

Mentoring Experiences and Perceptions of Faculty of Color

Faculty Inclusion and Excellence Study

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This report describes the mentoring experiences and perceptions about effective mentoring and mentoring challenges, of faculty of color who participated in the Faculty Excellence and Inclusion Study. This report, and the study on which it is based, was supported by a National Science Foundation ADVANCE-IT grant awarded to Michigan State University, and by the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives. We thank the study participants for their time and honest discussions related to their experiences as faculty of color. We also thank the many individuals who worked on this project and contributed to its success.

Project Overview

In 2008, MSU was awarded a \$3.98 million Institutional Transformation grant by the National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE Program (Kim Wilcox, Provost and Principal Investigator). The NSF-ADVANCE program seeks to increase gender equity and diversity in STEM fields. The goal of the grant awarded to MSU was to advance diversity through the alignment of policies and practices (ADAPP), with a particular focus on faculty performance review, faculty search and selection, faculty mentoring, and women's leadership. As part of the ADVANCE-ADAPP grant, MSU conducted a Faculty Work Environment Survey in 2009. The Faculty Work Environment Survey was a quantitative questionnaire distributed to all tenure track faculty at MSU and was designed to assess faculty experiences.

The Faculty Excellence and Inclusion Study (FEIS) is a qualitative study that was developed to address two issues that emerged in the 2009 Faculty Work Environment Survey. First, the response rate of underrepresented minority (Black, Hispanic, and American Indian) faculty members was too low to make generalizations from the survey data to this population of the faculty. Second, analysis of the responses of underrepresented minority faculty members, although limited in number, indicated that their perceptions and experiences were more negative than those of White faculty members at MSU. For these reasons, the ADVANCE grant project director, Melissa McDaniels, Ph.D., and Paulette Granberry Russell, J.D., Director of the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural initiatives and member of the ADVANCE grant, envisioned a qualitative research project, the Faculty Excellence and Inclusion Study, that would enable the gathering of information about the specific needs and particular experiences of faculty of color at MSU. The external evaluators of the ADVANCE-ADAPP grant (Ohio Center for the Evaluation and Assessment of Math and Science Education) agreed that qualitative methodology might be more effective for reaching this population who, because of their small numbers in some fields, might have concerns about confidentiality and identifiability in the quantitative Faculty Work Environment Survey which was seen as an activity conducted by MSU administration. Further, qualitative research provides the opportunity to obtain rich, in-depth, detailed data about faculty experiences (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). The project aims and goals were developed by Paulette Granberry Russell and Gregory Larnell, who at the time was a graduate student at MSU and is currently on the faculty of the University of Illinois at Chicago in the College of Education. Additional project development and oversight of the data collection and data analysis continued under Paulette Granberry Russell and Isis Settles, Ph.D., who was a faculty member in Psychology with expertise with issues of race, higher education, and qualitative methodology. Funding for the project was provided by the MSU ADVANCE-ADAPP Office as well as the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives.

Interview questions were tailored specifically to tap into the areas that were identified in the 2009 Faculty Work Environment Survey as being problematic for underrepresented minority faculty. These included: mentoring; interpersonal mistreatment (e.g., incivility, harassment); expectations around policies, procedures, and practices; and preparation for leadership. In addition to underrepresented minority faculty, Asian faculty were also included as part of the project. Although the response rate and responses of Asian faculty members were similar to that of White faculty on the 2009 Faculty Work Environment Survey, we felt that it was important to survey this group as their underrepresented status and work experiences may depend on their gender, discipline, and national origin.

Mentoring

One of the main areas of interest for the FEI Study was mentoring. Mentoring is an important mechanism for fostering the growth of faculty careers. Studies have found that mentoring is associated with workplace performance, positive work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, career satisfaction), greater intentions to stay and fewer work withdrawal behaviors, and career success (e.g., greater compensation and promotions; Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). However, in many organizational settings, racial minority individuals and women report receiving different types or amounts of mentoring (e.g., Allen & Eby, 2004). Thus, understanding mentoring experiences of faculty of color can allow for the development of successful activities that enhance and improve their mentoring and positive career outcomes.

All participants were asked: whether they had a mentor (formally assigned or informally developed); what impact mentoring has had on their faculty experience; what made mentors effective; whether they had mentors who differed from them along gender, race, citizenship, etc. and if so, how these differences impacted the mentoring relationship; and the type of mentoring they would most like to receive or would have most liked to have received.

Based on responses to these interview questions, seven broad qualitative themes were identified, each of which answered a particular question:

1. What are participants' views of mentoring, generally, and of formal mentoring programs in particular?
2. How did participants find mentors?
3. What are positive characteristics of mentors? What makes a mentor effective?
4. What types of mentoring does the participant's mentor provide?
5. What types of mentoring would the participant like or have liked to have had?
6. What are problems, barriers, or challenges in the mentoring relationship?
7. How do participants view cross-group vs. same-group mentoring?

In this report, we describe responses to each of these thematic questions, highlighting those responses that most frequently emerged, and will discuss when endorsement varies by gender, race, nativity (U.S. born or non-U.S. born), academic rank, or being in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) vs. non-STEM field. STEM fields included departments within the College of Engineering, the College of Natural Science, the College of Social Science, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resource, the College of Veterinary Medicine, and Lyman Briggs). Non-STEM fields included departments within the College of Arts & Letters, the College of Education, the College of Communication Arts, the College of Music, and the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities.

Method

Data were collected from MSU faculty between 2012 and 2014. Participants took part in a one-on-one interview, most of which lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Interviews were semi-structured such that all interviewers asked the same questions but had the latitude to probe with follow-up questions based on participant responses. Interviewers were trained graduate students who were matched with the participants along race and gender to improve trust and rapport. Participants could opt to be interviewed by Dr. Isis Settles if they preferred to do so; 7 participants chose this option. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission. Three participants did not wish to have the interviews recorded; in these cases, the interviewers took notes during the interview and their notes became the data used in the study. Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim, transcripts of recordings were checked, and then identifying information was removed from the transcript. The deidentified transcripts serve as the data for the study. Data were analyzed using NVIVO 10 with interrater reliability ranging between 85% and 96%.

Participants were recruited for the study in two phases. In Phase 1, all Black, Hispanic, and American Indian tenure-track faculty at MSU ($n = 176$) were invited to participate. From this population, we had a final sample of 62 (35% response rate). Once Phase 1 interviews were complete, we began Phase 2 of the interviews, which focused on Asian tenure-track faculty at MSU. Because of the larger number of Asian faculty, we used a stratified purposeful sampling technique in which we sought to recruit faculty that varied on gender, nativity (whether or not they were U.S. born), and field (whether they were in a STEM vs. non-STEM field). Based on these three characteristics, Asian faculty were placed into one of eight subsamples (e.g., one subsample was comprised of male, U.S. born faculty in STEM fields). Participants in each subsample were randomly selected to be recruited into the study until we reached our target of 6-10 participants from each subsample, or had exhausted attempts at recruiting all individuals within the subsample. From this population ($n = 261$), 244 participants were invited to participate, and 56 participants took part in the study (23% response rate). Thus, across the two phases, there were 118 participants. The demographic breakdown of the entire sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Demographic Breakdown

Participant Race and Gender	Number in Sample	% of Sample	Response Rate
Asian men	29	25%	18%
Asian women	27	23%	32%
Black men	13	11%	25%
Black women	17	14%	45%
Hispanic men	16	14%	40%
Hispanic women	10	8%	36%
American Indian men	4	3%	31%
American Indian women	2	2%	40%
TOTAL	118		

Our racial categorization is based on the federal categories used by the U.S. Department of Education. On a demographic pre-interview questionnaire, participants indicated whether they were Hispanic or Latino (ethnicity) and then whether they identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or White (race). For our purposes, we

combined the race and ethnicity categories to emerge with four racial/ethnic groups: American Indian or Alaska Native (henceforth referred to as American Indian), Asian, Black or African American (henceforth referred to as Black), and Hispanic or Latino (henceforth referred to as Hispanic); none of our participants identified as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and White, non-Hispanic individuals were not eligible for participation in the study. Hispanic individuals were those who indicated they were Hispanic or Latino for their ethnicity, and indicated they were White for their race.

In each section of our results, we present a tabular summary (frequency and percentage) representing endorsement of each theme by each group. In the discussion of our results, we use a guideline such that groups are considered to differ from each other if their endorsement of a theme varies by roughly 10% or more. In qualitative research, the percentage of participants endorsing a particular theme is smaller than one might find when asking a specific question on a quantitative survey. This is because interview questions are broader than those on quantitative surveys, and open-ended. Thus, our frequency rates capture the numbers of individuals raising particular issues in free response to interview questions, and differs from a quantitative survey in which all participants would be asked to indicate whether or not a question applied to them. Finally, although the total mentions and percentages remain an important marker in this study, the description of participant narratives, and the examples provided by participant quotations, provide the most critical basis for understanding the experiences of faculty of color.

In the footnotes, we provide results of Chi-square analyses of group differences where they are significant. For the quantitative chi-square analyses, differences at $p < .05$ are considered statistically significant by conventional standards, and differences at $p < .10$ are considered marginally significant. We report differences at both levels of significance. When quotations are provided, we indicate only the race/ethnicity and gender of the speaker, to protect participant identifiability and confidentiality.

Summary of Results

Participants reported more positive than negative perceptions of mentoring *in general*, however nearly equal numbers had positive and negative views of *formal* mentoring programs. Participants were most likely to be assigned a mentor, next most likely to have self-identified a mentor, and least likely to have been connected to a mentor by a third party. Of those assigned a mentor, participants reported both positive experiences with good mentors and negative experiences with others. Mentors that were self-identified or connected by a third party were generally seen as helpful, and were sometimes outside of the department or university.

Results indicated that effective mentors were successful and respected scholars, were skilled in navigating the academy, and were wise or insightful. These mentors were unselfish with their time and energy, and provided mentoring with caring and respect. Within the relationship, mentors acted in the mentee's best interests while also providing honest and critical feedback.

With regard to the types of mentoring activities participants received, mentors were most likely to have provided participants with various forms of coaching. The most common forms were coaching about how to navigate politics and interpersonal relationships within academia, coaching about research and publishing, and coaching about teaching. Other career support provided to participants included offering them challenging assignments and providing them with greater exposure and visibility in the academy. Social support was also provided to participants by mentors. Most often this was serving as a role model, offering friendship, and providing counseling (i.e., advice about personal issues).

Participants were most likely to say that the type of mentoring they desired was coaching around navigating politics and interpersonal relationships, and coaching about research, publication, and grants. Participants also desired exposure and visibility, in which their mentor would help them to network with others in their field. In terms of social support, participants were most likely to say they desired role models and counseling about personal issues.

Participants reported that there were some problems that emerged within their mentoring relationships. The most common of these was receiving poor mentoring (i.e., bad advice) or having a poor relationship with one's mentor. Participants felt it was necessary for there to be formal mentoring programs and for those programs to be valued, both financially and as part of mentors' annual evaluations. Another challenge was a lack of fit between the mentor and the mentee, in terms of research method or approach, language, or personality style. Participants indicated it was sometimes difficult to find appropriate individuals to serve as mentors, often because individuals in their research area or with a similar cultural background (or both) were not present at MSU, and reported the need for multiple mentors, each of whom serves different functions or offers mentoring around different issues.

Participants were most likely to report that mentoring across social group (i.e., race, gender) had no impact on the mentoring relationship. Others reported positive benefits to receiving cross-group mentoring, such as getting a different perspective, or challenges of cross-group mentoring, such as having a mentor who does not understand the participants' research area or background. Some participants reflected on the benefits of same-group mentoring, including greater familiarity with the participant's background and experiences. The primary challenge of same-group mentoring was the inability to find a mentor with shared background characteristics (e.g., someone of the same race, ethnicity, or gender), especially in the participant's field.

More detailed analysis is provided in the full report (including illustrative quotations from the interviews), as well as a discussion of areas in which we observed differences across gender, race, citizenship, rank, and field.

Recommendations for Mentoring at MSU

Support Mentoring

Mentoring has value for faculty of color across different ranks. Participants to varying degrees indicated that mentoring was developmental and foundational in establishing their scholarly identities. ***Thus, resources should continue to be used to support campus mentoring.***

Training, Compensation, and Evaluation

Faculty emphasized the importance of mentor training and mentor compensation as pieces that support stronger mentoring relationships. ***Mentor-mentee training should provide guidelines and structure for the relationship, communicate the types of support mentees desire, and directly address ways to facilitate mentoring across difference (e.g., finding common ground).*** Women, compared to men, positively viewed formal mentoring and placed importance on formalized and valued mentoring programs. Participants suggested that if mentors were compensated, this would reduce their apprehension around requesting support from individuals who are successful, and thus busy. Again, women were more likely than men to find it difficult to approach mentors and to value mentors who were unselfish with time. ***Thus, we recommend that MSU consider ways to compensate and value good mentors for their time (e.g., count a certain amount of mentoring as a course).*** Greater formalization, valuing, compensation, and structure in formal mentoring may particularly benefit women of color. ***Further, units should consider how to evaluate mentoring as a form of service in evaluating the annual reward system for faculty members.***

Mentor Networks

MSU should support faculty in the building of mentor networks. Participants noted that different mentors were effective in different areas, and often desired mentors were not available in their units. Thus, MSU could support faculty of color in building mentoring networks comprised of individuals not only in their units, but also across the university and at other institutions. Peer mentors can be utilized as a part of the mentor network. When assigning mentors, units should attempt to find social group matches (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender) when desired by the mentee. This may be paired with additional mentors with strengths in other areas. Individual faculty members should be proactive in self-identifying mentors of similar racial, ethnic and/or gender identities to find a combination that meets personal and professional needs.

Mentor Selection

Not all faculty are effective mentors, and participants describe many instances of negative or poor mentoring. Mentor training may alleviate this problem, improving the mentoring of marginal mentors. However, administrators may consider that not all faculty are well-suited to be mentors, particularly as poor mentoring has been found to be associated with worse career outcomes than no mentoring (Eby, Butts, Durley, & Ragins, 2010; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). ***When selecting faculty to be mentors, administrators should look for the qualities our research has identified as characterizing effective mentors: successful and respected scholars, skilled at navigating the academy, wise or insightful, unselfish with their time and energy, provide mentoring with caring and respect, and act in the mentee's best interests while also providing honest and critical feedback.***

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