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Multicultural Faculty and the Challenges they face from Students and Administration: A Multiracial Perspective.

Abstract

The identification of stereotypes and challenges multiracial faculty face from students and administrators, including an examination of ways to effectively deal with these stereotypes and challenges, and how all faculty of color can work to bring these issues to the forefront and change the perceptions of students and administrators.

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Fifty years after Brown, the concept of integration in education still eludes us. Students and administrators in predominantly white institutions are still having difficulties communicating effectively with multicultural faculty. While there has been an increase in the number of 'brown' faces in higher education, academic institutions have done very little to integrate faculty of color into the mainstream. More specifically, multiracial faculty members are even more of an anomaly for students and administrators, as their mixed ethnic heritage prevents visual and schematic classifications. The concept of multiculturalism in academia is developing beyond the 'Crayola' approach; it is no longer enough to have one of each color in the academic box of crayons. This trend has caused confusion and discomfort among university constituents, resulting in greater isolation and segregation of faculty of color at predominantly white institutions.

Because it is so confusing for students and administrators to comfortably classify multiracial faculty, they oftentimes revert back to an 'us versus them' mindset. Ultimately, it comes down to what multiracial faculty are NOT instead of what they are: not white. In other words, how do students and administrators deal with those who classify themselves racially as 'other'? Academia has done a poor job of communicating with and integrating faculty of color, how can we expect an integration of those who identify with more than one ethnic minority?

It is imperative that students and administrators recognize the explicit and implicit expectations they put on multiracial faculty members, both in the classroom and in service to their universities. It has gone far beyond 'tokenism' -there is a fundamental error in how race and image are interpreted in academia. Most often, administrators believe faculty of color automatically become experts on all ethnic minorities, not just the groups these individuals identify with. Students believe that the actions of faculty of color are indicative of how all ethnic minorities behave socially, and are even more confused by the fact that faculty of color typically do not fit their preconceived schemas of what an ethnic minority is. Basically, students and administrators expect us to bear the brunt of their multicultural issues. They also expect us to come up with a solution.

It is no wonder that there is confusion -it goes far beyond academia. It permeates American society through the mass media: in movies, on television, in advertising, in marketing, etc. Even the US Census is

quite sure how to classify multiracial people. What is it that fascinates us about those boxes we check identifying who we are racially/ethnically/culturally?

What is clear: the definition -and complexion -of an American is changing. The booming growth in America's multicultural audiences has created many economic and social opportunities (but also challenges) for mainstream America. With multicultural buying power expected to increase to \$10.7 trillion by 2008 (The Selig Center), mainstream America can no longer afford to ignore the cultural and economic effects of these very powerful groups.

This panel seeks to stimulate a discussion of challenges and stereotypes multiracial faculty experience from students and administration. I envision a discussion on the concept of multiracial heritage, a discussion on multicultural trends in the United States, how these multicultural trends have affected higher education, and the identification of stereotypes and challenges multiracial faculty face from students and administrators. Finally, I would like this panel to examine (and solicit from the audience) ways to effectively deal with these stereotypes and challenges, and how all faculty of color can work to bring these issues to the forefront and change the perceptions of students and administrators in predominantly white institutions.

Panel members

Christine M. Signal, assistant professor, is in her fourth academic year at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her teaching interests/focus include Communications Research and Strategy, Principles and Practices of Promotional Writing, and Advertising and Public Relations Campaigns. She has recently begun work on 'Nebraska's Partnership for Rural Entrepreneurship and Innovation', an interdisciplinary program that focuses on helping Nebraska's rural businesses and also to encourage more rural Nebraska entrepreneurs to remain in the state. Professor Signal's research interests include communicating across cultures both inside and outside the United States; how to get more minorities into the advertising industry (both academically and professionally); teaching assessment and the scholarship of teaching; and the socialization of racial ambiguity in the mass media. Prior to joining UNL, professor Signal worked for the Chicago Cubs in the Marketing Department.

Peon-Casanova is in his second year as a lecturer in the College of Journalism at the University of > Nebraska-Lincoln and sixteenth year working for the University producing educational television and multimedia. Peon-Casanova teaches Photography and Electronic Newsgathering, Photography and videography in addition to sponsoring three independent graduate courses in photojournalism. His professional affiliations and activities include the production of educational and commercial media throughout the United States. Peon-Casanova recently completed a thirty-minute documentary on Literacy for Hispanic people and a series of public service announcements in Spanish for the Iowa Department of Roads. He also provided the voiceover talent for the College of Journalism's award-winning student documentary Cuba: Illogical Temple. He's currently serving as the vice-president of the Nebraska Chapter of Partners of the Americas promoting professional exchanges between Brazil and the United States.

Shelie S. Foss, Ph.D. received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication from Stanford University, her Master of Arts degree in Rhetoric and Communication from the University of California, Davis, and her doctorate from the University of Florida. Her research interests include the social construction of race and mixed race and their manifestations in various entertainment media venues, such as soap opera, situation comedy, science fiction, and reality television programs, slasher/horror films, and commercial advertising in culture-specific magazines. Currently, Foss directs the Joaquin Delta College Speech and Debate team, and she teaches a freshman seminar, "Mentor Seminar: Timeless Issues," at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California.