

---

September 2023

## Equipping Faculty of Color: Mentorship and Strategies for Success in the Academy

Kara R. De La Fosse  
Minnesota State University, Mankato, wyatt100@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openriver.winona.edu/jaep>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

De La Fosse, K. R. (2023). Equipping Faculty of Color: Mentorship and Strategies for Success in the Academy. *The Journal of Advancing Education Practice*, 4(2). <https://openriver.winona.edu/jaep/vol4/iss2/2>

This Reflection Paper is brought to you for free and open access by OpenRiver. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Advancing Education Practice by an authorized editor of OpenRiver. For more information, please contact [klarson@winona.edu](mailto:klarson@winona.edu).

---

## Equipping Faculty of Color: Mentorship and Strategies for Success in the Academy

### Author Acknowledgement

Dr. DeJuana Parker and Dr. Barbara Holmes believed in me and taught me to trust the process years ago. My faith in them never waivered and I am forver grateful and blessed to have their continued guidance. They are two of the most influencial faculty I was privlaged to learn under throughout my extensive academic journey. Their intelligence and devotion for student success compares to none.

## **Equipping Faculty of Color: Mentorship and Strategies for Success in the Academy**

### **Abstract**

Equity is salient in the academy; however, the lens is focused on students and not faculty. Affording faculty of color, the same respect, honor, and opportunities white individuals possess are critical. Discounting credit and recognizing individuals' achievements based on the color of their skin transpired unfortunately. Emphasis has been provided necessitating the need to have diverse leadership in higher education to reflect the population of students. This exemplifies what students have voiced and provides support for the growing diverse population matriculating through higher education. Ensuring that recruitment for faculty of color and ongoing support is extended is paramount. Removing gaps and setting all individuals up for success is necessary.

*Keywords:* *Mentorship, Faculty of color, Equitable, Success, Academe, Academy*

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are salient phenomena in academe striving to lessen gaps to promote success for students and faculty alike. Establishing an equitable community in the academy of leaders and educators demands urgent attention and fervor to mitigate disparities. Historically, faculty of color contend with the stigma that they lack the competency to deliver high-quality instruction compared to white faculty (Parker, 2022). Motivation and persistence are paramount to overcoming the impediments inflicted on faculty of color for sustainability in the profession. Holmes and Willis (2022) assert deliberate mentorship equips faculty of color with essential perseverance to endure inequalities and the lack of inclusion within the profession. Faculty of color possess the unique ability and strength to bridge gaps cross-culturally with interaction in instruction and experimental preparation (Nalo, 2017). Despite the stellar contributions the faculty of color deliver, unfortunately, that population of educators is most difficult to recruit into the academy (Nalo, 2017). Discourse within the educational arena hinders the recruitment and retention of diverse educators. Demarginalizing experienced faculty of color endure as opposed to white faculty and mitigating racism impeding professional success is critical. Navigating higher education with a culturally responsive approach is central to best situating faculty of color for success in education and leadership roles (Truesdale-Moore, S. Y. (2022). In addition, diversity is exemplified among college students nationally and rapidly expanding; many are students of color that are unfortunately underrepresented and lack equivalent faculty representation as white students (Griffin, 2020). Intercultural expertise is afforded to students when provided the opportunity to receive education from faculty of color (Madyun et al. (2013). Student demands align with the vision of higher education establishments' pledge to embrace diversity, yet no strides have been accomplished in increasing faculty of color ratios. Students of color indicate susceptibility to increased prevalence of racial microaggressions, discrimination, prejudice, disrespect, marginalization, and not feeling valued as they matriculate through school (Harris and Lee, 2019). Much like what faculty endure, students report similar adverse experiences. Equipping faculty with support services will enable them to provide guidance and support strategies to mitigate disparities students are subjected to. Closing the equity gap will enable the focus to be centered on academic excellence and remove undue stressors.

### **Institutional Change**

White, non-Hispanic individuals comprise more than 75% of full-time faculty positions in higher education institutions compared to Blacks, which comprise only 4% (Settles and

Buchanan, 2019). The declared charge to demarginalize the overwhelming disparity, considerable work necessitates a change to achieve the desired aim. Underrepresentation and lack of overwhelming visibility in the academy negatively correlate with perceptions of not being regarded and possessing power and authority (Settles and Buchanan, 2019). Stress levels significantly increase as faculty of color diligently work harder in attempts to prove competence and have their voice and perspective heard. Rejection, incivility, discrimination, and overcoming pre-determined stereotypes are identity-based labels requiring internal deliberation on personal judgments and actions executed.

Invisibility obstructs awards and deserving recognition for instructional excellence, course redesign, scholarship, and stellar leadership abilities demonstrated. Contrary to being underacknowledged, supported, and honored, the same population of faculty remains under a microscope and is continually subjected to scrutiny enlarging the equity gap among faculty in the academy (Settles and Buchanan, 2019). In the arena of higher education, interpersonal relations, policy, and approach to conducting research are influenced by colorblindness (Cabrea et al., 2017). Navigating and implementing changes in the landscape of higher education affording faculty of color equality in the profession must be intentional to promote success, thus, mentorship must be provided.

### **Theory of Proportional Representation**

Quantifying faculty of color in relation to others in the academy, Kanter's (1977) theory of proportional representation has significant relevance. Kanter's research study yielded findings that women, also defined as minorities in the workplace were treated differently in comparison to others. Uniquely, individuals who are perceived as "tokens" were subjected to additional stressors (Settles et al., 2019). Kanter posited the enhanced stressors was equated to increased visibility of the minority population since they differed from the vast majority, thus being easily identified (Settles et al., 2019). The inequity observed in the academy signifies the identical imposition placed on faculty of color as they are a minority population. Targeted to being easily differentiated, unfortunately, subjects to additional stressors and scrutiny as they diligently strive to demonstrate value and acceptance within the profession. Leading with passion and devotion committed to higher education roles, faculty of color remain cognizant of upholding their reputation and mitigating unfair stereotypes inflicted on the race. Faculty of color struggle with inclusion, discrimination, decreased prospects to be afforded that they are highly skilled to perform, and overcoming preconceived beliefs are common themes faced battle within the academy. Individuals that are tokens based on race endure adverse consequences that impeded academic and professional excellence and ultimately might deter others from willingly entering the profession. Kelly (2007) argues stress imposed by race tokens contributes to the increased prevalence of depression, seclusion, loss of individuality, and rejection further compounding performance expectations.

Mentorship for faculty is integral for success and advancement within the profession. However, Kanter's 1977 theory identifies additional criteria faculty of color will need support to promote success and retention within higher education. Overcoming multiple barriers intensifies the challenges of assimilating into faculty or leadership positions. Mitigating unnecessary stress for faculty of color that others in the profession are not subjected to would enable the focus to remain on academic excellence and scholarship. As marginalized and underrepresented minority

groups, careful consideration is given when making decisions under the spotlight to lessen undue stressors that potentially obstructed retention, promotion, and tenure in academia.

### **Meaningful and Effective Mentorship**

Historically in higher education, mentoring was provided informally to novice educators from veteran experts in the field. Innovation in practice encompasses formal mentorship in the United States with the belief that job satisfaction will be enhanced and faculty will be retained (Lunsford et al., 2017). Effective mentorship is believed to best equip new faculty with skill sets to publish, write grants for funding, and excel in delivering education. Offering an arena displaying encouragement in the workforce, mitigating the perception or reality of isolation, and enhancing the new faculty's self-assurance, knowledge, and skills to advance in the profession are goals of effective mentoring (Jeffers et al., 2017). The rapport between the mentor and mentee is designed to promote a sense of connectedness and support during the assimilation transition of the new role and meeting outlined objectives (Barrett et al., 2017).

Allocating the role of a mentor must be assigned purposefully for optimal outcomes to be achieved three essential criteria must transpire. The mentor will devote considerable time to the mentee offering guidance and continued support. In addition, the mentor must remain teachable and receptive to feedback and suggestions shared by the mentee without displaying resistance (Barrett et al., 2017). An expectation that both parties are committed and actively engaged with the mentorship is exemplified by remaining flexible and available to meet, continued motivation to strive for excellence, and offering reciprocity throughout the process (Barrett et al., 2017). To further strengthen the mentorship, effective and honest communication is critical. Both parties must fully trust one another and respect the aim of delivering excellence within the academy. Lastly, Barrett et al., argue intentional selection between the mentor and mentee should transpire to align individuals with parallel pursuits for optimal outcomes that agreed on the collaboration for the best outcomes.

Organizational socialization is widely observed within the literature, and mentorship is predominant and is respected in introducing faculty into their newly assigned roles. Mentorship offers a landscape where guidance and support are initially provided but flourishes into collaboration and academic and professional growth for both parties (Mazerolle, 2017). For optimal mentorship to transpire, attentive and active listening must be observed by both parties. Demonstrating active engagement within the dialogue confirms investment in the partnership and establishes trust. When necessary, seeking clarification allows the mentor and mentee to remain aligned in partnership to obtain desired goals. Recognizing that immediate solutions might not be obtainable is permissible and offering a presence to act as a sounding board is occasionally needed. After obtaining the feedback and details, deciding on solutions can be examined and time devoted to presenting the best option for the mentee. Establishing and maintaining trust is vital for effective and optimum mentorship and partnership. Demonstrating confidentiality with declarations and fears expressed is crucial. If problems arise, or differences of opinions are expressed, be truthful and provide honest feedback. Remaining dependable and following through with commitments will strengthen trust between the mentor and mentee. Encouragement and praise for small and big accomplishments should be observed. Respecting the multiple impediments for faculty of color to excel in higher education and offering admiration for overcoming barriers will promote motivation and persistence to remain in the

academy. Recognizing opportunities to commend achievements and highlight them to others offers opportunities to engage others in acknowledging excellence. Frequently analyzing desired professional and personal goals and outcomes of the mentorship distinguish areas of strengths and weaknesses. Building upon strengths offers encouragement and identifying strategies to overcome weaknesses with actionable feedback is necessary. Setting realistic goals for improvement is desirable to promote success coupled with honest feedback throughout the mentorship. Mentorship opportunities enhance faculty retention and satisfaction which ultimately promote positive outcomes for students as they learn and grow academically with a demonstration of acceptance of diversity without discrimination. Establishing a supporting and welcoming community where distinguished and respected faculty of color are desperately needed in higher education can flourish is critical. Selective partnership with same-race individuals lessens academic stressors, and faculty of color endue in predominately white establishments (Harris and Lee, 2019).

### **Perspectives From a White Student**

Earning multiple undergraduate and graduate degrees has enabled enrollment at numerous higher education establishments. Degrees earned encompass a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education, Pre-K – 3<sup>rd</sup>, Associate Degree in Nursing, Practical Nursing Degree, Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Public Health Nurse Degree, Master’s Degree in Nursing Education, and Doctorate Degree in Education. Multiple colleges and universities over the last two decades have offered educational experiences that have shaped the professional now established. Interestingly, the variety in degree plans sought and numerous institutions did not afford diversity in the instructional and leadership team. The faculty consisted of solely white individuals throughout the entirety of the multiple programs except for the doctoral program.

Entering a doctoral program with exclusive faculty of color was a welcomed new experience. What is most impressive, was the warm embrace from the faculty and never once feeling awkward or misaligned. Immediately upon entry into the doctoral program, the instructional team demonstrated stellar leadership and excellence to an extent never observed before. This speaks volumes concerning the multiple academic leaders encountered previously completing numerous degrees.

Successfully earning a terminal degree demanded stellar leadership and excellence to guide students contending with imposter syndrome, fear of the unknown, and the ability to excel academically while maintaining a full-time job and raising a family. The delicate technique was critical in assisting students to enter the classroom leaving professional titles behind to remain teachable and receptive to feedback provided. Serving as a program director at a higher education establishment accustomed to being in control required adjusting to the student role once again. Frequently the leadership team would remind the cohort to “Trust the process.” Trusting the process and faculty was immediate and easy to accomplish.

Most commendable is the unwavering, unconditional, and passionate devotion to student success that cohort members were graced with. Faculty remained available during weekends, evenings, and holidays to support academic growth and development. Having the instructional team believe in scholars empowers individuals to strive for excellence for self-actualization, but more importantly to honor the academic leaders. Consulting the body of literature and

disseminating individual research was emphasized throughout the program as an expectation to guide others in the profession. Faculty guided students throughout the entire process beginning with academic residency. Faculty and students worked in small groups and co-authored manuscripts to demonstrate the process. Upon completion, the manuscripts were submitted for consideration for publication. Teams then traveled to an international conference to present their research. This teamwork was admirable and established the foundation for future manuscripts and publications. Faculty promoting student excellence and modeling the path to achieve and excel was only demonstrated by the faculty of color in the doctoral program. Until this point in the academic journey, there was never an inclination that faculty were truly concerned about student success.

Support has continued years after program completion and the best way to repay the team for their dedication is to continue doing the work of the scholar. Contrary to the findings in the literature, most students desire faculty identical to their race, personally, this is the opposite of this lens. The high standards, dedication to scholarship, and continued support years after program completion have only been delivered by the faculty of the doctoral program. Words are unable to express the sincere gratitude and blessings experienced by the remarkable and amazing faculty. Advancement into the role of the doctor has demanded the application of teaching experiences from the doctoral program integrated into personal courses under current leadership roles. Desiring to model their approach to afford nursing students an identical experience is crucial.

## References

- Barrett, J. L., Mazerolle, S. M., & Nottingham, S. L. (2017). Attributes of effective mentoring relationships for novice faculty members: Perspectives of mentors and Mentees. *Athletic Training Education Journal*, 12(2), 152-162. <https://doi.org/10.4085/1202152>
- Cabrera, N. L., Franklin, J. D., & Watson, J. S. (2017). *Whiteness in higher education: The invisible missing link in diversity and racial analyses: ASHE higher education report, volume 42, number 6*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Griffin, K.A. (2020). Institutional Barriers, Strategies, and Benefits to Increasing the Representation of Women and Men of Color in the Professoriate. In: Perna, L. (eds) *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research, vol 35. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11743-6\\_4-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11743-6_4-1)
- Harris, T. & Celeste N. Lee (2019) Advocate-mentoring: a communicative response to diversity in higher education, *Communication Education*, 68:1, 103-113, DOI: [10.1080/03634523.2018.1536272](https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2018.1536272)
- Holmes, B., & Willis, K. (2022). Intentional Mentoring: A Shared Journey of Discovering and Supporting Diverse Talent in Academia. *The Journal of Advancing Education Practice*, 3(2). <https://openriver.winona.edu/jaep/vol3/iss2/1>
- Jeffers, Stephanie; Mariani, Bette. The Effect of a Formal Mentoring Program on Career Satisfaction and Intent to Stay in the Faculty Role for Novice Nurse Faculty. *Nursing Education Perspectives* 38(1):p 18-22, 1/2 2017. | DOI: 10.1097/01.NEP.0000000000000104
- H. Kelly. Racial tokenism in the school workplace: An exploratory study of Black teachers in overwhelmingly White schools *Educational Studies* (2007)
- Lunsford, L. G., Crisp, G., Dolan, E. L., & Wuetherick, B. (2017). Mentoring in higher education. *The SAGE handbook of mentoring*, 20, 316-334.
- Madyun, Williams, S. M., McGee, E. O., & Milner, H. R. (2013). On the importance of AfricanAmerican faculty in higher education: Implications and recommendations. *Educational Foundations* (Ann Arbor, Mich.), 27(3-4), 65–84.



Mazerolle, S.PhD, ATC, FNATA; *Athletic Training Education Journal* (2018) 13 (3): 259–267.  
<https://doi.org/10.4085/1303259>

Nalo Hamilton, Emily A. Haozous, Retention of faculty of color in academic nursing, *Nursing Outlook*, Volume 65, Issue 2, 2017, Pages 212-221, ISSN 0029-6554,  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2016.11.003>.

Parker, D. (2022). If You Build It, They Will Take It: Institutional Theft of the Academic Work of Black Faculty. *The Journal of Advancing Education Practice*, 3(2).  
<https://openriver.winona.edu/jaep/vol3/iss2/3>

Settles, Nicole T. Buchanan, Kristie Dotson, Scrutinized but not recognized: (In)visibility and hypervisibility experiences of faculty of color, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Volume 113, 2019, Pages 62-74, ISSN 0001-8791, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.06.003>.

Tina M. Harris & Celeste N. Lee (2019) Advocate-mentoring: a communicative response to diversity in higher education, *Communication Education*, 68:1, 103-113, DOI: [10.1080/03634523.2018.1536272](https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2018.1536272)

Truesdale-Moore, S. Y. (2022). Navigating the Unknown: A Black Faculty Member's Journey in the Predominantly White University. *The Journal of Advancing Education Practice*, 3(2). <https://openriver.winona.edu/jaep/vol3/iss2/4>