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# Addressing Recruitment and Retention Through Building Anti-Racist, Multicultural Campuses

Phyllis May-Machunda

*Assistant Professor, Humanities and Multicultural Studies, Minnesota State University Moorhead*

Amy Phillips

*Assistant Professor, Social Work, Minnesota State University Moorhead*

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# Addressing Recruitment and Retention Through Building Anti-Racist, Multicultural Campuses

## Abstract

*Conventional and creative strategies for recruitment and retention of people of color in predominantly white institutions have not worked. Long-term success in recruitment and retention requires institutional acknowledgement of systemic racism and development of an anti-racist institutional identity. This presentation will examine one Midwestern campus' effort to achieve this goal.*

### **Phyllis May-Machunda**

Assistant Professor, Humanities and Multicultural Studies, Minnesota State University Moorhead

### **Amy Phillips**

Assistant Professor, Social Work, Minnesota State University Moorhead

Conventional strategies for recruitment and retention of people of color historically have not worked in most predominantly white institutions. Even with the development of creative and special efforts in recruitment and retention, substantial under-representation of people of color at institutions of higher education continues to be pervasive (Turner & Myers, 2000; Valverde & Castenell, 1998). Although creative strategies in recruitment and retention are important in responding to under-representation, they do not address a more fundamental factor inhibiting diversification at predominantly white institutions - inhospitable and unsupportive campus and community environments. Numerous scholars have documented the dynamics of hostile campus environments and their impacts on faculty, staff and students of color (Turner & Myers, 2000; Hurtado et al., 1999; Blackwell, 1996; Harvey, 1991; Reyes & Hakon, 1988). As opposed to their white counterparts, people of color are faced with multiple barriers to stability and longevity in the university setting and the costs of daily survival are high. Most of these barriers are systemic in nature and include subtle bias in decision making; stereotypical expectations of the roles of faculty of color and the performance of students of color; overwork; traditional requirements for tenure that conflict with service and advising expectations; "old boy" networks and predominantly white male administrators; devaluation of credentials and research interests; tokenism; isolation and exclusion from informal networking and social events; and harassment in the work place.

We contend that fully successful recruitment and retention strategies will only emerge from institutions of higher education that have undergone intentional systemic change. Most institutions assume that the long-term solution to the diversification issue is to create a so-called multicultural institution by inserting students, staff and faculty of color into existing institutional frameworks. This all too common response, however, is insufficient. It does too little to change the systemic attitudinal and structural factors which overtly and covertly create the inhospitable environments that diminish recruitment and retention success.

Instead of a model of diversity that does not address these systemic factors, a framework is needed which speaks to systemic change in the structures and attitudes of the institution. Only an *anti-racist, multicultural* paradigm provides such a framework for systemic change because it views inhospitable environments through the lens of systemic racism. This paradigm calls for the academy to move beyond its existence as merely a culturally diverse entity into an actively anti-racist, multicultural institution. As an *anti-racist* institution, the organization operates out of an awareness of white systemic advantage that confers power and privilege on whites and disempowers people of color. As an *anti-racist multicultural* institution, diversity develops beyond mere representation to become a force which shapes the institution through shared power and full participation of diverse racial, cultural and economic groups.

In this presentation, we describe one non-urban mid-western university's commitment to grapple with the process of critical transformation into an antiracist, multicultural institution. The first phase of this process began with the university's sponsorship of a community study circle project in response to a report issued by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on the status of equal opportunity for minorities in the local community. The success of the university's leadership with the study circles endeavor has led to the institution's co-sponsorship of an anti-racism initiative on four local college campuses. This initiative involves the creation of internal, campus-specific anti-racism teams that develop action plans for systemic change. We anticipate that the systemic changes generated from this process will contribute to the creation of a campus and community environment more conducive to successful recruitment and retention of faculty, staff and students of color.

### **Presenters**

**Phyllis May-Machunda** is an Assistant Professor of Humanities and Multicultural Studies at Minnesota State University Moorhead. Trained as a folklorist and ethnomusicologist specializing in African American cultural traditions, her other research areas include humanities, multicultural American Studies, disability studies and social justice. For several years prior to joining the faculty at MSUM, she was employed as a folklorist at the Smithsonian Institution and has conducted fieldwork on cultural traditions of people of color throughout the South and Midwest. She is a native Iowan and a graduate of the University of Iowa and Indiana University.

**Amy Phillips** is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Minnesota State University Moorhead. Prior to university teaching, she spent fourteen years in social work direct practice, supervision and administration. Her current research interests are in the areas of racial identity development, community development and social justice. She is a graduate of DePauw University, Vanderbilt University, Union Theological Seminary (New York) and Columbia University.