). Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for FOC to experience marginalization and devaluation by their colleagues (Liu et al., 2022, p. 2). They are also more likely to face microaggressions by their colleagues and have their authority, credibility, and expertise challenged (Liu et al., 2022). Concerning some cultural groups, mental health is challenging to express openly (Sue et al., 2022), exacerbating the challenge of getting help or discussing openly with colleagues. Furthermore, when dealing with the issue of mental health in isolation, staff in the academy found themselves more debilitated, residing in somewhat of a prison that seemed to lead to a downward spiral (Arday, 2020, p. 91).

Fifth, faculty reported experiencing no sense of belonging. The feeling of isolation is familiar among Latinx/ faculty due to a workplace lacking Latino/ cultural values (Salinas et al., 2020, p. 122). Faculty of color who do not value a team approach will find navigating this environment challenging and isolated (Salinas et al., 2020, p. 122).

Traditional Mentoring Programs at Predominately White Institutions

One factor that needs to be addressed within the mentoring model is the lens by which higher education forms its standards for mentoring its faculty. Within our higher educational institutions, a Euro-American culture permeates all facets of our educational standards. Faculty success is centered around individualism. Their professional development is conceptualized through individual performance (e.g., rank, competition, recognition, achievement, ideas, goals). Because of historical domination and oppression by Whites in America and globally,

whites have been taught to believe that they have an individual identity that is more important

than others and that their worldview should be the standard followed by all (Sue et al., 2022,

pp. 92 - 95). This worldview is presumed to be a universal perspective (Sue et al., 2022, p. 25).

However, it is insensitive to the needs of culturally diverse faculty: it does not accept, respect,

and understand cultural differences; it ignores discrimination against its FOC; and has little

understanding of prejudices and microaggressions (Sue et al., 2022, p. 27).

Culturally Responsive Mentoring: Implications in Higher Education

Upon reviewing the higher education faculty data and literature on racial battle fatigue,

developing a culturally responsive mentoring program model is prudent to assist with the

professional development and advancement of FOC in higher education. Culturally responsive

mentoring recommends that mentors share knowledge and wisdom with FOC mentees while

recognizing their cultural differences. The model should integrate three crucial components:

1) promotion guidelines or faculty contracts, 2) Discipline/College/University's Mission and

Vision, and 3) Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies of the American

Counseling Association (2015). In more detail, the promotion guidelines or faculty contracts are

guidelines for evaluating professional development plans, reports, reviews, and promotions.

Your research, teaching, and other scholarly activities should be highlighted within your

discipline, the college, and the university and resonate with the university's mission and vision.

Lastly, the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies of the American Counseling

Association (2015) are ideal for guiding cultural aspects of mentoring faculty because it

acknowledges attributes mentors should have: Self-awareness of values, biases, and

assumptions; 2) knowledge about FOC; and 3) skills to generate verbal and nonverbal helping

responses, communicate appropriately, understand various helping styles, while engaging in

academic and other scholarly activities that appreciates the intersectionality of culture,

community, college, and university. The following practical implications are presented below.

Cultural Awareness

Culturally responsive mentoring recommends that mentors go beyond holding diversity

dinners and other celebrations as their practice of cultural awareness. While this academic

engagement is essential and enjoyable, more is needed to improve the professional experience

of FOC. This experience educates whites and gives administrators a sense of accomplishment

but only gives FOC a false sense of belonging. Diversity matters, but it becomes questionable

when FOC remain isolated in their respective departments where discriminatory practices

threaten tenure and promotion. Focus on meaningful development within a cultural context by

diving deep into the cultural learning process (Sue et al., 2022). Faculty will begin to better

recognize the areas of distress within higher education and how to navigate these spaces. Seek

to acknowledge group differences and recognize that all FOC will not be at the same level of

race, ethnicity, and cultural identity (Sue et al., 2022). Equally important, mentors should

develop an understanding of their attitudes and identify factors that impact work with FOC (Sue

et al, 2022, pp. 149 – 165).

Collectivism and Racial Identity

The psychosocial unit of the identity of most people of color is not individualistic or independent; it is collectivity. For cultures of color, independence is viewed as undesirable, and interdependence is valued. For higher education, independence is valued, but for mentoring FOC, mentor-mentees must address their mentoring through a collective lens. Addressing this matter through a Western Euro-American lens, FOC experience isolation and alienation. Culturally diverse faculty typically come from collectivist cultures and do not view individualism favorably; instead, collectivism is viewed more importantly. From the mentee's worldview, the group, the community, and the family orientation shape the FOC's identity (Sue et al., 2022, p. 44).

Collectivism and Cultural Capital

Making collectivism the focus, the FOC approach works through two types of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). The first is familial capital, which engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a broad understanding of kinship, such as gatherings among FOC members. The second is social capital, which includes the network of peers and other social contacts that provide FOC both instrumental and emotional support, such as peer reviews on scholarly articles by FOC and other supportive professional roles where feedback is helpful, such as reviews on tenure and promotion documents. Sometimes, conversations about race matters are necessary among FOC, who can help navigate the issue.

Collectivism and Scholarship

As noted, isolation is one factor that impacts the professional experience of faculty in higher education on campus. Social isolation is defined in many ways, but generally, it is understood as the absence of relationships with other people (Hussein, 2022, p. 276).   With the connection of social isolation with culture, collectivism is the most profound in that it can explain how individuals are incorporated into their social groups. For many organizations, individuals in one's social network often share similar demographic characteristics (Bristol & Shirrell, 2019, p. 872). Because of this tendency and the over-representation of white faculty, FOC might experience social isolation or feel no sense of belonging. White faculty generally come from individualistic cultures where attributes such as autonomy, independence, uniqueness, self-reliance, achievement orientation, and a sense of competition are embraced, and individual responsibility is rewarded (Hussein, 2022, p. 278). According to Gist (2016), when white faculty consists of the majority, they are more likely to influence the day-to-day experiences of faculty of color and their opportunities to increase social capital (Bristol & Shirrell, 2019, p. 872).

Research indicates that North American and Western European societies tend to be more individualistic, whereas, East Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe tend to be more collectivistic (Hussein, 2022, p. 278). Associated with a duty to one's group., interdependence is in harmony with group conformity and norms that guide a collaborative relationship (Hussein, 20022, p. 278). Isolation is especially notable when faculty are culturally oriented from collectivistic cultures. When they are the only ethnic faculty within the department or college, the faculty can experience isolation because of the research focus of

his/her research subject matter. This can produce a need for more access to information, networks, and organizations that might assist in producing scholarship. However, the research topic on race and ethnicity can produce challenges but finding trusted FOC members of the Academy and community organizations can help address critical societal issues and the faculty research agenda. This leads to more collaborative research productivity by FOC.

Collectivism and Student Advising

This area is where FOC are typically predisposed to work with students collaboratively, which is overrepresented around service. Advising and mentoring students of color is an area that FOC chose to volunteer because they value the social and familial nature of working collaboratively. One example is precollege and college access programs where FOC volunteer to teach and participate in various activities, giving high school students early access to college and faculty who look like them. This work is rewarding, but FOC must proceed with caution.

According to educational scholars (Martinez & Welton, 2017; Padilla, 1994), this practice leads to cultural taxation because it is all done simultaneously: producing scholarship, teaching, participating on committees, and attending other collegiate activities, which is unappreciated, overworked, and leads to not receiving tenure and promotion. It is an assault of microinvalidation involving failing to recognize and acknowledge FOC's unique individuality, cultural values, and professional knowledge (Sue et al., 2022, p. 72).

Cross-Cultural Communication

Communication styles are how groups use personal space when speaking to one another. For example, African Americans and Latinx have a closer conversing distance than White Americans and Asian Americans (Sue et al., 2022, p. 163). In other words, culture

dictates distance in conversation. Also, how we perceive communication is often different among cultures. For example, African Americans are often direct and are often stereotyped as being quick to anger and prone to violence, which is seen as threatening to White Americans (Sue et al., 2022, p. 163). How we communicate in tone, volume, voice quality, attitude, and word choices deliver a misunderstood message (Fontes, 2008, pp. 56 – 108). This includes demeanor where nonverbal behaviors are communicated – including eye contact, nodding, leaning forward, posture, and greeting, to name a few (Fontes, 2008, pp. 56 – 108).

CONCLUSION Equity-Mined Goals

Equity brings attention to the impact that organizational culture, expressions of power, work environment, decision-making, and patterns of interaction have on individual and collective experiences, productivity, and employment trajectories for faculty. Faculty departure is a visible sign of organizational problems and social exclusion of FOC and its negative impact on their productivity. With your mentor-mentee relationships, start building equity-minded goals that are measurable, culturally responsive, and meet the priorities of the college and university.

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