

Challenges in Recruiting, Retaining and Promoting Racially and Ethnically Diverse Faculty

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Abstract: Background: Despite individual and institutional awareness of the inequity in retention, promotion and leadership of racially and ethnically underrepresented minority faculty in academic medicine, the number of such faculty remains unacceptably low. The authors explored challenges to the recruitment, retention and promotion of underrepresented faculty among a sample of leaders at academic medical centers.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted from 2011 to 2012 with 44 senior faculty leaders, predominantly members of the Group on Diversity and Inclusion (GDI) and/or the Group on Women in Medical Sciences (GWIMS), at the 24 randomly selected medical schools of the National Faculty Survey of 1995. All institutions were in the continental United States and balanced across public/private status and geographic region. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and organized into content areas before conducting inductive thematic analysis. Themes expressed by multiple informants were studied for patterns of association.

Results: The climate for underrepresented minority faculty was described as neutral to positive. Three consistent themes were identified regarding the challenges to recruitment, retention and promotion of underrepresented faculty: 1) the continued lack of a critical mass of minority faculty; 2) the need for coordinated programmatic efforts and resources necessary to address retention and promotion; and 3) the need for a senior leader champion.

Conclusion: Despite a generally positive climate, the lack of a critical mass remains a barrier to recruitment of racially and ethnically underrepresented faculty in medicine. Programs and resources committed to retention and promotion of minority faculty and institutional leadership are critical to building a diverse faculty.

Keywords: Underrepresented minority faculty ■ Faculty development ■ Academic climate ■ Faculty retention

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INTRODUCTION

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity in academic medicine is a nationally recognized imperative. A more diverse faculty is essential to address health disparities¹ create high quality biomedical research,^{2,3} and

push the boundaries of excellence in all areas of education, clinical care and research.^{4–7} However, despite continued and growing awareness, representation of underrepresented minority faculty in medicine remains lower than in the United States population and in current medical student demographics.⁸ Medical schools still struggle to recruit underrepresented faculty and to retain and promote those hired.^{8,9} To better understand the challenges to recruitment, retention and promotion of underrepresented racial and ethnic minority faculty in academic medicine, we conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with senior medical faculty charged with leading the diversity efforts at medical schools.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We conducted key informant interviews with senior faculty and administrators to understand faculty climate related to race and gender issues, across the 24 medical schools of the 1995 National Faculty Survey. Institutions were randomly selected and balanced across public/private status and Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) geographic region.¹⁰ Between 2011 and 2012, key informants from each institution participated in a qualitative, semi-structured interview regarding faculty perceptions of racial, ethnic and gender equity and institutional climate. For each institution, a listed representative from the Group on Women in Medicine and Science (GWIMS) and one from the Group on Diversity and Inclusion (GDI) were invited to participate. If either a GWIMS or GDI representative was unable to participate or had worked less than 10 years at the institution, we also interviewed another senior leader in a role related to gender or diversity issues.

In this qualitative study, four trained research team members conducted telephone interviews with key informants. Participants received a modest monetary incentive. Interviews included questions about the climate, programs, and challenges with regard to recruitment, retention and promotion of minority faculty. Appendix 1 lists the interviewer guide. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and organized into content areas before conducting an inductive thematic analysis. Initial inductive

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the National Faculty Survey Key Informants.

Demographic characteristics	Key informants (n = 44)	
	N	(%)
Women	33	(75)
Race/ethnicity		
White	24	(55)
Black	12	(27)
Hispanic	4	(9)
Asian	4	(9)
Years at institution		
0-5	5	(11)
6-10	8	(18)
11-20	9	(20)
>20	22	(50)
Academic rank		
Professor	33	(75)
Associate Professor	10	(23)
Assistant Professor	1	(2)

coding was conducted by one author in consultation with the primary author. Inductive codes were reviewed in conjunction with transcripts and a method of constant comparison resulted in a final set of codes for analysis.^{11,12} Codes and associated transcript data were reviewed with the research team to build consensus. Final analysis identified patterns among codes, resulting in a set of themes that characterize the climate for minority faculty and efforts to promote diversity. This study was approved by the investigators' Institutional Review Boards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We interviewed a total of 44 individuals: 16 GWIMS representatives, 10 GDI representatives and 18 other identified senior leaders. The final sample represented 23 schools with one institution declining participation. Interviews were 20-88 min in duration (mean = 48 min). Key informants interviewed included deans, associate deans, chairs, a vice provost and chancellor and members of senior leadership committees. Demographic characteristics of respondents are listed in [Table 1](#).

Key informants reported that the climate for underrepresented minority faculty was neutral to positive. Six of the 23 institutions we contacted had programs specifically targeting recruitment, retention and promotion of underrepresented in medicine faculty. We identified three

consistent themes regarding the challenges to recruitment, retention and promotion of underrepresented faculty: 1) the continued lack of a critical mass of minority faculty; 2) the need for coordinated programmatic efforts and resources to address retention and promotion; and 3) the need for a senior leader “champion.”

Climate

When asked about the institutional climate and how it has changed over time, the general perception was positive. The following are representative quotes on positive climate (with the academic rank and race/ethnicity of the respondent provided).

The majority of [minority faculty] felt that they [were] respected for their differences ... they felt valued for what they brought ... they did not feel marginalized because of belonging to a particular group. (Professor, Hispanic)

I started meeting with the minority faculty ... and what they said to me was that they feel the climate is good. There were no comments about feeling discriminated against. (Professor, White)

I think for minority faculty the climate is now very welcoming. They feel a part of the fabric of the institution. (Professor, Black)

Some comments described a neutral climate recognizing that “it is not visibly apparent that the school values and embraces diversity” (Professor, Hispanic). There were very few comments describing discrimination or marginalization.

Critical mass

The absence of a critical mass, defined by most as a sufficient number of faculty at an individual institution to create community and impact change, was consistently recognized as an obstacle.

Because we only have a low number to start with and these people, I think – it's just you don't have that culture. (Assistant Professor, Asian)

The most important thing at where we are now is to simply recruit more minority faculty, because I think if we ... were successful in that, other things would come from that, improved support and mentoring and professional satisfaction. (Professor, White)

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