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Advancing Faculty Diversity

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Isolated. Presumed Incompetent. Invisible, yet under the microscope. These terms are commonly used to describe the experiences of far too many racial and ethnic minority faculty members employed at predominantly White research-intensive universities. Add to this situation the too-frequent burden of being the "only" person of color in a department or college (Antonio, 2002; Jayakumar, Howard, Allen & Han, 2009; Stanley, 2006). Although AAU institutions strive to create a culture for diversity and inclusive excellence in teaching, research, and service, most institutions fall short and create conditions where everyday interactions exclude, diminish, and isolate faculty members, especially by race and ethnicity (Acker, 2006; Turner, 2002; Umbach, 2006). Research university structures and cultures present additional layers of this dynamic by emphasizing competitive individualism, institutional and disciplinary rankism and a reward structure that gives the competitive advantage to research that is not interdisciplinary, engaged, or collaborative (O'Meara, 2011). Such contexts present everyday interactions that constrain the full participation of faculty members in general and faculty members of color in particular. Given the burdens of race, gender and history of discrimination in the United States, to accomplish this goal is far from easy.

Many readers will be familiar with the National Science Foundation's Institutional Transformation ADVANCE grants, which provide U.S. institutions the opportunity to diagnose and design interventions to address issues of gender equity and work environment for women faculty members in the social sciences (NSF, 2006). Beginning in 2010, UMD ADVANCE began dsigning and implementing strategies to improve the

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retention and advancement of women in the faculty. In a previous Faculty Voice article, Co-Director O'Meara described several ADVANCE initiatives that have shown success in advancing the individual agency of women faculty members in career advancement, and the collective retention and advancement of women at UM. Among the most successful of these initiatives are peer networks. Recognizing the unequal retention and advancement of faculty members of color at UM, the ADVANCE program partnered with two distinguished faculty leaders (Thomas and Espy-Wilson), the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the Office of Faculty Affairs to establish the Advancing Faculty Diversity (AFD) program. The AFD program not only attempts to retain and advance individual faculty members of color, but also to make UM as a university, a more inclusive place. In other words, AFD attempts to advance full participation.

According to Sturm (2007), full participation includes equal opportunity to participate in the work of the university, realize one's capabilities, and have voice in decision-making. This requires "architecture for inclusion"—organizational structures and conditions that support diverse faculty members and diverse forms of scholarship. Although serious work has been done for decades on recruitment of faculty members of color and trying to increase awareness of bias in faculty hiring, this program focuses on retention and advancement.

ADVANCING Faculty Diversity (AFD) is a year-long peer network for women and men assistant and associate faculty members of color. The program was created in response to institutional data showing differential retention, advancement and satisfaction between underrepresented minority and White faculty members. Program objectives were informed by literature on faculty members' professional growth and agency, challenges experienced by faculty members of color in predominantly White research universities, and the development of prior successful ADVANCE peer networks for women and mentoring for faculty members of color. AFD objectives are to:

Improve participant knowledge of what matters in the tenure process, and promotion process to Full Professor.

Expand participants' peer support networks at UMD.

Decrease isolation and improve opportunities for collaboration.

Enhance the agency participants' feel about career advancement at UMD.

Advise the campus on structural and cultural change needed to recruit, retain, and advance underrepresented minority faculty members.

Although lessening the stress and negative effects of micro-aggressions and implicit bias for faculty members of color was not stated early on as an explicit goal of the program, it quickly became a key role the program played.

The Inaugural AFD cohort, during the 2013-2014 academic year, included 23 participants who responded to a campus-wide call for participation to faculty of color. Demographics of the cohort were: 9 men and 14 women; 18 Black/African American, 2 Latino/a, and 3 Asian/Asian American; 17 tenure-track assistant professors, 5 tenured associate professors, and 1 non-tenure-track research faculty member.

The AFD program was facilitated by Electrical and Computer Engineering Professor Carol Espy-Wilson and Public Health Professor Stephen B. Thomas, both of whom self-identify as African American and are tenured full professors at UMD who were willing to be role modes for resonance, sharing their lived experience and strategies they employed to thrive under challenging circumstances of life in the academy. KerryAnn O'Meara, Co-Director of the University of Maryland's ADVANCE program, who studies faculty members' careers and academic reward systems, provided curricular and administrative support for the program, and led evaluation efforts. Kumea Shorter-Gooden, Chief Diversity Officer, and Juan Uriagereka, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs, were chief advisors and often speakers and facilitators in the program, and are themselves faculty members of color in addition to serving as senior administrators on campus. The AFD program includes an opening reception, monthly meetings, communication across a listserv, and access to an Elms site with resources.

2013-2014 AFD Faculty Fellows with Dr. Loh at opening reception. Credit: Thai Nguyen

The program was launched via a reception wherein the University of Maryland's President, Dr. Wallace Loh, spoke to AFD participants and invited guests about the reality of bias and the commitment of the University of Maryland to inclusive excellence, full participation, and support of faculty of color. The monthly 2-hour meetings were held over a catered lunch, and there was a topic for each session, and sometimes outside speakers/facilitators. The sessions were always highly interactive and there was flexibility in the format in order to be responsive to the needs of the participants.

This program was rigorously evaluated, including participant observations of 80% of the sessions, pre- and post-evaluations, and focus groups. All participants were involved in the informed consent process and agreed to the process being evaluated and observed. Program evaluations from the first cohort suggest those who participated felt the AFD program added to their knowledge of specific aspects of the advancement process, felt stronger peer networks on campus, and greater agency in career advancement at UM. Longer term, AFD aims to be part of campus-wide efforts that achieve equity in the retention and advancement of all faculty groups on campus, and this is being tracked.

Key to the early success of AFD has been (a) creating safe, brave spaces to acknowledge micro-aggressions, bias and the challenges of being a "minority" (b) sharing strategies to cope with the stress of such micro-aggressions and bias (c) fostering peer recognition, resonance, and affirmation and (d) providing concrete, career advancement information tailored to issues faculty of color uniquely face.

Early on, AFD program facilitators acknowledged that micro-aggressions are a part of daily life in the U.S.—and in higher education institutions. "Racial micro-aggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color" (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, Equin, 2007, p.1). Those who inflict racial micro-aggressions are often unaware that they have done anything to harm another person. In addition to race and ethnicity, micro-aggressions can occur based on gender, race and gender, international status, sexual orientation, and a combination and intersectionality of different identities.

Sometimes micro-aggressions are explicit, at other times implicit. The AFD peer network offered an opportunity for participants to share experiences of micro-aggressions, as well as more general challenges of being faculty of color in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), in a safe and confidential space. Some ground rules were set including confidentiality within the room. Some of these ground rules included taking turns speaking, sharing air time, listening carefully and with empathy, staying on topic, being responsive to the things that are coming up, and not being afraid of the tension that comes up when such experiences are shared.

In the opening reception, one of the senior faculty leaders on campus shared his own career journey and was frank and honest about micro-aggressions and prejudice he had experienced along the way, as a student of color, faculty member, and even administrator. This immediate level of disclosure and openness, coupled with the structure of having faculty members in the program from different units across campus, of African American, Latino/a, and Asian backgrounds, and guidelines for facilitation created an early, safe, open space for the sharing of personal and professional experiences. All AFD participants noted that the program created a safe place to talk about experiences and concerns as well as what Areo and Clemens (2013) refer to as "brave space" wherein someone could take risks to raise issues that were typically not discussed in academe or with mentors in their departments.

On August 27, 2014, we launched the second cohort of AFD. The opening reception included Provost Mary Ann Rankin, who affirmed her commitment to creating a more inclusive campus, as well as listened to experiences and suggestions made by the first and second AFD cohorts for constructing better work environments for faculty members of color.

In conclusion, many would argue higher education institutions are "under construction" today. They need to be rebuilt to create cultures and structures that do not exclude those of color, women, professional track, and LGBTQ through every-day interactions, and policies and organizing practices inside departments. As this occurs, the AFD program provides an important rest area, feedback and recognition system for faculty members of color that we hope will also impact retention and advancement. Social network scholars have observed that relationships between people matter to enacting change (Daly, 2010). AFD is fostering such relationships, and those connections can build a better, more inclusive university for us all.

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For more information on the UMD Advancing Faculty Diversity Program's activities and research and evaluation efforts please visit: http://www.advance.umd.edu/

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