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# Now Is the Time to Focus on Faculty Diversity



**SREB**

State Doctoral  
Scholars Program



*This report was written by Hannah Bartlebaugh, SREB program specialist, and Ansley Abraham, director of the SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program.*

# Now Is the Time to Focus on Faculty Diversity

Across the country, higher education leaders are increasingly champions of diversity, equity and inclusion, amplifying calls for social change in communities everywhere. On many campuses, a key component of the conversations is an issue that has been inadequately addressed — or entirely unaddressed — for far too long: the lack of faculty diversity. SREB bases the recommendations in this report on 30 years of research and experience with this issue.

Faculty diversity is not a new issue, but it is an important one. There are far too few Black, Native American and Hispanic faculty members on our nation's campuses. Students at U.S. colleges have become increasingly diverse over the past decade, and this is a trend projected to continue in the years ahead. Yet while nearly 33% of undergraduate students are Black or Hispanic, just 9.5% of faculty are. Students do not see themselves reflected in the academic leaders in their classrooms. This matters, as research shows that racial and ethnic diversity has positive effects on the educational experiences and outcomes of students. Increasing faculty diversity is an important component of building a campus culture where people of color feel comfortable learning, teaching, conducting research and leading.

Now is the moment for higher education leaders to put their words into action and drive meaningful changes that can increase faculty diversity: investing in underrepresented doctoral students, reevaluating recruitment processes to identify more diverse pools of qualified candidates, and helping to support and retain junior faculty of color.

## Faculty diversity is a pressing issue

While higher education institutions have made progress in increasing faculty diversity over the past few decades, it has not been nearly enough. The percentages of minority faculty remain unacceptably low. While the country as a whole grows increasingly diverse, the demographics of higher education faculty do not reflect that reality. The pipeline of scholars of color clearly narrows as students move through the American higher education system, and the professors that students see at the front of their classrooms do not reflect their own diversity.



**Dr. Adriane Randolph** —  
Professor, Kennesaw State University

There are far too few Black, Native American and Latino faculty members on our nation's campuses.

	Total U.S. Citizens	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian or Alaska Native
U.S. Population	100% 325,719,178	60.6% 197,385,822	12.4% 40,389,178	18.1% 58,955,171	5.7% 18,565,993	0.7% 2,280,034
High School Graduates	100% 3,310,020	52.4% 1,733,070	13.9% 461,460	23.8% 778,440	6.0% 200,160	0.9% 29,920
Bachelor's Recipients	100% 1,980,644	63.2% 1,189,619	10.4% 195,014	14.2% 267,065	8.0% 150,999	0.5% 9,157
Master's Recipients	100% 820,102	65.0% 439,051	13.5% 91,273	10.7% 72,470	7.4% 50,091	0.5% 3,318
Doctorate Recipients	100% 35,404	70.5% 24,951	6.9% 2,456	7.3% 2,582	9.3% 3,305	0.3% 115
Faculty	100% 832,119	68.8% 572,586	5.5% 45,748	5.0% 41,403	10.3% 86,035	0.4% 3,413

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey; National Center for Education Statistics Digest for Education Statistics

While these numbers give a high-level view of the problem, they do not necessarily communicate the full scope of the issue. When the data is disaggregated to account for the large number of African American faculty teaching at predominantly Black institutions or historically Black colleges and universities, the representation of Black faculty falls from 5.5% to just 4%, worsening an already wide representation gap. There are also much larger gaps within specific fields of research, especially in STEM fields.

## Facing the issue

In 1991, the number of male Black Ph.D. graduates in mathematics in the entire South was so small — a total of three across all 16 SREB states — that they would fit comfortably in a Volkswagen Beetle. The numbers were even worse for Hispanics: there was *one* Hispanic mathematics Ph.D. graduate in the Southern region.

While the country grows increasingly diverse, the demographics of higher education faculty do not reflect that reality.



**Dr. Robert Osgood** — Associate Professor, Rochester Institute of Technology

This striking paucity of minorities in higher education reached across the country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 21.5% of the U.S. population in 1990 was from a minority group, yet in 1992 just 14% of all doctoral degrees awarded to U.S. citizens went to minorities and only 13.5% of full-time instructional faculty and staff were from these groups.

This is the context in which three regional education policy organizations — the New England Board of Higher Education, the Southern Regional Education Board and the Western

Interstate Commission for Higher Education — recognized the pressing need to address faculty diversity. These organizations came together and concluded that in order to make significant progress in increasing faculty diversity, states must be actively involved. The Compact for Faculty Diversity was formed in 1994 to unite these regional compacts for a single purpose.

SREB has upheld the legacy of the compact's work and continues to support efforts to increase faculty diversity. In 1993 SREB founded the Doctoral Scholars Program to redress the dearth of minority faculty on college campuses. The program hosts the annual Institute on Teaching and Mentoring to network, recruit and assist scholars in completing their doctorates.

## The Doctoral Scholars Program: Three decades addressing faculty diversity

The SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program provides financial, academic, personal and motivational support for students. The program also facilitates faculty recruitment and peer networking through the Institute on Teaching and Mentoring, the largest gathering of minority Ph.D. scholars in the country.

Over the past 27 years the program has helped more than 1,100 underrepresented students earn a Ph.D., and it is currently assisting an additional 400 scholars.

The program helps scholars achieve their academic goals, and it also helps states and universities save time and money. Participating scholars have a graduation rate of almost 83%, far exceeding the rate of doctoral students nationally. Participants also finish their Ph.D.s two to five years faster than the national average, saving a significant amount of student funding.

And the impact doesn't end with a degree. Participants go on to become innovators in their fields and to serve as leaders within higher education. Eighty percent of graduates are currently faculty, administrators or postdoctoral researchers on U.S. campuses. Many graduates become faculty members in their home states, where they earn research grants and patents, mentor younger students and become leaders within their institutions and broader communities.

## Faculty diversity creates positive impacts for students

Minority faculty serve as role models for students. As the adage goes, you can't be what you can't see — and when students don't see professors of color, it's harder for them to imagine being at the front of the classroom themselves.

Increasing the number of minority faculty on campuses can help challenge common stereotypes about who gets to produce and deliver knowledge in our society. Seeing professors of color across their campuses allows students to reconceptualize what a scholar looks like. Additionally, minority faculty are likely to have different research interests and approaches than their white peers and can offer new perspectives in their fields of study.



**Dr. Rosa Maria Stoops** —  
Professor, Montevallo University

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**Dr. Thomas Bynum** — Associate Professor,  
Cleveland State University

Minority faculty can serve as mentors and seek out students, offering them individual attention and support, helping to resolve problems and contributing to emotional and professional growth. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2018 approximately 41% of undergraduate students in the United States were non-white. This steadily growing student population can benefit from the mentorship of diverse faculty members at their postsecondary institutions.

Research shows that racial and ethnic diversity has positive effects on student outcomes. One recent study found that Black students who enroll in STEM courses taught by Black instructors are more likely to persist in a STEM field after their first year. In addition, some scholars argue that minority faculty members can help recruit underrepresented students, helping to diversify institutions. When the diversity of the student body is reflected in the faculty, minority students can feel more connected to their institutions, and *all* students have the chance to benefit from a broader set of perspectives.

## Where can we go from here?

The summer of 2020 served as a season of racial reckoning. State leaders and universities across the country have engaged with the ongoing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. These conversations are important, but it is past time for talk alone — resources need to be allocated, concrete actions taken. Universities have been promising for years to improve the diversity of their professoriate but have failed to move the needle much. Decades of research and practice have built a strong body of potential solutions, many of which do not impose a significant financial burden on institutions but instead focus on reevaluating the ways decisions are made.

## Based on three decades of work in faculty diversity, SREB offers the following strategies to propel higher education forward:

### 1. Universities can improve their recruitment of doctoral students from underrepresented groups.

Doctoral programs can review their graduate admissions process to ensure they are being deliberate and thoughtful. Strategies include:

- Ensure that the institution is collaborating with undergraduate programs that are strong sources of minority graduate students, including:
  - Programs targeted at preparing underrepresented students for doctoral study, such as the McNair Scholars, Gates Millennium Scholars and the Meyerhoff Scholars programs.

- Colleges and universities that serve many minority students, such as historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, American Indian and Alaska Native-serving institutions and tribal colleges and universities.
- Summer research opportunities that aim to prepare minority students for graduate school, such as the Summer Research Opportunities Program run by the Big 10 Academic Alliance.
- Require graduate admissions committees to complete implicit bias training.
- Encourage committee members to consider non-traditional students and to go beyond test scores to focus on all signs of promise.

## 2. States and doctoral campuses should join forces to address the issue.

States in the SREB region should partner with programs that support minority doctoral students with stipends and services. State financial support will in turn help secure the crucial commitment of university presidents, graduate deans and departments to these goals.

- Leading programs that provide such support include the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's Minority Ph.D. Program, the McKnight Doctoral Fellowships, the Gates Millennium Scholars, the PhD Project and the SREB State-Doctoral Scholars Program.
- Research shows that graduate fellowships, leadership development, mentoring and early research opportunities help students of color earn a Ph.D. in less time, with graduation and retention rates well above the national average.

## 3. Universities and departments would do well to reconsider how they recruit full-time and tenure-track faculty.

While there is a variety of ways in which this can be approached, strategies can include:

- Place position advertisements in outlets and resources targeted to people of color, such as *Diverse Issues in Education*, the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, *Hispanic Outlook on Education* magazine, the *Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education*, and the SREB-State Doctoral Scholars Program job search service.
- Require that search committees engage in implicit bias training and complete anti-bias checklists as part of the hiring process.
- Expand the recruitment pool to include doctoral programs that serve a greater number of students of color, such as HBCUs.



Decades of research and practice have built a strong body of potential solutions that can be implemented to increase faculty diversity.

**Dr. Kimberly Moffit** — Interim Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, University of Maryland Baltimore County

- Encourage faculty to use the online SREB Scholar Directory to identify candidates for open positions.
- Consider cluster hiring as a method both for bringing diverse faculty to campus and for creating an area of institutional expertise and excellence. This can be a particularly helpful approach for smaller institutions.

#### 4. Universities can address faculty retention by ensuring that faculty from under-represented racial and ethnic groups receive targeted mentorship, support and professional development.

Lasting and meaningful change in faculty diversity requires concrete efforts toward faculty retention. Building a more supportive environment for all minority faculty, particularly junior faculty, is an essential first step.

Lasting and meaningful change in faculty diversity requires concrete efforts toward faculty retention.



Dr. Amon Perry —  
Professor, University of Louisville

- Mentorship is a critical component in junior faculty professional development, and several institutions across the country have instituted mentoring programs to improve retention rates of minority faculty. Institutions can pair junior faculty with senior faculty whose experience and knowledge of university protocols and resources will help them transition through the ranks.
- Ensure that engagement in service is not undervalued in considerations for tenure and promotion. Research shows that faculty of color tend to carry a heavier service burden than their peers, and this work provides significant value to departments and institutions.
- Implement clear faculty tenure policies. Ensure that there are formal and informal communications with minority faculty members regarding tenure progression. Research has shown that pre-tenure faculty who have a better understanding of tenure criteria are more likely to have strong working relationships with their senior faculty colleagues.
- Provide dual-career support for spouses who are looking for work.
- Provide child or elder care for faculty and implement programs that allow a faculty member to stop their tenure clock when caring for a new child.
- Consider creating university-wide affinity groups to provide personal and professional support for minority faculty.



## Now is the time for institutions to make meaningful change

The United States has reached a pivotal moment in reckoning with its racial realities. Higher education institutions should take this as an opportunity to make progress on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. Increasing faculty diversity is a crucial element here, and the recommendations above can serve as a road map for institutions to strengthen their efforts.

We know what needs to be done. Now is the time to implement these solutions and build a more diverse faculty, one that is representative of our student bodies and of our country as a whole. Our university classrooms should reflect today's America, and it will reflect better on all of us — schools, workforce, communities — when they do.



Higher education institutions should take this as an opportunity to address and make progress on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

**Dr. Veronica Martinez-Acosta** —  
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