






MENTORING DIVERSE FACULTY

Women and underrepresented minority (URM) faculty experience the academic world differently than their majority counterparts. Creating mentoring opportunities that support the unique issues that these faculty face is an important step in retaining them, helping them thrive, and changing the culture of the academy.

Documenting Difference: Experiences of Female and URM Faculty

 **Sense of Belonging.** Women and URM faculty do not feel the same sense of belonging as their majority counterparts. For example, Black female faculty in predominantly White institutions constantly face the challenge of being viewed as ‘other’ or may be presumed to have been hired through affirmative action and be less competent.¹


 **Access to Networks.** URM faculty are more likely than majority faculty to perceive a lack of opportunity to participate in departmental matters that are non-minority focused; feel excluded from mainstream decision-making sectors; and perceive themselves to be buffers in shielding institutional interests from the minority community.² Further, assumptions about a woman’s lack of competence, lack of leadership ability, or familial demands may cause leadership to “provide women with fewer training opportunities”³ and limited exposure to diverse experiences....³

 **Achieving Tenure.** Women and URMs experience the tenure process differently. Female faculty report feeling a lack of clarity surrounding tenure requirements at

“Mentoring is essential for under-represented women in male dominated fields and essential for non-immigrant, colonized group members, given the extra taxes and stressors that these outsiders often encounter.”

-Moody, 2012

their institutions,⁴ and both female faculty and faculty of color feel they have to perform twice as hard as their majority peers to receive half the credit.⁵

 **Access to Mentors:** Female and URM faculty often do not have access to mentors who understand their diverse needs and research interests, and who advocate on their behalf. Mentors make a difference. A lack of effective mentoring is a significant barrier to minority scientists’ applications and successful competition for NIH funding.⁶ One study showed that female faculty who had a mentor had a 93% chance of receiving grants whereas those with no mentor had only a 68% chance.⁷



Activity

- Review a mentoring map¹⁰ with your faculty, identify specific areas where you can serve as a mentor to that faculty member, and jointly brainstorm suggestions for individuals who can fulfill other mentoring roles listed in the mentoring map.

Discussion Questions

- How does your department explicitly address faculty mentoring? What could be improved? How could you implement these improvements?
- What do you know about the experiences of your women and URM faculty? How could you learn about their experiences? How could you provide better support of their professional development?
- How do you pair mentees and mentors?

Strategies for Mentoring Diverse Faculty

- 💡 Promote group mentoring and peer mentoring opportunities^{8,9} for faculty.
- 💡 Take your junior faculty to lunch every few months to check in with them as a group.
- 💡 Offer regular mentoring workshops discussing topics such as career goals, ethical behavior, handling departmental politics and personal issues, developing productive collaborations and competitive research proposals, and how to be an effective mentor or mentee.
- 💡 If you cannot act as a mentor, be a sponsor for URM and female faculty. Advocate on their behalf and mention them when important opportunities arise such as grants, awards, important committees, and high profile collaborative proposals.
- 💡 Include men in initiatives to promote gender equity by encouraging cross-gender mentoring and providing guidance on how to be effective mentors for female faculty.
- 💡 Protect women and other URM faculty from the demands of “tokenism.” Do not ask them to sit on all diversity committees or ask them to speak on topics associated with ‘their’ group.
- 💡 Assign short-term (one semester/quarter) allies to new faculty who can help them identify where to go for specific answers to questions
- 💡 Officially recognize women and URM faculty’s “unofficial mentoring” of female and URM students as part of their formal service load and as a contribution to supporting diversity and equity at the institution.

Additional Readings

University of Washington ADVANCE Mentoring Resources:
advance.washington.edu/resources/mentoring.html

National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity: facultydiversity.org

Making the Right Moves: A Practical Guide to Scientific Management for Postdocs and New Faculty (2006). The Howard Hughes Medical Institute and Burroughs Wellcome Fund:
hhmi.org/programs/resources-early-career-scientist-development/scientific-management-training-programs

University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching Resources on Faculty Mentoring: www.crlt.umich.edu/faculty/facment

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