

Short Paper:
Faculty Roles in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

College of Professional Studies, Northeastern University
EDU 6202: Faculty, Curriculum, and Academic Community

Dr. Mary Ann Benites Kaplan

November 6, 2022

As institutions begin to address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at campuses across the country, steps are taken to identify contributing factors to the advancement and detriment of DEI at each institution. In many cases, institutions focus on student diversity in areas such as campus climate, student support, and recruitment of prospective students. There are other contributing factors that affect an institution's population diversity as well as its equity and inclusion on campus. Social mobility, the higher education pipeline, and how degree attainment affects the labor market are all considerations (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). As such, issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion at even just a single campus are more complicated than a single paper could ever hope to address. For this reason, this paper addresses solely this question: what role do faculty members' play as agents of change in the diversity of college campuses?

In considering this, it is important to understand a paradigm shift has occurred: institutions no longer exist solely to provide instruction. Instead, institutions produce learning, wherein students, faculty, and institutions are all responsible for student learning that should increase over time; each graduating class learns more than the previous (Barr & Tagg, 1995). This concept is further supported by the notion of faculty members as leaders, in and out of the classroom. Young faculty members (with 20 or less years of teaching experience) consider their work as transformational, and rely on their understanding of self-leadership to directly and indirectly affect students' learning and outcomes. Faculty members who view themselves in this way "focus more on quality teaching, pedagogical changes, access, and student success" (Hamilton, 2021).

Faculty contribute to the process of learning in both curricula instruction and creation; they select content for their courses, therefore they have direct control over what information and experiences students discover in the classroom (Mehaffy, 2010; U.S. Department of Education,

2016). This contribution presents a challenge as well; not all faculty feel confident in their ability to plan and create curriculum, and the assessment of courses and outcomes is often disorganized, difficult, and inconsistent (Bhat et al., 2017).

Faculty influence extends outside of the classroom and course instruction, as they interact with students on campus more frequently than institutional leadership, administrators, and staff members. Faculty hold power and influence that their peers do not; as a result, classroom and non classroom experiences with faculty affect and influence students' perception of systems and structures across both the institution and society at large (Parker & Trolian, 2020). With the idea that faculty members are agents of change in mind, examples of the use of this power for the purposes of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education can be found.

Faculty, through their influence on students in and out of the classroom, can significantly alter a student's perspective of DEI by "[encouraging] the exploration of diverse perspectives and worldviews in the classroom and [challenging] students to wrestle with new ideas in their teaching and advising help increase students' openness to diversity and challenge" (Ryder et al., 2015). When faculty exert their influence in the classroom in this way, they can positively affect a student's view on these issues, and in turn increase the likelihood that this student will foster this understanding in their peers.

In order to be effective in achieving DEI outcomes and accomplish this task, faculty must have an understanding of how their teaching reflects (or does not reflect) the needs of all students and consider diversity in this understanding (Pawlyshyn, 2013). An effective way to achieve this is to rely on faculty as institutional leaders. Interconnected policies and strategies must be communicated uniformly across a campus to provide opportunities, resources, and the environments for diverse populations to succeed (Larsen & Rocque, 2009); faculty leaders can

exert social influence to improve these systems and structures, particularly to privileged faculty members who might struggle to understand as a result of their lack of personal experience.

(Marchiondo et al., 2021).

Though all faculty have the power to influence students' perceptions of DEI in all subject matter areas, institutions have also created new and required courses with diversity in mind. To accomplish this, those institutions have hired faculty members off the tenure track specifically to teach these courses. As a result of their non-tenure track status, faculty members are often disadvantaged compared to their tenure track colleagues, and feel the burdens of the expectations of the institutions more adversely. With limited resources, non-tenure track faculty more frequently describe feeling unsupported and burnt out compared to their full-time colleagues (Miller & Struve, 2020).

The hiring of non-tenure track faculty is not the only way institutions have attempted to address DEI topics in classrooms; faculty diversity is a key focus at many institutions, though initial studies on the effectiveness of hiring procedures for the purpose of diversity indicate an inherent bias. Hiring processes and structures are designed in such a way that equity-minded hiring efforts are inhibited; as a result, diverse faculty are often excluded from consideration (Maffis, 2021). Beyond the structure of hiring processes, implicit bias also affects the hiring of diverse faculty. Faculty on search committees play a role in the decision making process for new hires, and their personal bias can affect discussions on potential candidates. Furthermore, if the chair of the search committee is a junior faculty member, their opinions are often superseded by those with higher professional standing, often leading to a continued culture of Whiteness (Hakkola & Dyer, 2022).

Should a new faculty member from a diverse background be hired, they are relied on heavily for any matters related to DEI: faculty members from diverse and/or underrepresented backgrounds (non-white, non-male, first-generation etc.), engage in activities related to DEI more often than their other colleagues. Similarly, those faculty with tenure and associate or full professor positions are more likely to participate in those activities, as their untenured and assistant level colleagues did not see these activities as increasing their ability to obtain tenure (Jimenez et al., 2019). This further disincentivizes faculty of diverse backgrounds from accepting positions at predominantly white institutions and perpetuates institutions' lack of diversity across all levels of the institution.

Ultimately, faculty members are agents of change at a course, program, and institutional level. Their influence extends across the campus, from students to their fellow faculty members. They play a role in the development of courses and curricula as it pertains to DEI, the hiring of new faculty, and the changing of attitudes of their colleagues. This influence is not without its challenges, as curriculum management is often complex for faculty who do not have experience with the process, and implicit and institutionalized bias stands in the way of maintaining a diverse faculty and student body. Further research needs to be conducted on methods to mitigate these factors so that the creation and implementation of DEI initiatives on a campus are successful endeavors.

References

- Barr, R. B., & Tagg, J. (1995). From teaching to learning: A new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 27(6), 13–25.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.1995.10544672>
- Bhat, D., Pushpalatha, K., & Kulkarni, P. (2017). Study of faculty viewpoints on challenges and factors influencing curriculum development/revision. *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research*, 11(10), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.7860/jcdr/2017/25697.10764>
- Hakkola, L., & Dyer, S. J. V. (2022). Role conflict: How search committee chairs negotiate faculty status, diversity, and equity in faculty searches. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 15(5), 583–595. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000386>
- Hamilton, M. K. (2021). Introspective faculty assessment of self leadership. *SAGE Open*, 11(3), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211031902>
- Jimenez, M. F., Laverty, T. M., Bombaci, S. P., Wilkins, K., Bennett, D. E., & Pejchar, L. (2019). Underrepresented faculty play a disproportionate role in advancing diversity and inclusion. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 3(7), 1030–1033.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-019-0911-5>
- Larsen, S., & Rocque, B. (2009). Faculty development for institutional change: Lessons from an ADVANCE project. *Change Magazine*, 18–27.
- Maffris, V. A. (2021, August). *Hiring faculty for equity and diversity: The role of search committees*. (Doctoral Dissertation) Retrieved from Long Beach ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (28547017).

- Marchiondo, L. A., Verney, S. P., & Venner, K. L. (2021). Academic leaders' diversity attitudes: Their role in predicting faculty support for institutional diversity. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000333>
- Mehaffy, G. L. (2010, November 10). *The role of faculty in a Red Balloon Era*. Red Balloon Project Blog. Retrieved from <https://aascuredballoonproject.wordpress.com/2010/11/11/the-role-of-faculty-in-a-red-balloon-era/>
- Miller, R. A., & Struve, L. E. (2020). "Heavy lifters of the university": Non-Tenure Track Faculty Teaching Required Diversity courses. *Innovative Higher Education*, 45(6), 437–455. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-09517-7>
- Parker, E. T., & Trolan, T. L. (2020). Student perceptions of the climate for diversity: The role of student–faculty interactions. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 13(4), 333–344. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000132>
- Pawlyshyn, N. (2013, July). *Faculty engagement with higher education learning outcomes assessment: Transformation in a faculty learning community*. (Excerpt from Chapter 2 Literature Review, pp. 89-103. Doctoral Dissertation) Retrieved from Proquest Dissertations and Theses Database. (3590555).
- Ryder, A. J., Reason, R. D., Mitchell, J. J., Gillon, K., & Hemer, K. M. (2015). Climate for learning and students' openness to diversity and challenge: A critical role for faculty. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 9(4), 339–352. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0039766>
- U.S. Department of Education (2016). *Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education*. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Office of the Under

Secretary. Retrieved from

<https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf>