

Chapter 63

Multicultural Leadership in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Women and people of color are vastly underrepresented in the American professoriate; although the presence of female faculty and professors of color is beneficial to the academy on various levels, these groups often face numerous barriers and challenges while serving in the professoriate and striving for promotion and tenure. This study was designed to investigate demonstrated multicultural awareness and positive work environment with regard to race, gender, or a combination within academic departments to help academic leaders better develop and understand multicultural leadership. Data were collected from 650 tenured and tenure-track faculty through an online questionnaire. The data analysis revealed that males and females of color within the professoriate report a less positive work environment than Caucasian faculty.

INTRODUCTION

There is a racial crisis in American higher education today (Smith, Atlbach, & Lomotey, 2002). Over the past few years, there have been a number of racial issues on college campuses that have garnered national attention. For example, in 2015 fraternity members at The University of Oklahoma were found to have a ritual of racist chants. These chants created a media fire storm but more importantly, it shaped a campus call to action to do more to address issues of multiculturalism (Howard, 2015). Similarly, at The University of Mississippi [Ole Miss], students and faculty alike were shocked by a person's racist behavior of placing a hoary Georgia state flag, which symbolized the Jim Crow South, on the statue of James Meredith (Blinder, 2015). The flag, along with the noose, being hung around the statue symbolized a strong sense of disrespect for African Americans and people of color who attended the campus. Yet again, the media along with faculty and staff reported that the institution may not be as welcoming to the idea of modern day multiculturalism. Finally, it was at the University of Missouri [Mizzou], where President Tim Wolfe was forced to resign following intense assertions that the campus leadership lacked

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the indispensable degree of multiculturalism needed for students and faculty of color to feel valued which triggered a national movement aimed at increasing and improving multiculturalism in higher education (Eligon, 2015). Indeed, this is a crisis that must be resolved, but the solution rests in part with academia and academic leadership who have an obligation to create inclusive multicultural environments for faculty and students alike.

Research (Piercy, Giddings, Allen, Dixon, Merzaros, & Joest, 2005; Stanley, 2006a) suggests there is a lack of multicultural competency demonstrated by academic leaders, which leaves faculty members feeling isolated and unwelcomed. These effects often create the sensation of institutionalized racism (Brayboy, 2003). While faculty may more closely identify with these feelings, often these emotions trickle down to students who quickly identify that the welcoming atmosphere, support, and nurturing needed simply does not exist at the institutional level (Milano, 2005; Palmer, Maramba, & Dancy, 2011; Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002). This leads to frustration and outrage that ultimately results in peaceful protest, but sometimes brings revolt. Therefore, colleges and universities who desire to create a more multicultural and inclusive environment must start by having leaders (e.g., chairs, deans, and provosts) who demonstrate a high level of multicultural awareness and competency. In fact, the failure of academic leaders to understand multicultural awareness is the central issue that contributes to the persistent issues of racism that has led to the 'black lives matter' movement on campuses throughout the United States. Simply stated, students and people of color within the American higher education system are tired of being victimized by the insensitive, callous, and inapt effects of racism. This series of recent events on college campuses like the aforementioned issues at Oklahoma, Mizzou, and Ole Miss, prompted college students, faculty, staff, and community stakeholders to raise the resounding question, "Where are the multicultural leaders?" Certainly during the Civil Rights Movement there were agents of change well-versed in multicultural leadership, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Reverend Jesse Jackson, and Rosa Parks, etc., who ushered the nation into a better place where equality in human rights was at the center on the American demographic, and which dramatically changed the face and landscape of diversity and multiculturalism for post-secondary education in the United States. As a nation, there have been great advancements in the area of Civil Rights that have positively impacted American higher education, but efforts have staggered and more must be done to create multicultural equality for institutions of higher learning.

Issues of multicultural equality have long polarized the nation as well as American higher education dating back to the inception of the College of William & Mary in 1693 whose goal as an institution was to de-heathenize the Native Americans (Thelin, 2004). The challenges of racism seem to be specifically challenging at Predominately White Institutions [PWIs]. These are post-secondary institutions, i.e., colleges and universities, where Caucasian students make up an overwhelming majority of the undergraduate population. At many of these institutions [PWIs] it can be difficult for students of color, particularly because in many cases this is the first time that either Caucasian students or students of color have had an opportunity to live, study, and socialize in a multicultural environment; and therefore, there are a number of cross-cultural misunderstandings and miscues that often leads to inter-cultural conflict. In fact, educational institutions, particularly post-secondary units, are microcosms of the American society in that many of the nation's issues are reflected in the academy. It is important to note that the best remedy for advancing multicultural equality, increasing diversity, and developing a post-racial society is American higher education. Higher education administrators must exercise leadership that will make it a priority to increase the number of faculty of color, which may in turn establish an academic environment that is conducive for students of various races, ethnicities, and cultures. In essence, higher education

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