Ten Ways To Retain Faculty of Color

Dr. Marybeth Gasman

Recently I gave a talk at the American Association of University Professors' annual meeting. The talk focused on the retention of faculty of color—unfortunately only one White faculty member attended the session. My comments were directed at those in positions of power within historically White institutions—I was saddened that many of these individuals did not attend the session.

Below are the 10 ways to retain faculty of color that I discussed in my talk. Many of these suggestions can be used with all faculty members. I invite you to add more in the comment feature of this blog.

1) Hire a critical mass of faculty of color. Quite a few historically White institutions have done this and it works. Not only does hiring a critical mass show commitment on the part of an institution, it also helps to create a less isolating and alienating atmosphere on campus and in individual departments. [For those who object: we hire critical masses of White faculty all the time.]

2) Don’t “over committee” faculty of color. Although it is important to have diversity in representation on campus committees, deans and chairs must make sure that faculty of color are not asked to serve disproportionately. There are some majority faculty who can and will advocate for the rights and perspectives of faculty and students of color.

3) Provide mentors to faculty of color—including other faculty of color and majority faculty. Both kinds of mentors are essential for understanding how the academy works.

4) Be clear about tenure and promotion policies with faculty of color. If you see someone going off track, steer them back as soon as possible.

5) If you are a department chair or dean, check in with faculty of color, asking regularly about their experiences. It is important that faculty of color have a comparable experience to that of majority faculty.

6) Invite faculty of color to lunch, to social gatherings, to your home. Creating an inclusive, warm faculty environment is essential to productivity and satisfaction.

7) Don’t make the mistake of asking for the input of faculty of color then ignoring it.

8) As a chair or dean, listen and watch faculty meeting conversations—making sure that White males are not dominating the conversation. Allow room and time for all voices. [For those who object: I’ve been a female for over four decades and I have countless examples to back up my assertion here.]

9) Provide clear annual feedback to faculty of color, making sure that they have all of the resources to improve and succeed at your institution.
10) Be cognizant that the experiences of faculty of color might be different from your own. Sometimes White faculty members are resistant to this idea because they can't view a situation from any perspective other than their own. Try harder.

An associate professor of higher education at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Gasman is the author of "Envisioning Black Colleges: A History of the United Negro College Fund" (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007) and lead editor of "Understanding Minority Serving Institutions" (SUNY Press, 2008).

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