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COMMENTARY

Diversity and Merit: How One University Rewards Faculty Work That Promotes Equity

By SHEILA O'ROURKE

Any university that is seriously committed to equity must value faculty contributions to diversity made through teaching, research, and service. If diversity is truly part of the core academic mission, it should be included in the criteria used to evaluate and reward faculty achievement. Toward this end, the faculty of the University of California's 10-campus system, through the Academic Senate, has recently developed amendments to the instructions for faculty-review committees that give recognition to faculty work promoting diversity and equal opportunity.

The system's policy on faculty appointment and promotion calls for the highest standards of excellence in teaching, research, and service. The amended policy states: "The University of California is committed to excellence and equity in every facet of its mission. Teaching, research, professional and public service contributions that promote diversity and equal opportunity are to be encouraged and given recognition in the evaluation of the candidate's qualifications."

The policy articulates examples in each area of faculty evaluation, stating: "These contributions to diversity and equal opportunity can take a variety of forms, including efforts to advance equitable access to education, public service that addresses the needs of California's diverse population, or research in a scholar's area of expertise that highlights inequalities."

The new policy language acknowledges the history of exclusion that has created lasting disparities in higher education and society as a whole. It recognizes that these disparities are public problems that can and should be addressed by the teaching, research, and service work of the University of California's faculty members.

Some faculty members have objected to considering contributions to diversity in the evaluation process, citing the imposition of "political correctness" and limitations on academic freedom. These objections, however, overlook the necessity for colleges and universities to allocate resources to deal with the changing demands on higher education. Seeking faculty members who can contribute to a university's diversity mission is no different from seeking faculty members with technology or science backgrounds in order to build expertise in those growing areas of need.

The language on diversity is part of a much-longer list of the types of activities that should be recognized as teaching, research, and service for appointment and advancement. No professor would be "punished" for not doing diversity work, but in the past, faculty members who did such work were sometimes disadvantaged. Diversity work has been devalued at many research universities and not seen as legitimate academic achievement. The new policy creates an explicit framework for faculty members to receive credit for this work in their appointment and promotion cases.

When professors' contributions to diversity are understood as an integral part of excellence, colleges and

universities can allocate resources to reward these contributions. This commitment does not require additional money; instead, existing funds can be reallocated, and even nonmonetary resources like parking or office space can be engaged to reward and inspire diversity efforts.

The Berkeley Diversity Research Initiative is an excellent example of how faculty contributions to diversity through research can be rewarded. In response to the initiative's call for proposals to spark faculty searches in interdisciplinary topics focusing on diversity, Berkeley professors identified about 25 new areas of research focusing on ethnic and racial disparities of concern to the State of California and the nation.

In 2006, the university announced it would search for faculty members doing scholarly work in three areas: diversity and democracy, racial inequities in urban public schools, and race-based health disparities. These searches produced a diverse pool of highly competitive candidates, demonstrating that excellence and diversity can be achieved by allocating resources to the development of important new research directions.

One of the first faculty hires under the initiative is Mahasin Mujahid, a newly appointed assistant professor whose research considers the impact of neighborhoods on health inequalities experienced by racial and ethnic groups. Her record reflects considerable academic achievement, as well as a clear scholarly commitment to improve the health status of marginalized populations.

Another example of rewarding faculty members' contributions to diversity is the \$30,000 Chancellor's Award for Advancing Institutional Excellence. One recipient in 2006 was William A. Lester Jr., a chemistry professor who is widely recognized for supporting minority students in the sciences and programs like the College of Chemistry Scholars Program. Another was Rhona S. Weinstein, a psychology professor who is noted for exemplary teaching and outstanding leadership in the development of CAL Prep, an innovative new charter-school collaborative established by the university and Aspire Public Schools, a nonprofit organization that builds and operates public charter schools to prepare urban students for college.

The appointment and promotion into academic leadership of professors with outstanding records of advancing diversity and equity is another important way to reward faculty contributions to diversity. For example, Mark Richards, Berkeley's dean of physical sciences, has demonstrated achievement in promoting diversity in his multiple roles as a faculty member, department chair, and dean. He served on the search committee that appointed the first woman to a tenure-track faculty position in the department of earth and planetary sciences, and is credited with supporting a sea change in gender equity in the department.

Dean Richards also has been instrumental in the creation of Cal Teach, a program to prepare math, science, and engineering majors for K-12 teaching. This program helps students find rewarding careers and addresses the critical shortage of qualified math and science teachers in California public schools.

Neil Henry, dean of Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism, is another example of an academic leader who has advanced diversity in many dimensions of scholarship, teaching, and academic leadership. His extensive contributions to the study of race in journalism and deep engagement with underrepresented students have had a significant impact in his field.

Faculty involvement in the diversity discussion is vital to achieve institutional transformation. The Assembly of the Academic Senate of the University of California voted unanimously to adopt a diversity statement that defines diversity as "the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews

that arise from differences of culture and circumstance." It adds: "Such differences include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and geographic region, and more."

The statement also states the value of diversity to the educational mission: "Because the core mission of the University of California is to serve the interests of the State of California, it must seek to achieve diversity among its student bodies and among its employees." This statement — written by the faculty, endorsed by the president, and adopted by the regents — serves as a unifying policy platform in support of faculty diversity.

Valuing faculty contributions to diversity not only allows the university to participate in creating the conditions for a more equitable society, but also provides a path through the uncertain legal terrain with regard to the consideration of race and gender in more-traditional, faculty affirmative-action efforts.

While the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the consideration of race for student admissions in the University of Michigan cases, it is not clear how this ruling applies to faculty hiring and promotion. Although at least one state court upheld the consideration of race or gender as a factor in a faculty diversity hiring incentive program, university legal counsel tend to discourage race- and gender-conscious programs that affect faculty appointment and tenure. Further, in some states, ballot initiatives have led to laws that prohibit "preferential treatment" in public institutions, eliminating the consideration of race or gender as even one factor among many in faculty employment decisions.

Valuing faculty members' contributions to diversity through their teaching, research, and service also overcomes some of the limitations that plagued earlier faculty affirmative-action programs. Under the old model of affirmative action, "opportunity" hiring programs left women and minority scholars vulnerable to accusations of special treatment and second-rate scholarship. Some departments interpreted "affirmative action" to mean reviewing the list of candidates who were not selected for interviews to look for women and minorities. These practices, while well intentioned, reinforced the mind-set that a commitment to diversity meant asking departments to consider less-qualified candidates on the basis of their race or gender.

At the same time, women and minority scholars in the academy suffer under disproportionate loads of student advising and service directly related to their visibility as "the only one" of their group in the department. These faculty members report that this extra service is expected only for underrepresented scholars, while their academic interests in studying pressing social, political, and economic questions involving race and gender are often devalued in the faculty-promotion process.

Research and experience have shown that faculty diversity serves two important institutional interests: excellence and legitimacy. A diverse faculty promotes academic excellence by incorporating the breadth and depth of a wide range of experiences, perspectives, and scholarly interests. A diverse faculty promotes legitimacy by demonstrating that the path to scholarly achievement is open to all, including groups that have been historically excluded from higher education.

Recognizing faculty contributions to diversity through research, teaching, and service places diversity where it belongs: in the center of the core academic mission. Rewarding faculty work to advance educational equity and access counteracts the stigma and stereotypes associated with earlier efforts, and it compensates underrepresented faculty for their unpaid labor supporting the diversity mission. Valuing these contributions also sends a clear message that the responsibility for a more-diverse and inclusive future rests on the shoulders of all faculty members.

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Section: Diversity in Academe

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