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"ARE FACULTY OF COLOR REALLY WANTED OR WELCOME IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS: A VIEW FROM WITHIN THE MINNESOTA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM"

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Willie James Johnson, Ph.D.

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Bloomington, Minnesota

"During this presentation participants will discuss the results of a qualitative study (1996) concerning some of the factors affecting the successful recruitment and retention of African American faculty in Minnesota community colleges."

During this presentation participants will discuss the results of a qualitative study (1996) concerning some of the factors affecting the successful recruitment and retention of African American faculty in Minnesota community colleges. These colleges are part of the Minnesota State College and University (MNSCU) system. Suggestions for improvement will also be discussed.

Michael D. Woodard (1992) did not mince words when he called community colleges racist institutions. He admonished community colleges to provide diverse faculty role models for students. Faculty of color are needed desperately in three areas as role models including:

- Mentoring minority students,
- Helping white students to overcome prejudicial thoughts about the intellectual capabilities of people of color and,
- Helping white faculty gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for different cultural heritages and approaches to curriculum and pedagogy.

Betty B. Jones (1993) has advocated the study of the experience of faculty of color in community colleges. She said that it should not only be a study of underrepresentation, but more importantly the study of the actual experiences of faculty of color in predominantly white institutions as a way to create strategies for increased representation and better climate. Jones has dealt with how the person of color is often the "only one" and how that status can lead to social and professional isolation, being stereotyped, and being overworked.

This presentation will also discuss the overall framework that produces some of the factors that influence the success of African American faculty members in Minnesota community colleges. This framework encompasses:

- The overall society of the United States,
- The academic environment of United States higher education and,

- The personal lives of the African American faculty members.
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Data for this study was drawn from two specific populations, African American faculty members and the chief academic officers in Minnesota community colleges. Study participants were selected through the use of purposeful sampling. A structured interview guide was used in order to elicit information from the respondents. Study highlights include the following:

- (1) a number of key differences in perceptions between the African American faculty informants and the mostly European American academic dean informants;
- (2) major factors and their various weights surfaced in three areas for African American faculty in Minnesota community colleges, including personal history and family background, the employment interview process used by the colleges, and experiences after becoming a member of the faculty at a Minnesota community college;
- (3) how the factors surrounding the reactions of European Americans in the Minnesota community college environment to issues of color and culture loom in a gargantuan manner for the system's African American faculty;
- (4) comments of informants that relate back to the United States' history of individual and institutional racism, and how the state of Minnesota has its own version of that history.
- (5)

In essence this will be a discussion about African American faculty members working in Minnesota community colleges and their perceptions of their own situations and the reasons why the recruitment and retention of other African American faculty have not been successful.

Minnesota is often regarded as one of the most progressive "education states" in the country. Even so, Minnesota's track record in hiring faculty of color is not good. This is especially true at the community college level. If progressive Minnesota is failing the grade, then how bad is the situation in the rest of the states?

Presenter:

Johnson has taught speech-communication at Normandale Community College for 17 years. He is also an adjunct program professor in the master of education program at St. Mary's University, Minnesota. In the past he has taught at Hamline University. Johnson holds a Ph.D. in educational policy and administration from the University of Minnesota. His areas of interest in research are qualitative studies of minorities in higher education, and issues of cross-cultural communication. He is a former Fulbright Scholar to Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Senegal. He is also a past McKnight Fellow to the Salzburg Seminar. Since 1997 he has written a monthly opinion page column for the St. Paul Pioneer Press. His travels have taken him to areas of South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Polynesia.