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October 2000

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Smith, Sheila M. Ph.D., ""ROLE MODEL: WELCOME OPPORTUNITIES AND INEVITABLE CHALLENGES"" (2000). *Building Diversity in the University and the Community----Fifth Annual National Conference* (2000). 30.
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"ROLE MODEL: WELCOME OPPORTUNITIES AND INEVITABLE CHALLENGES"

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For faculty members of color at predominately white institutions the concept of "role model" presents a dilemma. The presenter discusses the welcome opportunities and inevitable challenges.

College students are exposed to a multitude of experiences while pursuing their educational goals. Crucial among the college experience is the faculty and student encounter, which adds richness to the collegiate experience. Positive predictors of academic outcomes include faculty and student relations (Cokley, 2000; Davis, 1991; Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995). A quality faculty and student interaction frequently establishes the faculty member as a role model. Tan (1995) defined a role model as "a person the student looks up to and tries to emulate." However, for faculty members of colors at predominately white institutions the concept of "role model" presents a dilemma. The following sections will discuss the welcome opportunities and inevitable challenges.

Welcome Opportunities

The faculty member of color becomes highly visible and recognizable to minority students and non-minority students as well. This is especially true if the faculty member is the only person of color in a department. Students of color who see the faculty member may develop a sense of affirmation. This sense of affirmation can offer inspiration and signify future possibilities, even if they never take the professor's course. The belief is that if students of color see other people of color in positions of authority and status, the students will be motivated to achieve and excel. DeFour & Hirsch (1990) found that just the mere presence of the faculty member of color provides evidence to students of color that they can complete their degrees and become competent, successful professionals.

Awareness of a faculty member of color gives some students of color a sense of proximity or "connectedness." Students of color often depend on the faculty member for emotional and social support. They use the faculty member as a platform to help them solve many problems they face in higher education. In some instances, the faculty member can empathize with students because of similar educational experiences. Advice given by the faculty member can contribute to the students' comprehension of procedures required to accomplish academic pursuits (Parker, 1980).

Faculty of color can also have a positive effect on white students. Limited interaction with professionals of color will not adequately prepare students for a diverse workplace (Williams, 1996). Therefore, the opportunity to interact with faculty members of color helps students develop a genuine understanding of different cultures. Cultural awareness

broadens the learning experience leading to personal success within a multicultural society.

Inevitable Challenges

The same visibility and recognition that can provide opportunities can also have detrimental effects. The attention may cause the faculty member of color to feel the need to adjust their personality or character to adapt to the expectations of being the "perfect" role model for minority and non-minority students. This undue attention becomes stressful if it puts the faculty member in a viewable position as an object on display.

Role conflict develops as faculty members of color find themselves in a position that requires them to respond to different constituents. Faculty members of color at times have to make a choice between commitments to their discipline and student demands. They often serve as the only department member of color and spend more time than their white counterparts acting as a role model (Rocker, 1991). Time dedicated to student development allows less time for research required for promotion and tenure.

Discussion

Faculty members of color who serve as role models can help increase the recruitment and retention of students of color. Blackwell (1983) found the presence of faculty member of color is a powerful predictor of enrollment and graduation of students of color from professional school~. Several studies have noted the importance of accessible role models of color to the success of undergraduate students of color (Garibaldi, 1991; Tan 1995). The reasons students of color drop out of predominantly white institutions are complex and multifaceted; however, one reason cited is lack of role models (Jackson & Kite, 1996). Students are not seeking the "perfect" role model; student selection is based on the faculty member's ability to help students resolve academic and social issues.

Dedication of time to promotion and tenure requirements cannot replace the rewards obtained from devoting time to students. Attention given to students by a faculty member of color can have an indelible impact on the student's future success.

The position of role model may present some difficulties; however overall it is an honor and a privilege. The association forever affects students' lives. Faculty members of color who serves as role models at a predominately white institutions can contribute to an enriched collegiate experience for all students.

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Presenter:

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