

Academe Online

Supporting Women and Minority Faculty

To retain and promote a more diverse workforce, institutions need to welcome faculty newcomers differently.

By JoAnn Moody

We must cultivate and value diversity within the faculty, and the fact that we have not done so, despite our frequent expressions of good intentions, means that something is wrong about how we do business.

—*The Recruitment and Retention of a Diverse Faculty*, Dean's Diversity Subcommittee, University of Arizona, 2002

Good departmental practices can help women and minority faculty thrive and make the greatest possible contribution to the academic enterprise. Several recent books have explored what is wrong with the current way of doing business.¹ In this article, I outline steps to bring U.S. minority and European American women faculty—at both the junior and the senior levels—closer to full citizenship on U.S. campuses. In addition, I suggest how to coach senior faculty to recognize and then rise above cognitive mistakes they often make unwittingly. Examples of such errors include elitism that blinds one to quality outside one's own circle, the longing to clone, the stereotypical assumption that only European American men possess professional competence above suspicion, and snap judgments. These mistakes and lapses in critical thinking frequently result in the underrating of women and minority colleagues and, at times, in the overrating of majority men, immigrant, and international faculty. Here are my recommendations.

First, prepare new faculty hires and the department, beginning about three months before the newcomer's arrival. The department chair (aided by other faculty and the department secretary) should inform newcomers in advance about their course assignments, the office hours expected of a department member, anticipated class sizes, and the approximate academic preparation of students. The department should send the newcomer sample syllabi and book lists for review, the e-mail addresses of faculty who have taught the newcomer's courses and who are willing to chat about typical homework assignments and the like, and a description of student advising duties. Any faculty or personnel handbooks should be included. Easing the transition into the professoriate is a critically important process. Invaluable checklists and tips can be found in the 2000 guide *The Department Chair's Role in Developing New Faculty into Teachers and Scholars* by higher education scholars Estela Mara Bensimon, Kelly Ward, and Karla Sanders.

If any of the equipment or support promised to a newcomer fails to materialize, the chair or a designated senior faculty member should immediately and apologetically inform the new member. Doing so will help to avoid a lapse or omission that might be construed as a personal or professional slight by the predictably nervous new colleague. According to faculty developer Robert Boice, slights and critical incidents—such as not being invited to lunch during the first few weeks by any of one's colleagues—can easily fester and begin to undermine the morale of newcomers, especially women and minorities. Because decisions to leave the department are often made in the first semester or first year, a department and its faculty would be wise to "frontload" cordial and helpful attention on its new colleagues.

Several months before the arrival of new women or minority colleagues, the entire department (perhaps with the dean or provost included) should discuss the explicit and implicit customs of the department that might hinder the professional development and sense of belonging for these new hires. As Brown University professor Evelyn Hu-DeHart has observed, a department of mostly white men may unthinkingly expect new nonmajority hires to adapt to the departmental culture. But the departmental culture itself must also change to make certain that new members are treated as valued colleagues who receive nurturing and support.

For example, the department should recognize that many national studies have shown that members of the majority group within a department usually receive more mentoring—in the form of psychosocial support as well as instrumental assistance—than do minorities and women within the same department. Instrumental mentoring occurs when senior colleagues take the time to critique the scholarly work of junior faculty, nominate them for career-enhancing awards, include them in valuable networks and circles, collaborate with them on research or teaching projects, and arrange for them to chair conference sessions or submit invited manuscripts.

Not receiving instrumental mentoring can translate into a significant and cumulative professional disadvantage. The department as a whole must become aware that the experiences of majority newcomers will probably differ greatly from those of minority newcomers and that accumulating professional strength and advantage is usually easier for members of the majority group. Accordingly, the department must ensure that nonmajority new hires and pretenure colleagues receive instrumental mentoring and guidance in leveraging small successes into larger ones, as Hunter College psychologist Virginia Valian points out in her

1998 book, *Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women*. (For example, how can one convert a successful conference presentation into an article for publication?)

During faculty meetings before the arrival of new hires, the department chair—perhaps assisted by the dean or provost—should lead discussions about how affirmative action and faculty diversification will enhance (rather than dilute) the excellence of the department and its value to students and the campus. The new colleagues must not be denigrated as "affirmative action hires" who are not qualified for their posts. It is the responsibility of senior administrators to guard against, preempt, or deal with any such backlash. In addressing such negativity, the chair can cite scholars Ronald Takaki of the University of California, Berkeley, and Robert Dahl of Yale University, who point out that European American men have enjoyed invisible affirmative action, a monopoly on political power, and the highest-ranking jobs in this country since colonial times. The chair, provost, and senior faculty should craft other strategies as well in case the belittling of nonmajority colleagues occurs.

Second, strategically welcome new hires. To heighten newcomers' sense of belonging, the chair or a designated senior faculty member should visit each new faculty member's classes on the first day of the semester to briefly and enthusiastically explain to students why the department is so pleased about its new hires. This courtesy will help students better appreciate the new faculty members (studies have shown that students question the intellectual authority of women and minority instructors far more than that of white male faculty). In addition, the chair can proactively provide details to the dean and faculty colleagues that demonstrate how valuable the newcomers are to the department. Some deans make it a habit to meet cordially for an hour with each new hire in their divisions some time during the first year.

Third, provide yearlong, campuswide orientations for newcomers that go beyond arranging for a campus personnel officer to review the institution's pension and health insurance plans during the first week of the fall semester. Orientation sessions should begin before the newcomers' first semester and occur every two months thereafter, throughout the academic year. The sessions should focus on campus services, teaching and learning issues, time-management and stress-reduction strategies, grants for research or teaching, and the like. Extra attention should be paid to helping the newcomers build community with one another and with senior faculty from different disciplines. At a small campus with only a few new hires, the provost could invite new faculty from nearby institutions to a fall reception.

Fourth, develop "demystifying workshops" for pretenure faculty. Deans and chairs should lead annual workshops for pretenure faculty on such topics as "managing your lab" and "meeting the requirements for tenure." Many campuses now have centers for teaching and learning that offer invaluable sessions on how to promote active learning, even in large courses; write case studies for use in classes; draw up learning contracts with students; measure student-learning outcomes; restructure tests as pedagogical devices; manage technology in the classroom; and effectively run group mentoring sessions for all or most of one's student mentees.

Fifth, be consistently friendly and helpful to newcomers, especially minority faculty. Merely smiling and being vaguely cordial is insufficient to help new minority and women colleagues deal with the extra stresses they face, such as coping with the insistent questioning of their authority by some students. Senior faculty can introduce newcomers to informal and valuable Internet networks and key colleagues near and far, collaborate with them on research or teaching projects, and invite them to lunch or cultural and sporting events. In short, persist in reaching out—or isolation will set in. If senior faculty feel uncomfortable and awkward around newcomers whose gender, race, religion, social class, or ethnicity differs from their own, then they should consider taking one or more communication skills workshop focused on multicultural issues. These sessions will help those who are ready to learn to build new skills and confidence in a short time.

Ronald Wakimoto, a professor in the forestry school at the University of Montana, typically asks pretenure faculty in his department to advise him on a troublesome manuscript or on a teaching or mentoring problem. (He deliberately asks the junior colleagues for guidance in areas in which they excel.) By helping the senior professor and knowing that he will return the favor when they have a writing or teaching problem, the junior faculty members become connected and have the opportunity to participate in a reciprocal and beneficial relationship.

Sixth, coach and assign senior faculty to mentor pretenure faculty. Before each new hire arrives in the department, the provost's office should appoint a mentoring committee composed of three enthusiastic senior faculty members (some campuses also use retired faculty as mentors). Studies suggest that two of these mentors should be from outside the newcomer's department, because they will not be involved in contract renewals and tenure decisions. The department chair should appoint the third member from the new hire's department. After these mentors receive training, their job is to provide psychosocial encouragement as well as career-enhancing instrumental guidance. A schedule of monthly conversations between the mentors and the newcomer should be set, perhaps over lunch, with costs underwritten by the provost's office. Every three months or so, several mentoring committees and their mentees could meet with one another to build collegiality and share insights. A seasoned administrator should oversee these mentoring committees and help resolve problems as they arise.

For smaller campuses, only one mentor may be feasible for each pretenure faculty member. That mentor, like mentors at larger institutions, should receive formal coaching. In addition, mentee-readiness workshops should be held for junior faculty so they can make the most of the mentoring relationship.

Seventh, protect junior faculty, especially women and minorities, from excessive teaching, advising, and service assignments. A chronic overtaxing typically occurs when minority and women faculty are asked to serve as the "diversity" member for numerous campuswide or departmental committees. The chair and the mentoring committee must prevent an overload not only of committee work but also of student advising. The chair should help the new-comers choose committee assignments that will bring them in contact with other faculty important for them to know and possibly to collaborate with on scholarly enterprises.

To facilitate protective monitoring, a group at the University of Washington is building a database that will allow administrators to keep up with each faculty member's committee work and nomination for university and national awards and possibly teaching assignments, student advising, lab space, salary, merit raises, and the like. This database is part of a program called ADVANCE that the National Science Foundation funds at a handful of universities nationwide to enable women faculty to participate fully in science and engineering. (Soon the University of Washington's ADVANCE project will post a guide to faculty retention on its Web site as a companion to its excellent Faculty Recruitment Toolkit.) Some departments or colleges may already have similar databases they maintain for accrediting bodies. These, too, could be used to monitor and protect junior faculty.

For all new faculty hires, the department and its chair should limit the number of courses taught and make sure that the topics of assigned courses are familiar to the newcomers. These steps will help newcomers avoid a frenetic and stressful launch of their careers.

Eighth, assess and monitor pretenure faculty as they work to meet the tenure requirements for teaching, research, and service. Each pretenure faculty member must receive an annual job performance review as well as details about tenure requirements. Nothing can be as bewildering as wondering "How am I doing?" and "What are the tenure goals I should be focused on?" These questions must be answered.

Conventional wisdom holds that the department chair should serve as the primary monitor of job performance. I don't believe this arrangement is feasible, given the current practice of many departments of rotating their chairs every two to three years. To ensure continuity in the mentorship and monitoring of pretenure faculty, I suggest that larger departments establish a review or career development committee made up of three senior faculty members who can guide each tenure-track member in the department. This special committee can make sure that newcomers and pretenure colleagues understand the protocols and idiosyncrasies of the department. In addition, the committee can monitor the junior members as they work to meet the requirements for teaching, research, and service and approach the time for possible tenure and promotion.

The committee should coach new faculty members on ways to remedy any teaching difficulties or concerns raised in student evaluations of them. It would also be helpful to ask each new hire to prepare a three- or five-year plan setting out goals for scholarship, publications, and teaching. The committee can determine if departmental resources such as money, clerical help, research assistants, or videotapes on effective teaching can be allocated to support execution of the plan.

In the education department at Louisiana State University, a review committee ensures that new faculty understand the requirements for tenure and are working satisfactorily toward that goal. The high success rate of those mentored shows how productive junior faculty can be when they receive feedback and are not bewildered by the hidden rules of the game, according to Kofi Lomotey, a former LSU professor who is now president of Fort Valley State University in Georgia.

Ninth, monitor tenure and promotion reviews. At the University of Massachusetts-Boston, the College of Management carefully appoints a senior faculty member as chair of its yearlong, collegewide personnel committee. The faculty member selected must be knowledgeable and experienced about personnel matters, policies, and procedures. As chair, the faculty member has no vote in tenure or promotion decisions. Instead, the chair's job is to monitor procedures even-handedly, deal with mistakes or misconceptions that arise during the committee's work, and keep on track the review of departmental cases for tenure and promotion coming up to the college committee. At times, the chair and the committee suggest to departments how to remedy weaknesses in their reviews and encourage them to file addenda in light of evidence appearing in the candidates' files. To ensure transparency, careful decision making, and fairness in the review process, campuses and schools should consider this strategy and others.

Tenth, advance women and minorities into leadership positions. Provosts, presidents, departments, and divisions should take steps to advance minorities and women into roles traditionally closed to them. Prospective candidates for such roles should, of course, be carefully prepared, but a harder job will be to dismantle glass ceilings. Senior power holders should be held accountable for how well such dismantling proceeds.

Finally, prevent the shortchanging of women and minority colleagues at the junior and senior levels. In one famous example, sixteen of the seventeen tenured women faculty in the science division at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1996 documented that they received lower salaries and less lab space and institutional research funding than their 194 tenured male colleagues. In addition, they were less often promoted to leadership roles (no woman had ever been chair). Despite their membership in the distinguished American Academy of Science and their exceptional track records as researchers, these women felt that they were excluded from having a voice in their departments and kept down by very low glass ceilings. They explained in "A Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT," published in the March 1999 issue of the —*MIT Faculty Newsletter*, "The heart of the problem is that equal talent and accomplishment are viewed as unequal when seen through the eyes of prejudice." To its credit, MIT is moving to remedy gender inequities.

Such undervaluing and shortchanging continue at many colleges and universities, even though nasty, frontal putdowns of women and minorities are mostly a thing of the past. As the Deans' Subcommittee on Diversity at the University of Arizona put it, "A philosophical commitment to diversity can co-exist with practical barriers to diversity when our decisions and our decision-making procedures reproduce unexamined preferences and presumptions that make it difficult for our university to make significant strides toward creating a diverse faculty."

The university's vice provost, Elizabeth Ervin, explained to me that the campus recently held a two-day workshop for the provost, vice presidents, deans, and department chairs to "begin talking openly about barriers existing at the University of Arizona" that keep the number of Hispanic and African American faculty low. She said the workshop, entitled "Subtle Discrimination," made a "tremendous impression" on many participants who had not realized how privilege plays out in academia to the detriment of many women and minorities. Right after the workshop, participants felt freer to discuss this system of inequity and seized the occasion to do so. But after a few weeks, the new awareness and new conversations faded, with business back to usual. It is clear to the vice provost and other leaders that additional workshops and other means must be developed to keep the conversation alive and to move closer to institutionalizing good practices for equity.

In my own campus work, I have found that presenting "discussion scenarios" has a positive effect on faculty and administrators. These scenarios dramatize bad departmental practices as well as misconceptions that arise during, for example, meetings of tenure review and search committees, conversations between mentors and mentees, preparations of junior faculty for tenure review, and so on. After faculty and administrators identify and analyze the bad practices, dysfunctions, and cognitive mistakes in a scenario, they brainstorm about good practices the department in the scenario needs to adopt, how it can do so, and how it can ensure critical thinking and fairer decision making among its members. A new discussion scenario can be addressed at every other meeting of a deans' council, chairs' retreat, or divisional or departmental faculty meeting. This process gives faculty and administrators practice in reflecting on ways to remedy dysfunctional behaviors that stymie the advancement of women and minorities.

Comprehensive good practices can undeniably improve the department's culture, protocols, and customs—and benefit all faculty, not just minority or women faculty. At Johns Hopkins University, the Department of Medicine began a fifteen-year program of comprehensive "interventions" in 1990 that are indeed shrinking gender-based salary inequities and career obstacles for women faculty there. The three male chairs in that department since 1990 have steadfastly provided sturdy leadership and support; the current chair, Myron Weisfeldt, recently won a university-wide award for his diversity work. Moreover, the university itself is moving to launch its own gender-equity action plan.

In closing, I want to underscore four points. First, adopting good practices at the departmental level takes long-term commitment and work from many people. Happily, we are seeing progress in gender equity, as demonstrated by the Johns Hopkins Department of Medicine and by the work begun by ADVANCE programs throughout the country. New intervention programs for underrepresented minorities can be modeled after or incorporated into these gender-equity successes. Education researcher Cathy Trower and her Harvard associates (who are undertaking a national study of practices affecting junior faculty) propose one intriguing way to spotlight departmental cultures: evaluate and nationally rate departments on how well they are recruiting, retaining, and professionally developing junior faculty, especially women and minorities. External scrutiny and competition could indeed hasten the replacement of bad practices with good ones.

Second, well-meaning intellectuals in the academy often unwittingly make cognitive mistakes that undervalue their women and minority colleagues. They do so on a routine basis as well as during crucial gatekeeping processes such as reviews for tenure and promotion and elections for awards and leadership posts in and outside their departments. Far more long-term attention must be devoted to helping faculty recognize and rise above cognitive errors.

Third, every campus and department should become attuned to the importance of those faculty who serve as ad hoc champions for campus diversity. Working behind the scenes and occasionally stepping up to the bully pulpit, these advocates often have significant influence on their colleagues and students. It would behoove provosts, chairs, program directors, and other leaders to

coach and enlarge a cadre of such champions. As I quip in my consulting, administrators come and go, but senior faculty endure and endure. Because senior faculty have such lasting power, more of them should be engaged as prime movers in diversity work.

Finally, colleges and universities have miles to go before they are family friendly. Child-care facilities on campus, penalty-free family leaves for pretenure faculty, part-time and shared-job arrangements-all of these are desperately needed. Having these options would benefit junior and senior faculty. Perhaps it is time to begin rating campuses and departments on quality-of-life issues.

Note

See, for example, Joanne E. Cooper and Dannelle D. Stevens, *Tenure in the Sacred Grove: Issues and Strategies for Women and Minority Faculty* (2002); Lilli Hornig, ed., *Equal Rites, Unequal Outcomes: Women in American Research Universities* (2002); Clarence G. Williams, *Technology and the Dream: Reflections on the Black Experience at MIT, 1941-1999* (2001); Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner and Samuel L. Myers, Jr., *Faculty of Color in Academe: Bittersweet Success* (1999); and Raymond Padilla and Rudolfo Chávez, eds., *The Leaning Ivory Tower: Latino Professors in American Universities* (1995).

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