

Faculty Advisory Council

Illinois Board of Higher Education



Advancing Equity in Illinois Higher Education

Introduction

The IBHE Faculty Advisory Council believes that issues related to racial equity among higher education must remain a foundational element in all conversations related to policy and funding across Illinois. This paper addresses three key areas of opportunity for building upon the equity strategies presented in the IBHE strategic plan, *A Thriving Illinois*: diverse faculty hiring, support, and retention; faculty development; and student support and resources. Diversity, equity, and inclusion policies across Illinois higher education are large-scale and immediate needs. Thus, we present recommendations and policies that are linked to measurable accountability outcomes for higher education institutions in Illinois.

As the data analysis in the IBHE Strategic Plan shows, equity gaps in postsecondary attainment manifest along many dimensions including race, ethnicity, income, geography, first-generation status and the intersections these dimensions create. In this paper, we mostly focus on approaches for addressing equity gaps in the Black and Latinx communities, as data are more readily available indicating how these groups are affected by the inequitable structures in our higher education institutions. Future efforts will address equity gaps affecting other groups, including indigenous persons, as data studies emerge. **Diverse Faculty Hiring, Support, and Retention**

A key factor in the effort to increase academic success for Black and Latinx students is the ability to systematically hire, support, and retain Black and Latinx faculty in our higher education institutions across the state (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). We offer a set of

policy recommendations and action steps addressing issues of the hiring pipeline, diversity recruiting, faculty retention and support, and faculty evaluations.

Pipeline

In many fields, disproportionately few Black or Latinx people receive PhDs. For example, 13% of the United States population is Black and 18% is Hispanic, but of U.S. citizens who received PhDs in Mathematics in 2017, only 3% were Black and 3% were Hispanic (Golbeck et al., 2019). (Other disciplines may be higher or lower.) In light of this, higher education must address the academic hiring pipeline in the following ways:

- Develop programs that encourage Black and Latinx undergraduate students to consider graduate school and demystify graduate school through information, exposure, and proactive advising.
- Reach out to undergraduates at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).
- Use mentoring, peer groups, and networks to help Black and Latinx students pursue and complete their doctorates.
- Encourage graduate schools to recruit and retain Black and Latinx students to complete their terminal degrees.
- Fund predoctoral and postdoctoral fellowships for Black and Latinx students.

Through the work of the IBHE, the state of Illinois has a mechanism to support the pipeline for minoritized populations through the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois program. This program offers financial assistance to graduate students in master's and doctorate degree programs from traditionally underrepresented groups. Although DFI provides an opportunity to directly benefit and support a diverse faculty pipeline, more can be done to increase transparency and intentional evaluation to fully understand the program's effectiveness. Once outcomes of the program are clearly identified and assessed, then increased interest and support will continue to strengthen and advance the program's outcomes.

Recruiting

Higher education institutions would be wise to adopt intentional recruiting strategies to meet diversity goals in their hiring practices. Different ways to do this include creating initiatives to recruit and support Black and Latinx faculty at all institutions, not only to those colleges and universities in larger cities and metropolitan areas, and finding ways to fund and support recruiting initiatives such as the following:

- Cluster hiring initiatives (bringing on faculty with a common research focus or expertise, such as Black or Latinx faculty in a cohort to provide shared experiences and support).
- Connecting with academic and professional organizations focused on students and faculty of color.
- Supporting networking across the state to help connect recent graduates with faculty positions, especially among HBCUs, PBIs, and HSIs, and a variety of racially inclusive organizations.

Retention

Higher education institutions must be intentional and unrelenting in support of Black and Latinx faculty and those doing racial justice and equity work on campuses throughout Illinois. Administrators need to find ways to create safe and supportive systems for the work of equity to be done. They must design and implement processes and policies to protect faculty from negative consequences that might result from this challenging work. Some areas to be aware of include the following:

- Supporting faculty and staff of color through mechanisms to build relationships and collegiality across the institution.
- Supporting staff of color through the building of relationships with colleagues, support from supervisors, equitable workloads and conditions, and equitable pay scales.
- Encouraging and valuing the research from faculty of color.
- Empowering diverse voices in meetings and committees.
- Being aware of overwork for faculty and staff of color as they may be required to serve on additional committees and mentor/advise additional students because of their diverse backgrounds.
- Working to create a campus culture and climate that supports the faculty and staff of color who have been hired to do racial justice work at the institution.

Faculty Evaluations

The Faculty Advisory Council to the IBHE conducted a survey of Illinois higher education institutions to determine how many institutions use student evaluations of faculty in their tenure and promotion processes. The survey was disseminated to 68 post-secondary institutions under the IBHE purview through email to faculty leadership or academic administrative leadership. Responses were received from 49 institutions, a 72% return rate.

The results of the survey point to a high percentage of Illinois colleges and universities that use student evaluation of faculty in tenure and promotion processes. Of the 49 that responded, 39 institutions noted “Yes,” they do use student evaluations of faculty in tenure and promotion processes. Nine institutions do not, and one institution noted they mostly do not.

In light of the high percentage of institutions that utilize student evaluations of faculty in tenure and promotion processes, questions emerge concerning student bias in faculty evaluations, especially toward faculty of minoritized populations. Higher education institutions must look carefully at the equity implications of faculty evaluations in light of implicit bias among college students and use other measures to evaluate faculty as well, such as the following:

- evaluation of teaching by peers.
- redacting comments that reference certain characteristics (i.e., race, sex, size, accent).
- engaging portfolio-based assessments of teaching.

Faculty Development

Faculty members of all races and backgrounds need intentional, effective training related to racial equity. All people have biases formed by their experiences and education, biases that can be reinforced by societal stereotypes related to race, gender, class, and appearance (JacobySenghor, 2016; Straats et al., 2015). Because it is invisible to the individual, implicit bias can be more detrimental to those against whom the bias is held, and often implicit bias does not align with one’s beliefs. Faculty would benefit from training focused on racial implicit bias that unknowingly creates barriers to success for Black and Latinx students. Most efforts to address implicit bias in the classroom have focused on providing assistance and support for students of color as they work to cope with the classroom climates implicit bias creates. This approach diverts attention from the more central need to proactively create successful classroom engagements. Rather than simply helping students of color to cope, colleges should focus on making faculty aware of their biases, how they impact the classroom experience, and what can be done to create more inclusive learning environments. Scholars have shown that relatively small, cost-effective interventions in workplaces are very effective (Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2016).

Faculty and institutions must take responsibility for alleviating academic outcome gaps. Faculty development must focus on racially responsive curricula and pedagogies, including blended and online learning approaches, that fully engage traditionally marginalized students in collaborative knowledge production and critical thinking. These training programs need to be built upon measurable learning outcomes such as the following cultural competencies: employ active learning in the classroom, develop a learning community among students, build knowledge of students and differentiating instruction, maintain high expectations, view culture as an asset to academic learning (Tanner & Allen, 2007, p. 252). Effective faculty development helps faculty

of all races and backgrounds take into account the cognitive, linguistic, and social assets of each student in the classroom (Glimps & Ford, 2010).

In order to advance equity across entire institutions, funding and resources must be committed to support professional development. As noted above, relatively simple, cost-effective training can provide successful transformational change among faculty and staff; schools need not restrict their intervention to a narrow focus on continued supports for students of color. As committed as institutions are to providing wrap-around supports and services for students, the commitment must expand to ongoing training related to anti-racism in systems and practice.

Student Support and Resources

Beyond the focus on faculty hiring, retention, and development to advance equity, institutions must actively seek to support students from marginalized groups who need intentional and specific resources that directly address the challenges they face while pursuing a post-secondary credential. Institutions of higher learning should seek to support students in four areas: championing student groups, designing student-friendly colleges, offering classes in ethnic studies, and developing summer bridge programs to support students from underrepresented groups.

Student Groups

First, institutions of higher learning need to provide direction and support to organizations to create and champion student groups with strong leadership where Black and Latinx students can be supported in their lives both on and off campus. Bell (2015) describes the importance of promoting participation in racial affinity groups (e.g., Black Student Union, Hispanic Alliance, etc.). These groups “allow students who share an identity—usually a marginalized identity—to gather, talk in a safe space about issues related to that identity, and transfer that discussion into action that makes for a more equitable experience at school” (Bell, 2015). The *Columbia Social Work Review* indicates that these groups promote a sense of belonging, identity development, mental well-being, and social justice advancement for students. Research suggests that such groups play a significant role in retention efforts.

Institutions of higher education should encourage students to join affinity groups while also amplifying the voices of such groups on campus. We can ensure the voices of such groups are heard by ensuring they are adequately funded, well represented in campus leadership events and activities, and are led by qualified and dedicated advisors. A qualified leader will ensure that questions of identity are discussed while also promoting the social and support aspects of the group. The leader will also collaborate with students to create a clear sense of purpose for the group and to bring awareness to the campus community at large (Bell, 2015).

Student-Friendly Colleges

Faculty lament that they do not have college-ready students, but an equally valid concern is whether they have student-ready colleges. A lack of empathy, unnecessary bureaucracy, a staff lacking in customer service skills, and other factors already cited can hinder retention (McNair et al., 2022).

Race and Ethnic Studies Programs

Offering classes and programs (and even majors) in African American Studies and Latinx Studies can help Black and Latinx students to feel more at home and connected to their university, thus improving retention. In addition, offering courses focused on diversity and inclusion provides opportunity for all students, not just traditionally marginalized populations, to build cultural awareness and racial justice competencies. Furthermore, such programs have the added advantage of employing professors in ethnic studies, who can then provide the academy with important and useful research on race, ethnicity, and equity.

Summer Bridge Programs

Other ways to promote student support are success initiatives that are specifically designed to help students of color succeed. For example, low-income Black and Latinx students are disproportionately placed in remedial classes upon enrollment. Summer bridge programs can help by providing intense instruction in one or more subjects, typically for four to five weeks. Summer bridge students are more likely to finish their first year of college and enroll in higherlevel math and writing courses upon completion of the program. However, these programs are often grant-funded and schools typically do not have the resources to continue them once the grant runs out (Adams, 2012). As a result, state funding can be instrumental in paving the way for success for many Black and Latinx students.

Accountability

McNair and Bensimon (2020) in their book *Equity Talk to Equity Walk* address issues of equity and accountability among higher education institutions. They have developed an Equity Scorecard to guide colleges and universities through the assessment of equity-mindedness on their campuses and create a clear and intentional plan for building an equity-minded institution.

The transparent and accurate use of data is key to making sustainable changes among higher education. Student success data must be disaggregated by race and analyzed through a critical lens to honestly identify reasons for racial disparities in academic success rates for Black and Latinx students. The same need exists for disaggregation of faculty hiring data. Findings must be shared broadly to promote a transparent and committed climate for making assessments and subsequent changes to the policies and practices not only within the classroom but also across

the institution. We strongly suggest that institutions reward departments achieving milestones in diversity (for example, in faculty hires; recruiting, retention, and graduation of Black and Latinx students; campus climate surveys; etc.).

The Faculty Advisory Council to the IBHE recommends a mechanism for Illinois institutions to report and measure these data disaggregated by race and make commitments to benchmarking and supporting sustainable changes to faculty diversity and equitable student supports throughout Illinois higher education.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the success of any individual student depends upon the nature and quality of the full range of interactions the student has across an institution. When faculty and staff are more aware of the diverse range of circumstances their students experience and of the impacts their own experiences, attitudes, and actions have, they will be better prepared to maximize the likelihood of success for all students. Similarly, the success of any individual faculty member depends upon the nature and quality of the full range of interactions they have throughout the institution and their discipline. Making progress requires coordinated efforts at the state policy level, at the level of institutional practices, and at the level of individual actions. The recommendations in this report are offered in the spirit of informing possibilities at each of these levels, individually and collectively, with an eye toward building upon the many good initiatives already underway across our state.

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