Retaining Faculty of Color

Most higher education institutions include language in their mission statements about the importance of diversity, but they often fall short when it comes to retaining faculty of color, says Christine A. Stanley, assistant dean of faculties and associate professor in the department of educational administration and human resource development at Texas A&M University.

Stanley, who has edited a book titled Faculty of Color: Teaching in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities (Anker Publishing, April 2006), which features the stories of 27 faculty of color at institutions across the United States, recently spoke with Academic Leader about the factors that affect the retention of faculty of color and ways that institutions can improve retention.

From the stories of faculty in the book and her own experiences as a person of color, Stanley identifies six themes or challenges related to retaining faculty of color:

1. Teaching—Faculty of color often feel that students treat them differently than their white colleagues. They feel that students tend to question their knowledge and credibility while they don’t do that as often with their white colleagues.

2. Mentoring—Some of the faculty members featured in the book have had strong mentors both inside and outside their institutions, while others did not get much mentoring. Stanley emphasizes the importance of mentoring.

3. Service—Faculty of color often have more service responsibilities than their white colleagues. “When you’re a person of color, your colleagues and administrators often assume that you’re the expert on people of color in general, so you’re asked to serve on numerous committees dealing with diversity issues. Also, it’s natural that students of color flock to you because they don’t see many faculty of color on campus,” Stanley says.

4. Collegiality—Collegiality means different things to different people. For example, are you expected to attend a social gathering? What are the consequences if you don’t show up? When you do you show up, how are you treated?

5. Identity—This refers to how people see themselves in relation to the world. “Individuals have multiple identities that are part of who they are,” Stanley says.

6. Racism—There are two kinds of racism that faculty of color face: individual and institutional. Institutional racism can play out in several ways. For example, some people believe that academia is culturally neutral and based on merit, but “if we truly believe that if everyone works hard and gets ahead, that doesn’t play out well for everyone in our society, particularly when you look at groups that have been marginalized over the years,” Stanley says. “The playing field is not equal.” Racism also can come into play when faculty of color engage in scholarship outside the mainstream. “If I’m doing research on the effects of voting rights on Latinos or African Americans, or if I’m doing research on anything that deals with race or gender issues, oftentimes people look at that and say, ‘It’s not exactly mainstream research.’ When you engage in that type of research, it’s not always rewarded or looked at very well in the academy.”

Recommendations

Based on the stories in the book and her own experiences, Stanley recommends the following strategies to help retain faculty of color:

- Grow your own—Consider hiring candidates who attended graduate school at your institution. The relationships they formed as students can help them feel more connected to the institution as faculty.

- Try to understand the experiences of faculty of color—Talk about diversity issues in exit interviews as well as in ongoing conversations with faculty who remain at the institution.

- Cluster hiring—Faculty of color often feel lonely, isolated, and “constantly under the microscope.” To alleviate these feelings, hire more than one faculty member of color at a time when possible.

- Provide mentoring—“I wouldn’t be where I am today without mentors,” Stanley says. “They were not afraid to give me constructive and critical feedback when I needed it. They didn’t walk on eggshells around me. They helped me navigate landmines and helped me get into certain networks that I probably wouldn’t have access to. But I think in academia … ‘mentoring’ sort of connotes that somehow you’re deficient in some way, and, quite frankly, some faculty don’t seek mentoring because they don’t want to be perceived as deficient.”

- Limit service activities—Faculty of color often take on a lot of service responsibilities as a way to give back to the community. Department chairs or administrators should act as a buffer between the faculty and those who ask them to serve on committees to protect these faculty members’ time and enable them to engage in activities that count toward promotion and tenure.

- Encourage a deeper dialogue on...
people who complete the survey, the more accurate the results will be.

"If the results reveal a trend in behavior that could be improved, we discuss possible developmental activities that the chair might engage in. Frankly, I am blessed with an outstanding group of department chairs, so the frequency of occurrence of negative observations is very small," Hattlestad says.

Although not every faculty member has firsthand information about an academic administrator's activities (they have the option of selecting N/A for any item), their feedback can provide another perspective that has a legitimate place in evaluating academic administrators, similar to the role that student feedback plays in faculty evaluation.

"We all need to be accountable. Faculty are rated by students and their administrators every year... as long as this is done—and I think it should be—I don't see how we can justify not evaluating administrators. Thus I think all institutions should implement a system that they have planned. I chaired the last committee that developed the new system. That committee consisted primarily of faculty with one department chair and myself representing the dean's perspective. We gathered examples from many institutions and it worked fine. I think other institutions would find a similar process feasible," Hattlestad says.

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relate the grant criteria to the equipment we needed:
1) The state had identified a rate of 17 percent of uncertified teachers in the target disciplines of math, science, and special education. Research for the grant demonstrated that 13 percent of the teachers in music were also not certified. By demonstrating that this was similar to the target disciplines, the proposal demonstrated a shortage of certified music teachers and, hence, satisfied the first criterion.
2) Initial research demonstrated that subject matter rich in technology had the effect of attracting and retaining students in math and science. Subsequent research demonstrated virtually identical data for the discipline of music. Through this, not only had the second criterion been satisfied but parity had also been established between music and the target disciplines.
3) Finally, research yielded a clause in the state's interpretation of the NCLB legislation that linked teacher preparation programs to the integration of technology in the curriculum. This satisfied the third criterion.

The investigators then set about redesigning the music education curriculum. This infused current music software, already the standard in the industry, into curricula for music-teacher preparation. The grant was fully funded at $127,700.

Conclusion
A successful grant actually creates a symbiosis. The key is to create something highly desirable to the funding agency and, in order for this to be realized, the agency has to provide funding.

Director of the School of Music at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Dr. Himes is a former member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). A grantsmanship presenter at national conferences, he has been awarded over $400,000 in grant funding since 1999.

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diversity—People are often reluctant to broach the subject of diversity for fear of appearing racist, sexist, or homophobic. But the issues must be out in the open, or else there won't be any progress. Stanley appreciates her mentors' candor in talking about diversity. For example, they often ask Stanley's opinion as to whether something they said might be perceived as racist. "They always tell me, you can call me on things I'm doing wrong." And I consider these individuals strong allies for diversity. When Stanley gets upset over something she perceives as racist, "they never say to me, 'Well, Christine, I think you're being too sensitive' or 'You're reading too much into it.' Instead, they ask, 'Why do you feel that way?' or 'Why did you reach that conclusion?'"

• Take action to prevent faculty of color from being lured away—"Don't wait until the negotiation stage with the other institution. Sit down and have a conversation with that person, and say, 'I've heard you're interviewing with another institution. Is there anything we can do to keep you here?'"

• Provide opportunities for advancement—If a person color being interviewed doesn't see many people of color in leadership positions, that could be seen as an indication that the institution has not progressed very far in its diversity goals.