

Minority Educators and Promotion: A Dilemma

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A minority faculty member in higher education has a responsibility greater than merely being appointed to a position. He or she must be evaluated, promoted, and rewarded on educational merit just as others are.

In THE late sixties, the Federal Government strongly urged colleges and universities to employ more minority members on their staffs. The pressures applied by the courts, minority groups, and other agencies were responsible for many persons being employed in positions never before held by members of minority groups. Now that the pressures have subsided there are many such persons in positions that are meaningful and viable to the educational process. There are also some minority educators who are employed in "paper" positions, that is, positions with fancy titles and few responsibilities.

Minority members of a university staff thus are placed in a dilemma. This dilemma is demonstrated in the fact that the forces responsible for the person becoming employed will not usually be the forces that will keep him employed. Periodically, these educators are evaluated and promoted with the use of the same criteria by which most of their colleagues are evaluated. Therefore, it becomes much more imperative for the minority members to identify their strengths

and weaknesses and move rapidly toward carving an educational niche for themselves.

This writer believes that a person who accepts a position as the minority member of a staff should ask himself the following questions:

1. Can I work effectively in this group?
2. Can I command respect from the staff?
3. What are the possibilities for advancement?
4. What are my real duties as compared to the other members of the group?

On some occasions a person finds that his effectiveness will decline when he is the minority member of the staff. The everyday pressures of the job are also difficult for most new faculty members, minority or majority. Consequently, it appears that it would be difficult for members of a minority, who have had little experience in university routine, to avoid deep frustrations. Nevertheless, the minority member must plan, organize, and become accustomed to university red tape the same as his colleagues do.

Being a member of a minority in a university system could create problems for some young educators. Being new to a staff and also being in the minority could be far too traumatic a combination for some to over-

come. The frustrations can cause an inexperienced person to become overly aggressive or cause him to become submissive to everyone around him.

It is important for minority members of a department to remember that some majority members of the staff experience deep frustrations, are not promoted, or do not enjoy their jobs. Therefore, it is crucial that the minority members of the staff move forward with a planned program of professional growth.

One must understand that many large universities operate on a merit system. Even though department members are friendly, each one is seeking recognition as an individual because personal growth and local and national involvement are positive factors when it is time for promotion or other advancement.

Moving Toward Promotion

The writer also believes that communicating how it feels to be different from everyone else in the group is extremely difficult. This feeling is something that each person must experience for himself.

Minority members of a university staff cannot forget the fact that they are few in number. Neither can they constantly think about their ethnic background or their tokenism. It does not seem reasonable that the negative aspects should always be emphasized when one experiences a failure. The writer knows that the minority educator should develop a positive concept of self and move forward in the development of educational projects the same as his colleagues do. When a project is not successfully completed, as shown by experience, the minority member of the staff becomes frustrated and worries about the failure the same as the other members of the staff. The failures should not become the end to the development of educational projects. On the contrary, they should serve as catalysts toward seeking additional projects.

As one moves through the educational structure toward promotion and other advancement, he is usually confronted with the

rules of the majority. The members of the majority are often called upon to make decisions concerning the minority colleague. It appears that the initiative for selling one's accomplishments lies with the person who is to be evaluated. Furthermore, it seems that the educator who has difficulty in working with people in a system would find it hard to achieve the goal of promotion. The dilemma becomes greatly entangled for the minority educator because he no longer has the power of the forces that were responsible for his attaining the position. On many occasions some minority members of a staff might not know the rules for advancement until it is too late; consequently, they do not accrue enough achievements in order to apply for promotion.

The educator who is a member of a minority has a responsibility greater than being appointed to a position in higher education. He must demonstrate potential for educational excellence the same as his colleagues do. He must be evaluated, promoted, and rewarded on merit the same as anyone else.

For the minority member to believe that his superiors expect more from him than they do of his colleagues, or for him to believe that his accomplishments should be less than those of his colleagues could be psychologically damaging to his professional growth. The degree of frustrations should decline if the person has the credentials necessary for obtaining the position and the maturity for engaging in activities that would aid him in growing professionally.

Yes, minority members of an educational staff could face a dilemma when applying for promotion. Nevertheless, if these members are observant and ambitious, if they get caught up in the professional enthusiasm around them, and if they become elevated to greater educational accomplishment, the degree of this particular dilemma should decline and promotion should become a reality.

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