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Opening the Pipeline: Peer Mentoring Among Graduate Students of Color

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Opening the Pipeline: Peer Mentoring Among Graduate Students of Color

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“Part of the solution to opening the academic pipeline for faculty of color must include strategies for successfully mentoring graduate students of color.”

This panel discussion will examine the graduate school experiences of three men of color who overcame significant obstacles in completing the dissertation writing phase of their program by initiating a peer mentoring group.

The experiences of three men of color struggling to complete their doctoral programs is particularly relevant given the present crisis in higher education. Colleges and universities across the nation are coming under increasing pressure to build faculties and student bodies that reflect the larger mosaic of American social diversity. Yet the most commonly cited reason for failing to recruit more faculty of color is that the pool of potential hires to choose from is small. Institutions of higher education "end up stealing each other's minority scholars and battling for the few new minority doctorate holders who enter the job market each year" (Magner, 1993, p.A13). According to Manger, African Americans earned 1,047 doctoral degrees in 1982, while in 1987 the number fell precipitously to only 768 (p.A13).

In a recent interview, the outgoing assistant secretary of Education, Diane Revitch, revealed that Latina/o dropout rates are nearly triple the national average (Hispanics Have, October 8, 1992). If the key to hiring more faculty of color is to enlarge the pool of minority doctorates, the implications of these trends are disturbing. Academia must develop an approach that recruits and retains students of color at the doctoral level or we risk creating (continuing) apartheid in American higher education. Faculty will be increasingly White and students will be increasingly people of color unable to rise up the academic ladder of opportunity due to lack of academic credentials.

Expanding the pool of scholars of color has been the subject of considerable discussion in the last several years. Kalbfleisch and Davies (1991) found that African American professionals report having more mentors who are from their own ethnic group than from other cultural groups and that African American professionals also report having more protégées who are from their own ethnic group than from other cultural groups. Yet in her 1989 article, "Black and female: reflections on graduate school," bell hooks recalls that, "in all my years of studying in English department classes, I had never been taught by a black woman. In my years of teaching, I had encountered students in both English classes and other disciplines who had never been taught by Black women" (p. 56). In predominantly White academia, a problem for many students of color, and certainly for the writers of this article was finding mentors who

were readily accessible from our own cultural groups.

The facilitators will present their experience as members of a peer mentoring group and a discussion of the advantages and implications of the peer mentoring approach.

Part of the solution to opening the academic pipeline for faculty of color must include strategies for successfully mentoring graduate students of color. From our collective experience it is clear that a peer mentoring group can have a positive impact on a graduate experience and can assist students in completing a terminal degree. This we believe is true for all students, but especially for students of color who may be more marginal and have less access to traditional mentors and support systems.

PRESENTERS:

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