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## Creating a Model for Faculty Success: Faculty Advancement Initiative for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color at the University at Albany

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## **Creating a Model for Faculty Success: Faculty Advancement Initiative for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color at the University at Albany**

### **Cover Page Footnote**

This initiative was born out of the SUNY Hispanic Leadership Institute, whose Executive Director, President Havidán Rodríguez, gave substantial feedback. Samuel Caldwell and Lokia Green from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) have offered their unwavering support, both moral and financial. We have also received funding from the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures (LLC), The United University Professions (UUP), School of Public Health (SPH), The College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), and CATLOE (Center for the Advancement of Teaching).

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## **Creating a Model for Faculty Success:**

### **The Faculty Advancement Initiative for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color at the University at Albany**

In 2020 of nearly 836,600 full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, almost three-quarters of them were White, while 25.8% were non-White (National Center for Education Statistics 2022). The racial and ethnic imbalance in higher education becomes more visible when the numbers are disaggregated to account for solely Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Indigenous faculty representation (5.68%, 5.3% and .39%, respectively). The data also reveals significant racial and ethnic disparity when only tenure-rank faculty (Full, Associate, and Assistant Professors) are considered (3.9% Black, 4% Hispanic/Latinx, and 0.3% American Indian/Alaska Native). While student diversity has increased over the last two decades, the faculty are far less diverse than the students they serve (Davis et al., 2019). To respond to the augmenting gap between Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic/Latinx faculty compared to the diversity of students they serve, diversity initiatives have aimed to mitigate the racial and ethnic imbalance, as illustrated by various State University of New York (SUNY) Faculty Diversity Initiatives.

Through a SUNY diversity initiative, Carmen A. Serrano was hired in 2013 as an Assistant Professor at the University at Albany in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, while Elizabeth Vásquez was recruited to the School of Public Health in 2011. Despite being hired under the same SUNY diversity initiative, their paths never crossed, and they endured the tenure process without benefitting from each other's camaraderie. It was not until 2022, almost ten years later, that they met through the [SUNY Hispanic Leadership Institute](#) (HLI), and it was through this fellowship that Associate Professors Serrano and Vásquez were

finally able to develop a strong bond and dynamic professional relationship: Was their story unique? And were there other faculty of color who would also benefit from such solidarity? Fortunately, during the HLI fellowship, they were each asked to develop a capstone project that would address a major challenge confronting Higher Education and our home campus, specifically. As a result, the UAlbany Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and people of color (BILPOC) Faculty Advancement Initiative was born.

### **Our HLI Capstone Results**

Carmen A. Serrano in collaboration with Elizabeth Vásquez established the BILPOC Faculty Advancement Initiative at UAlbany, which focuses on research endeavors and creating community. To garner support, Serrano and Vásquez reached out to seven UAlbany faculty members in March of 2022 and since then we have seen our community take root. During our inaugural year, several BILPOC members gave dynamic research presentations, established mentoring relationships, attended professional development workshops, and enjoyed meals together. The leadership team of BILPOC partnered as co-investigators with the Center for Elimination of Health Disparities, for the renewal of the University at Albany (UAlbany) prestigious National Institute of Health (NIH) S21 award. In addition, BILPOC aligned with community and university stakeholders to co-organize the one day [Mental Health in Communities of Color Symposium](#) in collaboration with [BIPOC PEEEEEEK](#).

The UAlbany BILPOC Faculty Advancement Initiative focuses on the holistic mentoring, retention, and promotion of BILPOC Faculty across campuses. The faculty-led association is providing a safe and supportive space for faculty who identify as Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx, and people of color (Frick, 2022). This association serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas while helping BILPOC faculty with professional growth and career

advancement. The group's programming serves as a catalyst to retain assistant and associate faculty. Our overarching goal is to promote greater representation of faculty of color in recruitment, retention, tenure, and promotion. The group's interconnected aims are to:

1. Create community and encourage community engagement. To do this, we created a series of surveys to determine faculty preferences for meeting times, format, and frequency. Based on the initial survey results, three meetings per semester were scheduled (once in person and two times via Zoom). In addition, we scheduled monthly lunches to discuss research projects, set goals, and provide a safe space for mentoring and research support. The community building and professional development activities include mentoring, tenure and promotion discussions, grant application training, and scholarship writing retreats.
2. Secure financial support. We were co-investigators on the NIH S21 proposal renewal entitled, "The Endowment for Community-Based Health Disparities Research and Training Grant". We applied for the 2023 Diversity Transformation Award from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), which has funded guest speakers, a writing retreat, and coaching. (Frick, 2023)
3. Increase the retention of BILPOC tenure-track faculty. We are aligned with the UAlbany Strategic Plan that aims to increase the proportion of BILPOC tenure-track faculty obtaining tenure and decrease the time for associate professors' promotion to full (5-7 years). This newly established BILPOC community provides opportunities that support our diverse mid-career workforce, while also creating a positive and sustainable scholarly environment, that will serve as a model for other institutions.

## **History and Contextualization**

The ideas presented here are in line with the Chancellor’s Spring 2021 *SUNY Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion Phase One Action Plan*. The report analyzes the racial equity gaps within SUNY and proposes solutions. The report also underscores the benefits of having diverse faculty:

Several studies have documented the benefit of developing and maintaining a racially and ethnically diverse teaching corps. However, while students of color increasingly comprise a larger share of postsecondary education, nationally, the racial and ethnic backgrounds of college faculty, staff, and administrators remain much less diverse than that of the student body. The same is true at SUNY . . . There have been marginal increases in the percentage of Hispanic/Latinx and Black full-time faculty. (P. 6)

Newly appointed SUNY Chancellor John B. King is also a champion of diversity and aims to have faculty reflect the students they serve, as underscored in the *2023-24 Executive Budget Testimony*: “Our shared success requires that SUNY rise to complex challenges to ensure opportunity and success for every student while competing for world-class faculty who reflect the rich diversity of our students.” (State University of New York, 2023). Furthermore, UAlbany BILPOC’s initiative supports the goals as outlined in the UAlbany Strategic Plan that aims to have “20% of our teaching faculty come from underrepresented minority groups”—this refers to tenured and tenure-track faculty.

The BILPOC Faculty Advancement Initiative is a campuswide supplement to the SUNY system’s PRODiG (“Promoting Recruitment, Opportunity, Diversity, Inclusion and Growth”) program, a state effort to increase the representation of historically underrepresented faculty at all SUNY campuses. The PRODiG initiative intends to promote both underrepresented minority (“URM”) faculty in all disciplines and women faculty of all races in STEM fields (“WSTEM”).

According to the SUNY PRODiG website: “Our data reveals a pronounced gap between the racial/ethnic diversity of SUNY faculty members (8.6%) as compared to the diversity of the students they instruct (28.5%, Fall 2018). This 3X gap is expected to grow if SUNY campuses do not take steps to overhaul their hiring practices and methodology.” At the University at Albany, PRODiG appears to be making progress in terms of women in STEM, while Black, Indigenous and Latinx faculty have benefitted the least, which is also contributing to augmenting the gap between Black, Indigenous, and Latinx faculty compared to the diversity of our students.

Representation matters for faculty and student success. In 2015 our UAlbany student diversity population was 27% and faculty of color represented 9% (UAlbany News Center, 2015). In 2019 the students belonging to these groups represented 40% of the student population while our historically underrepresented faculty belonging to these populations was a little over 9%. While UAlbany has one of the largest racially and ethnically diverse student populations within the SUNY system, the number of BILPOC faculty is not growing at the same rate. By creating a highly supportive environment on campus, the BILPOC Faculty Advancement Initiative contributes to institutional retention efforts and helps decrease the widening gap between racial and ethnic diversity of SUNY faculty and the students they serve. Most important, hiring more BILPOC faculty will help retain current faculty and contribute to student retention.

### **Impact on University and BILPOC Faculty**

Since inception, BILPOC has made a significant contribution to the University and Faculty as evidenced through its growth, programming, community engagement, and research proposal efforts. What began with a group of seven faculty members (the steering committee) has blossomed to over 50 within one year. The BILPOC Faculty Advancement Initiative is fulfilling a need on campus using a multilayer approach. BILPOC faculty are interested in

collaboration across disciplines on meaningful topics for their communities. They are also interested in mentorship, writing groups, social meetups, and outreach efforts, all of which this faculty advancement initiative provides.

The programming of BILPOC considers the needs of all members and offers opportunities for professional development and service. As a result, they have created committees to focus on goals that will ensure their growth and continued success. The *Faculty Development Committee* facilitates the establishment of mentoring clusters; matching faculty with potential mentors for those who want a more formal structure. This committee also organizes writing conclaves. For example, in the Spring of 2023 BILPOC partnered with UAlbany's CATLOE (Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Learning, and Online Education) to offer an interactive workshop on scholarly productivity. Their partnership hosted an outside workshop presenter, Dr. Tara Gray who has had extraordinary success with faculty development, specifically with publishing.

The *Outreach Committee* serves as ODI Liaison, plans, organizes, and invites BILPOC members for informal Networking Opportunities. This committee also organizes opportunities to give back to the broader community, which includes connecting with other BILPOC-like organizations inside and outside of UAlbany. Within one year, BILPOC co-organized a 1-day symposium on Mental Health in Communities of Color Symposium alongside the BIPOC PEEEEEEK Project. As one of the first events of the *Outreach Committee*, the event featured national and NY-based experts, ending with strategies to address trauma. The conference was well attended with over 180 participants. These participants included community partners, state commissioners, faculty, staff, and students. Our efforts have been documented in the campus



newspaper, *Today at UAlbany*, and featured on Spectrum News, our local news station (James, 2023).

The *Faculty Vitals Committee* organizes research presentations, proposal writing, and fundraising opportunities for BILPOC members. This committee is also responsible for surveys and interviews to understand tracking, hiring, retention, and advancement of BILPOC faculty members. The BILPOC Faculty Advancement Initiative has been active in grantsmanship to fund activities and to assist larger center-scale activities on campus, with proposals for internal and external sponsors. The *Faculty Vitals Committee* has not had the opportunity to track hiring, retention, and advancement of the members within the first year. However, having this type of committee built into the organizational structure will contribute to the impact of the initiative with usable metrics for university administration in the future.

### **What we would like to see**

BILPOC Faculty aim to partner with UAlbany leadership to contribute to the development of a 1-year, 5-year and 10-year plan that could help with the recruitment, retention, tenure, and promotion of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx faculty and other underrepresented faculty. The *Faculty Vitals Committee* will begin data collection efforts to track and assess hiring, retention, and advancement. Because we have such few faculty of color who are full professors, the plans will also include recommendations from all faculty who are culturally sensitive and aware of the institutional, systemic, and racist barriers faculty of color endure. This would include full professors whose scholarship and/or professional trajectory focus on Race, Ethnicity, Social Justice, Diversity, and Inclusion, among other related themes.

Given the success of our inaugural writing retreat and the expressed demand for more writing groups, BILPOC could continue to partner with CATLOE and other organizations to

expand the availability of writing group offerings. The resultant publications provide currency for the retention and promotion of BILPOC faculty, but writing groups have served a greater purpose in establishing a sense of community and connection to colleagues who otherwise would not cross paths on campus.

Finally, we will explore how academic disciplines and the university can build a pipeline to the professoriate for UAlbany BILPOC students. As one of the most diverse campuses in the state and nation, BILPOC faculty will assess opportunities to build programs for our underrepresented students to consider and pursue careers in academia. UAlbany garnered the coveted “Seal of Excelencia” by [Excelencia in Education](#) for ensuring that Latinx students are striving academically. Additionally, The Education Trust recognized UAlbany as a Top 10 performing university for Hispanic/Latinx student success and for improving Black student access to higher education (The Education Trust, 2021). The Education Trust and other studies have also ranked the University at Albany as a leading performer in achieving economic and social mobility but recruiting and retaining talented students of color for graduate studies has challenged us because many research universities with greater financial resources also compete for our underrepresented students, and many of our highest performing students also seek professional opportunities (Bitar, Montague, and Ilano, 2022). BILPOC committees will continue to connect its participants to professional development and networking opportunities that can make faculty at all ranks more successful at obtaining funding for research. Consequently, BILPOC faculty can obtain the funding to recruit and train tomorrow’s underrepresented scholars.

It is a complex and rewarding endeavor to develop a model for faculty success as the table below outlines. We have gained valuable insights and lessons that can benefit others undertaking a similar initiative.

Table 1

Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty who never crossed paths before are now collaborating on major grants.</li> <li>• BILPOC is becoming a well-known and highly recognized community and university organization.</li> <li>• We have developed an internal organizational structure and this process paper.</li> </ul>
Lessons Learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each faculty member has unique needs and career trajectories. To ensure the success of this model, we try to provide individualized support and professional development opportunities.</li> <li>• Transparency and communication are the key. We keep all stakeholders informed throughout the entire process. In doing that, we foster trust and engagement among faculty members.</li> <li>• The process of building a successful model demands effort and long-term commitment. During the process, adaptability is critical because we should be flexible in accommodating challenges and emerging needs.</li> <li>• Regularly assessing the effectiveness of the model and gathering feedback from faculty members are essential steps to ensure continuous enhancement.</li> <li>• Organizational structure is important and more formal roles are essential to ensure that tasks are distributed equitably.</li> </ul>
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We do welcome Indigenous faculty into our group, despite our focused efforts, we have been unable to identify anyone.</li> <li>• We have not yet secured stable financing to secure our longevity.</li> <li>• We need targeted hiring to increase BILPOC faculty representation.</li> </ul>

BILPOC, at the grassroots level, is addressing challenges confronting Higher Education, and UAlbany specifically, and we are presenting practical solutions to these challenges. The university already attracts diverse students, however, here we also propose ways in which the university can diversify and support research and tenure-track faculty. The ideas presented here are in line with the aims outlined in the UAlbany Strategic Plan, in which the institution aims to recruit and retain faculty that better reflect the diversity of our undergraduate students; foster an

inclusive campus climate; and incorporate diversity in teaching and create an inclusive classroom.

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