Stop the lip service and stalling on faculty diversity: What a genuine commitment to hiring African-American faculty requires at top universities

Dr. Darrell Norman Burrell,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4675-9544

Dr. Kevin Richardson,
Edward Waters University

Abstract—There is a significant shortage of minority faculty at U.S. Colleges and Universities (Davis & Fry, 2019). Black, Hispanic, Native American, and multi-racial faculty members are underrepresented in the faculty ranks, compared to not only their share of the U.S. population (Gasman, 2022; Davis & Fry, 2019). The U.K. is even worse than the U.S., where just 160 out of 22,855 professors in 2020/21 are Black, essentially less than 1% (White, 2022). Minority students with educators of the same race or ethnicity are more likely to see those teachers as role models and report more significant effort in school and higher college goals (Davis & Fry, 2019). This paper explores the best practices to recruit more minority faculty in 2022 and beyond.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently as students across the country protested incidents of racism and discrimination on and off campus, they called attention to the small numbers of Black, Latinx, and Native American professors on their campuses, and faculty diversity has consistently appeared on activists' lists of demands (Chessman & Wayt, 2016; Flaherty, 2015).

There is a significant shortage of minority faculty at U.S. Colleges and Universities (Davis & Fry, 2019). Black, Hispanic, Native American, and multi-racial faculty members are underrepresented in the faculty ranks, compared to not only their share of the U.S. population but also to the student bodies of colleges and universities at the highest-ranked universities in America (Gasman, 2022; Davis & Fry, 2019).

The numbers warrant more attention and focus on the university faculty diversity issue. For example, in the fall of 2017, only 5% of faculty members were Hispanic, compared with 20% of undergraduates (Davis & Fry, 2019). Black faculty were also underrepresented compared with the black undergraduate population (faculty 6% vs. students 14%) (Davis & Fry, 2019). On the other hand, Asian professors made up a slightly larger proportion of their peers than Asian students did (12% of faculty compared to 7% of students) (Davis & Fry, 2019). At the same time, students of color make up nearly half of the total enrollment in undergraduate programs (Centeno, 2021). Between the fall of 1997 and the fall of 2017, the share of nonwhite assistant professors grew by ten percentage points, compared with 8 points for professors (Davis & Fry, 2019). In 2013, underrepresented minority faculty made up approximately 11 percent of tenure-track or tenured faculty. As of 2019, the percentage of underrepresented minority faculty on tenure-track or tenured faculty has increased to just 12 percent (Gasman, 2022). Even worse than the United States is the situation in the United Kingdom, where only 160 out of 22,855 professors in 2020/21 are black, which is less than 1% of the total (White, 2022).

Students who come from underrepresented groups and have teachers who are of the same race or ethnicity as them are more likely to see their teachers as role models. These students also report putting in significantly more effort in school and having higher aspirations for college if they have teachers who are of the same race or ethnicity as them (Davis & Fry, 2019). If professors were more representative of the students they taught, the academic achievement gap between students of different races and ethnicities could be reduced by as much as fifty percent (Davis & Fry, 2019). According to the findings of recent studies, there is a significant and robust positive association that exists between improvements in the diversity of the faculty and the graduation, transfer, and drop-out rates of minority students. This association has been found to be significant and robust (Cross & Carman, 2022). When they are instructed by a more diverse faculty, students from underrepresented groups see significant improvements in their academic performance (Cross & Carman, 2022).

II. METHOD

This paper uses two focus groups of African-American faculty from research one universities (5 males & 5 females) that have also served in diversity and inclusion roles in their careers. One key research question was: What are the best practices for recruiting and searching African-American faculty?

III. CONTEXTS FROM THE LITERATURE

According to Rutherford (2021), change theory recommends making adjustments to the organizational system, which, in many cases, is structured in such a way as to disadvantage one group in order to advantage another. The problem of implicit bias can be alleviated by making adjustments to the way the system works. The theory of change can be defined as a theory of how and why an initiative works, which can be empirically tested by measuring indicators for every expected step on the hypothesized causal pathway to impact, according to Gilissen et al. The theory of change can be defined as a theory of how and why an initiative works (Gilissen et al., 2018). This definition places an emphasis on the necessity of taking conscious steps toward ensuring inclusivity as well as a diversity of cultures.

The concept of change, on the other hand, is defined by Rutherford as latching onto a plausible and transparent distribution of intensities purposed to liberate human beings from constraints such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity that enslave them from enacting and achieving solutions (Rutherford, 2021). In order to address the issue of diversity within the teaching staff, educational institutions need to break free of the behaviors, actions, and decision making that perpetuate racism and favoritism. In order to accomplish this goal, places of higher education need to address the entire system. According to Espinosa et al. (2019), an authentic commitment to diversity conveys the message that the success of people of color should not be solely dependent on a predetermined number of people of color at the top or a percentage of people of color at the table. In the given circumstances, the fact that the rest of the staff members are white despite the fact that the department head is African American is insufficient because it does not provide exceptional representation. The importance of maintaining a sense of equilibrium throughout the entire institution.

The curriculum, as well as the discussions that take place on committees and in faculty meetings, benefit from an increase in richness when there is more diversity of thought among the faculty members (Gasman, 2022; Gasman, 2016). Additionally, the university is held accountable by a diverse faculty in ways that uplift people of color and center issues important to the large and growing communities of color across the nation (Gasman, 2022; Gasman, 2016). Higher education is rapidly approaching a tipping point where increasing the diversity of faculty members is not only an absolute necessity but also essential to the future of our country (Gasman, 2022; Gasman, 2016).

People of color who are otherwise qualified for faculty positions are frequently disregarded as candidates through the use of the word "quality" (Gasman, 2022; Gasman, 2016). Even those people on search committees who appear to be dedicated to access and equity will cite "quality" or lack of "quality" as a reason for not interviewing or hiring a person of color. This is true even if the people on the search committee are committed to access and equity (Gasman, 2022; Gasman, 2016).

In most cases, quality indicates that the minority applicant did not earn their Ph.D. from an establishment that is regarded as being of the highest caliber or that they did not receive guidance from a renowned expert in the field. (Gasman 2022; Gasman, 2016). It has been found that being able to attend and graduate from elite institutions as well as being mentored by prominent people is linked to social capital and relationships. However, people of color are not typically able to experience these things to their full potential (Gasman, 2022; Gasman, 2016). The argument that there are not enough people of color in the faculty pipeline is a typical justification (Gasman, 2022; Gasman, 2016; Smith, 2020; Griffin, 2019; Gavino, 2021).

IV. THEORIES THAT PROVIDE MORE CONTEXT

There are a variety of social and psychological motivations that can explain the interactions that take place during the faculty recruiting, interviewing, and hiring process, and modern theories of intergroup bias function as a means to explain intergroup bias in terms of these various motivations around practices, behaviors, and interactions. Several different theories offer contexts for the difficulties posed by evolving systems and processes, which act to limit diversity. For example, sociocentrism is the tendency to judge one's own group as superior to other groups across various domains (American Psychological Association, 2022B). This theory could manifest itself when a White person on a search committee, a graduate from a predominantly White university, assumes that a Black applicant who went to a Historically Black College (HBCU) might have gotten an inferior level of education.

Another theory that provides an additional context to barriers to diversifying college faculty is ethnocentrism (American Psychological Association, 2022A). Ethnocentrism is the tendency, often unintentional, to base perceptions and understandings of other groups or cultures on one's own. A person functioning from a framework of ethnocentrism would practice regarding one's own ethnic, racial, or social group as the center of all things (American Psychological Association, 2022A). In behavior on a faculty search committee, this could mean that they might need to consider how the journeys, experiences, and perspectives of others could be so dramatically different from their own.

According to one of the central tenets of terror management theory, individuals are presupposed to hold favorable opinions of members of their own in-group because they believe that individuals who share similar perspectives are more likely to validate and support their own cultural worldview. However, they have a negative view of members of out-groups because they believe that people who are different from them pose a threat to their worldview (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). This theory provides some context for what could limit the viability of an African-American applicant when the search committee does not have any representation from other minority groups.

Intergroup bias is the final theory that helps provide additional context to the obstacles that prevent the diversification of college faculty. In general, this theory refers to the systematic tendency to evaluate one's own membership group (also known as the in-group) or the members of that group more favorably than one would evaluate a non-membership group (also known as the out-group) or the members of that group (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Bias can refer to actions (such as discrimination), attitudes (such as prejudice), or cognitive processes (such as stereotyping) (Wilder & Simon, 2001; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). This tendency toward serving one's own group can benefit the in-group while hurting the out-group (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). The concept of "bias" requires one to make an interpretive decision. Because it goes beyond the objective requirements or evidence of the situation, this judgment is unfair, illegitimate, or unjustifiable. All three of these descriptors are accurate (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). This means that minority applicants might not be considered part of the in-group or group of choice. As a result, the applications of those in the in-group would be more favored, valued, and coveted.

Research shows that schemas affect evaluation and performance (Kang et al., 2016). The study uncovered those job applicants with African-American-sounding names needed to send significantly more resumes than applicants with White-sounding names to get contacted for an interview (Kang at el., 2016). "Resume whitening" refers to a practice in which candidates alter any information on their resume that indicates their ethnicity or race. This process could even include changing foreign-sounding or ethnic-sounding names to something American-sounding or a nickname that might seem more Caucasian-sounding (Kang at el., 2016). The clashing forces of assimilation and diversity have long fought for preeminence in the American experience, most intensely among African-Americans (Luo, 2009). The Whitening strategy is often viewed as a way to eliminate one more potential obstacle that might keep applicants from at least getting the chance to make it to an interview so they could present their case in person (Luo, 2009).

Nevertheless, the strategy of hiding race, changing names, and adopting nicknames can be demoralizing (Luo, 2009). Black job seekers said the purpose of hiding racial markers extended beyond simply getting in the door for an interview. It was also part of making sure they appeared palatable to hiring managers once their race was observed in the interview. In some ways, it is viewed as denying who and what they are or attempting to make it easier to be accepted and embraced by having a nickname it is easier to pronounce or by having a name that might sound like those conducting the interviews (Luo, 2009). Ultimately feeling pushed to a state of desperation to be hired that they attempt to tone down their identity in a way be more tolerated instead of celebrated. In a study, the researchers sent out 1,600 fabricated resumes, based on real candidates, to employers in 16 different metropolitan areas in the U.S. Some resumes were left as is.

Others, on the other hand, were made "whiter" (Kang et el., 2016). According to the findings of the study, while 25.5% of resumes received callbacks when the names of African American candidates were "whitened," only 10% of resumes received a call back when the candidate left both their name and their experience unchanged. Applicants of Asian descent had a response rate of 21% if they "whitened" their resumes, while only 11.5% of candidates received a response if their resumes were not "whitened" (Kang et el., 2016).

V. FACULTY SEARCH COMMITTEES

When reviewing applicants' resumes and deciding who will be invited for an interview, the hiring committee often poses a significant challenge to diversity efforts in the faculty. These search committees for faculty positions are a contributing factor to the issue (Gasman, 2022; Fraser & Hunt, 2011). They have a need for training in recruitment, their makeup is rarely diverse, and they are frequently more interested in hiring people who are similar to themselves than expanding the diversity of their department (Gasman, 2022; Fraser & Hunt, 2011). They rely on the recommendations of people they know as well as advertisements in national publications (Gasman, 2022). The efforts that are put into recruiting still contain biases, which limit the inclusion of diverse candidates for interviews due to differences in the way their education or schools are perceived by the recruiters (Gasman, 2022). There are still biases present in recruiting efforts, which prevent a diverse pool of candidates from being considered.

Search committees that are lacking in diversity are more likely to engage in the manifestation of unconscious schemas or hypotheses. Our judgments of others, regardless of which group we belong to, are colored by schemas, which are expectations or stereotypes (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Every schema has an impact on the members of the group and the expectations they have regarding how they will be evaluated (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald 2002). Schemas frequently make their presence known through the occurrences of the following types of events:

• The quick processing of information, despite the fact that it is sometimes inaccurate.

• Frequently come into conflict with attitudes that are consciously held or "explicit."

• Evolve as a result of one's experiences and exposures.

The result is that the whole person is not considered for their full background and work experiences beyond the perceived pedigree of where they went to school (Gasman, 2022).

There are concerning trends where many selection committees are biasedly over-focused on international applicants or assume that everyone that goes to an Ivy League university must be the best in ways that dismissively leapfrog over highly qualified American minority applicants to focus diversity efforts exclusively on applicants from outside the U.S. with international backgrounds. Repeatedly search committees and administrators from predominately White institutions (PWI) superficial perception that only scholars from certain schools as automatically a better fit, instinctively more worthy, or more beneficial to the organization or its reputation or impact (Gasman, 2022; Smith, 2020; Griffin, 2019; Gavino, 2021).

Frequently, search committees make assumptions that people of color chose the university they attended because it was the only university they could get into, not understanding that often people of color have different variables and approaches to school choice (Gasman, 2022). The reality is that universities are not selecting a diploma. They are selecting a person. Inclusion requires that hiring committees consider more than where someone went to school without taking the time to find out about an applicant's full story or even the long and complex journey that someone took to get to where they are today (Gasman, 2022). The zig-zagged paths of diverse applicants often need to be fully valued, appreciated, and even understood (Gasman, 2022). An authentic commitment to diversity usually does not manifest itself by only interviewing a limited assortment of cookie-cut look-alike applicants regarding the same kind of backgrounds, degrees from the same types of universities, and linear career trajectories (Gasman, 2022; Smith, 2020; Griffin, 2019; Gavino, 2021).

VI. FOCUS GROUP RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following were outlined as best practices to diversify faculty that came from the focus group interviews.

They include 16 recommendations:

1. Build an effective search committee- Make sure that there is a significant representation of diverse members on the committee. Include people openly committed to diversity and excellence. When faculty members of color are low in a department, add minority graduate students or alumni as part of the search committee.

Train the search committee- Ensuring there is training on unconscious bias, diversity, and inclusion. One participant stated, "To be on a search committee at my university, we require that members read the following books as part of our training: "The Sum of Us" by Heather McGee, "Nice Racism," by Robin DiAngelo, Doing the Right Thing: How Colleges and Universities Can Undo Systemic Racism in Faculty Hiring by Marybeth Gasman and "Everyday Bias," by Howard Ross. We require the books to be read, and we have a facilitator debrief them and talk about how they might apply to the faculty search and hiring process."

2. Widen the pool from which the university recruits: actively pursue candidates thriving at less well-ranked institutions.

3. Partner with minority-serving institutions and institutions that are effective at graduating African-Americans from a variety of academic disciplines.

4. Include a diversity advocate- This is someone outside the school or academic department who is an expert on diversity and inclusion. This role supports the search committee by helping them see activities, approaches, and interactions that might need to be more inclusive or could recommend approaches that promote inclusion. This role could also be an externally hired consultant.

5.   Engage in Active Recruiting- Relationship building and recruiting begins before there is an open position. Network directly with young scholars, including your own students. Invite them to speak. Foster connections with other institutions to identify and track promising candidates.

6. Encourage high-quality applications- Provide explicit directions for applicants. Be clear about the audience for applications. Provide a checklist with clear instructions.

7. Include a diversity statement for all applicants- This statement should state an applicant's commitment to diversity by providing examples of when they promoted diversity, functioned as an ally, or even championed a diversity initiative.

8. Thoughtfully Evaluate Candidates - Discuss and define evaluation criteria in advance. One participant stated, "We have had searches where we remove names of candidates and the universities during our first review of whom we want to interview. We have done this to remove bias or favoritism of universities or colleges that the search committee members might have an inequitable affinity for to such a level that they may develop tunnel vision about candidates."

9. Use a Candidate Evaluation Tool at Multiple Stages- Having rating and ranking sheets for all interviews.

10. Try to interview more than one female/minority candidate because of critical mass effects.

11. Treat all applicants as valuable scholars and educators, not representatives of a minority class or group.

12. Provide information well ahead of the visit regarding schedule, expectations, and audience.

13. Ask the candidate who s/he would like to meet that are current faculty listed on the faculty webpage.

14. Identify a host or key logistics person that can set the tone and schedules for all interview visits.

15. Establish interview questions that are asked of all those being interviewed- Interviews should only evaluate qualifications that are relevant to a faculty position – questions about matters that are not job relevant (i.e., family status) are not appropriate.

16. Grow your own faculty African-American through specialized funded doctoral programs and post-doctoral programs that could have a criterion of selection in the program of being an HBCU graduate. These are universities that anyone of any race or background could attend but the most likely attendees would be African-Americans.

REFERENCES

[1] American Psychological Association (2022A) Ethnocentrism. American Psychological Association. Retrieved from: https://dictionary.apa.org/ethnocentrism

[2] American Psychological Association (2022B) sociocentrism. American Psychological Association. Retrieved from: https://dictionary.apa.org/sociocentrism

[3] Boyatzis, R. E. (2006). An overview of intentional change from a complexity perspective. *Journal of management development.*

[4] Britton, T., Rall, R. M., & Commodore, F. (2022). The Keys to Endurance: An Investigation of the Institutional Factors Relating to the Persistence of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. *The Journal of Higher Education*, pp. 1–23.

[5] Broady, K. E., Perry, A. M., & Romer, C. (2021, August 4). *Underfunding HBCUs leads to an underrepresentation of Black faculty.* Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/08/04/underfunding-hbcus-leads-to-an-underrepresentation-of-black-faculty/

[6] Centeno, J. (2021, May 12). Why We Need More Faculty Of Color In Higher Education. Forbes

[7] Chessman, H, Wayt, L. (2016, January 13). What Are Students Demanding?" Higher Education Today. American Council on Education. Retrieved from: https://www.higheredtoday.org/2016/01/13/what-are-students-demanding.

[8] Cross, J. D., Carman, C. (2022). The Relationship between Faculty Diversity and Student Success in Public Community Colleges, Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 46:12, 855–868, DOI: 10.1080/10668926.2021.1910595

[9] Davis, L., Fry, R. (2019. College faculty have become more racially and ethnically diverse but remain far less so than students. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/31/us-college-faculty-student-diversity/

[10] Elliott, S. (2021, July 6). *TSU looks to recoup millions in missing funding.* Nashville Scene. https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/citylimits/tsu-looks-to-recoup-millions-in-missing-funding/article_8ae60614-db7e-11eb-ba1f-0384b96522aa.html

[11] Espinosa, L. L., Turk, J. M., Taylor, M., & Chessman, H. M. (2019). Race and ethnicity in higher education: A status report.

[12] Flaherty, C. (2015, November 30). Demanding 10 Percent: Student protesters on a number of campuses want to see many more black faculty members. But how realistic are some of their goals? Inside Higher Education. Retrieved from: https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/11/30/student-activists-want-more-black-faculty-members-how-realistic-are-some-their-goals

[13] Fraser, G. J., & Hunt, D. E. (2011). Faculty diversity and search committee training: Learning from a critical incident. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 4*(3), 185.

[14] Gasman, M. (2016, September). An Ivy League professor on why colleges don't hire more faculty of color: 'We don't want them.' The Washington Post.

[15] Gasman, M. (2022). Doing the Right Thing: How Colleges and Universities Can Undo Systemic Racism in Faculty Hiring. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

[16] Gavino, M. C. (2021). Moving beyond the rhetoric on faculty diversity in higher education: an interview with diversity expert Dr. Bailey Jackson. *Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal.*

[17] Gilissen, J., Pivodic, L., Gastmans, C., Vander Stichele, R., Deliens, L., Breuer, E., & Van den Block, L. (2018). How to achieve the desired outcomes of advance care planning in nursing homes: a theory of change. *BMC geriatrics*, *18*(1), 1-14.

[18] Griffin, K. A. (2019). Redoubling our efforts: How institutions can affect faculty diversity. *Redoubling our efforts: How institutions can affect faculty diversity. Race and ethnicity in higher education: A status report*.

[19] Hewstone M, Rubin M, Willis H. (2002). Intergroup bias. Annu Rev Psychol. ;53:575-604. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135109. PMID: 11752497

[20] Kayes, P. E. (2006). New Paradigms for Diversifying Faculty and Staff in Higher Education: Uncovering Cultural Biases in the Search and Hiring Process. *Multicultural Education*, *14*(2), 65–69.

[21] Kang, S. K., DeCelles, K. A., Tilcsik, A., & Jun, S. (2016). Whitened Résumés: Race and Self-Presentation in the Labor Market. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *61*(3), 469–502. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839216639577

[22] Kershaw, C., Rast III, D. E., Hogg, M. A., & van Knippenberg, D. (2021). Battling in-group bias with effective intergroup leadership. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *60*(3), 765-785.

[23] Lovett, D. (2022). Rhetorical Twitter Tactics: Nikole Hannah-Jones and Digital Resistance on Twitter.

[24] Lou, M. (2009, December 5). 'Whitening' the Résumé. The New York Times.

[25] McBride, L. (2017, May 24). *Changing the narrative for men of color in higher education*. INSIGHT Into Diversity. https://www.insightintodiversity.com/changing-the-narrative-for-men-of-color-in-higher-education/

[26] Moultry, A. M. (2021). The Evolving Role of Historically Black Pharmacy Schools in a Changing Environment. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, *85*(9).

[27] Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald (2002). *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 6(1),* 101-115.

[28] Patt C, Eppig A, and Richards MA (2022) Postdocs as Key to Faculty Diversity: A Structured and Collaborative Approach for Research Universities. *Front. Psychol.* 12:759263. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.759263

[29] Prestiadi, D., Zulkarnain, W., & Sumarsono, R. B. (2019, December). Visionary leadership in total quality management: efforts to improve the quality of education in the industrial revolution 4.0. In *The 4th International Conference on Education and Management (COEMA 2019)* (pp. 202-206). Atlantis Press.

[30] Rutherford, M. (2021, May 12). Diversity & inclusion's theory of change (ToC). Diversity Professional. https://diversityprofessional.com/diversity-inclusions-theory-of-change-toc/

[31] Sekaquaptewa, D., Takahashi, K., Malley, J., Herzog, K., & Bliss, S. (2019). An evidence-based faculty recruitment workshop influences departmental hiring practice perceptions among university faculty. *Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal*.

[32] Smith, D. G. (2020). *Diversity's promise for higher education: Making it work*. JHU Press.

[33] Strauss, V. (2019, February 26). Debunking 3 myths about black students — using data and logic. *Washington Post (Washington, D.C.: 1974)*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/02/26/debunking-myths-about-black-students-using-data-logic/

[34] Taylor, S. N. (2006). Why the real self is fundamental to intentional change. *Journal of Management Development*.

[35] The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2022). *Adult population by race and ethnicity*. Kidscount.org. https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6539-adult-population-by-race-and-ethnicity#detailed/1/any/false/2048,574,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868/68,69,67,12,70,66,71,2800/13517,13518

[36] White, N. (2022, February 1). Just 1% of U.K. professors are Black, new figures reveal. The Independent.

[37] Wilder D, Simon AF. (2001). Affect as a cause of intergroup bias. See Brown & Gaertner 2001, pp. 153–72