

Black, Indigenous and People Of Color (BIPOC) Faculty Retention at the University of Michigan EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: INTERVIEWS WITH MICHIGAN FACULTY

A collaboration between the ADVANCE Program and
the Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
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INTRODUCTION

At the request of the Provost, the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) and the ADVANCE Program (ADVANCE) conducted informal discussion groups in an effort to understand the experiences of Black, Indigenous and People Of Color (BIPOC)¹ tenure-track faculty who are currently at the University of Michigan (U-M), as they relate to retention.

ADVANCE has completed multiple studies that directly address historically underrepresented racial and ethnic minority (URM)² faculty retention at U-M. The [ADVANCE Program's Indicator Report \(2019\)](#) focused on faculty departure, and found that 75% of URM faculty hired simply replace other URM faculty who have left the university. The [Exit Interview Study \(2020\)](#) included interviews with sixty-eight (68) faculty of color who left U-M between 2011 and 2019. Faculty of color were less satisfied with their department leadership than White faculty and recommended improving transparency, accountability, and the workplace climate.

The present informal study consisted of discussion groups with faculty and administrators conducted by ADVANCE and ODEI. Forty-three (43) tenure-track BIPOC faculty took part in eight (8) discussion groups that were facilitated by a BIPOC faculty member plus an additional discussion group with the five (5) BIPOC facilitators for a total of nine discussion groups of faculty. Among the BIPOC faculty, 63% are female. In terms of race/ethnicity, 70% were from historically underrepresented minority groups and the remaining 30% were Asian/Asian-American.

In order to hear the perspectives of administrators whose job responsibility includes retaining faculty, we conducted three other focus groups that included 8 department chairs (73%) and 3 associate deans (27%). Among participants in the administrator focus groups, 55% are female. In terms of race/ethnicity, 18% identified as being from a historically underrepresented ethnic minority group, 27% identified as Asian/Asian-American, and the remaining 55% were White.

The focus group discussions explored three areas: challenges, service & leadership, and recruitment & retention. Each transcription was analyzed to identify the common themes and subthemes. For this analysis, transcripts were coded at the discussion group level such that each discussion group was the unit of analysis.

¹ For the purposes of this report, the term BIPOC refers to all faculty of color

² URM includes African-American/Black, LatinX/Hispanic, Native American/Alaskan Native, and Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander

FINDINGS

CHALLENGES

1. Invisible Service is Overwhelming

- The BIPOC faculty discussion group members (“faculty”) expressed that faculty are sought out by, and feel pressure to support, students of color which keeps them from advancing in other areas of their work. This service is not limited to students in their department, and includes formal and informal mentoring, academic advising, and serving on dissertation committees in addition to providing emotional support.
- BIPOC faculty service is not valued, supported, understood, or recognized by their department or college.
- BIPOC faculty are often expected to guide their department, college, colleagues, and/or students in DEI work regardless of whether or not they do research on racism and issues of DEI.
- The expectations for service and DEI expertise are not shared by their white and/or male counterparts and thus falls disproportionately on BIPOC faculty.
- The weight of invisible service was very heavy in 2020. The combination of COVID-19, working from home, social isolation, racial tensions, targeting of Asian/Asian-Americans, and political unrest all combined to create additional stresses.

2. Climate

- BIPOC faculty continue to express the challenge of navigating racism on campus, including a recent growth in anti-Asian sentiments and discrimination in their departments.
- The over-policing of people of color contributes to a poor environment.
- Participants noted that the climate is especially bad for women and women of color, who can carry additional burdens based on both racial and gender stereotypes.
- In some parts of the University, participants observed a perceptible shift towards a more inclusive climate, such as noticing if a BIPOC faculty member is being asked to represent their identity group. Faculty are less consistent with intervening on behalf of BIPOC faculty.

3. Teaching

- BIPOC faculty also spoke to challenges in teaching, including the types of teaching evaluations they received.

4. Financial Resources

- There are financial challenges around housing and other aspects of living in Ann Arbor; housing costs and not having the availability to host events hindered building relationships with their colleagues.
- Many BIPOC faculty do not have access to intergenerational wealth to assist them.

5. Processes and Policies

- BIPOC faculty described navigating rules and expectations that are not formally set or transparent.

IDEAS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES

- Recognize “invisible service” and adjust the workload accordingly.
- Compensate and recognize faculty DEI service work.
- Increase hiring of faculty of color.

- Build community among BIPOC faculty.
- Increase transparency around policies and procedures. Create best practice recommendations to be shared across schools, colleges, and departments.

B. SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

1. Bias and Lack of Representation

- BIPOC faculty reported not being perceived as leaders, not readily considered in nominations for such positions, and being passed over for leadership roles when opportunities have arisen.
- BIPOC faculty felt categorized by other skills (e.g., great teachers, researchers, and mentors) instead of being thought of as effective leaders.

2. Denied Leadership Opportunities

- Multiple BIPOC faculty noted explicit denial to their requests for leadership opportunities, and being ignored when they explicitly asked to be considered for leadership roles. There was also a perception that one's social circle can be a large determining factor in being considered for leadership positions.

3. Leadership is an Added Burden

- Leadership is an added burden for BIPOC faculty members who are already overburdened in many other ways.
- Leadership roles for BIPOC faculty often include the additional component of addressing DEI issues in their department or school.

IDEAS TO ADDRESS SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

- Facilitate more leadership opportunities for women and BIPOC faculty through shorter terms for various leadership positions.
- Provide professional development (training, coaching, mentoring) around leadership.

C. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

1. Coming to U-M

- BIPOC faculty were attracted to U-M because of the reputation, resources, and DEI practices of the University.

2. Thinking about Leaving

- Faculty felt that they constantly had to try to prove their value and worth to others, and that they weren't valued or wanted unless they had outside offers from another university.
- U-M faculty are commonly advised to explore and secure an outside offer, but external explorations may also result in our BIPOC faculty receiving an attractive offer elsewhere, along with the excitement of finding new colleagues who recognize and/or appreciate their work.
- Difficulty of securing spousal/partner hires contributes to their contemplation of leaving the University. Faculty commented on a lack of serious consideration and push for helping to find a place for their spouse/partner at the University, as compared to other institutions.

3. Deciding to Stay

- BIPOC faculty members commented favorably on the internal funding mechanisms, financial support, grants, protection of their time when they first arrived, and the opportunity to work with a variety of people with overlapping interests.

- Recently, their colleagues have begun trying to learn more about DEI-related issues. BIPOC faculty are concerned about how to foster the continuation of this dedication to DEI.
- Fostering collaboration across departments, schools, and even outside of the University has been an important part of community-building with their colleagues.

IDEAS TO ADDRESS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES

- Make more efforts around spouse/partner job support.
- Proactively support BIPOC faculty to prevent the need for outside offers (e.g., pre-emptive retention offers); provide counter-offers when needed.
- Evaluate policies for areas of inequality (e.g., in awards; years between retention offers) and work to remedy them.
- Create mechanisms for faculty to provide anonymous feedback.
- Improve the climate, and facilitate community-building