

Faculty of Color: Contesting the last Frontier

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Introduction

Professors of color bring unique identities, perspectives, beliefs, and pedagogical methods that may run against the grain of traditional teaching within the University system. Their emergence into the domain of academia elicits careful examination of the interface between these professors and their students. The question of how professors are perceived by their students in addition to how the professors negotiate the context of this domain is examined within the body of this article. Of particular interest are how these professors engage their students, what adjustments they make to succeed in this domain, and whether they retain their own sense of individuality with an emic perspective or, acquiesce to dominant etic discourse that mutes their potential for uniqueness and capacity to promote social justice principles.

The United States' historical development has left us the legacy of a racialized society that still strains when discussing matters of race, ethnicity and diversity. Despite the existing social and economic stratification of this society, marginalized people continue to make slow and steady gains when breaking the color barriers of domains traditionally held by white males. Each time one of these domains is breached the context of interpersonal relationships is challenged, consciously or subconsciously, by the mere presence of people of color who bring their perceived *difference* to the new environment. Subsequently, tensions between racial/ethnic groups who have experienced conflictive historical relationships with one another can resurface as emotions generated by long held attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices, inhibit the development of healthy working and social relationships. Within the domain of academia, professors of color may encounter students who have had limited exposure to diversity. If the student is unable to value "difference" as a positive quality or the professor is unable to successfully navigate this domain, the students' capacity to learn is impeded and the professor's capacity to teach is questioned.

This racialized legacy permeates the classroom from a multitude of sources as our segregated neighborhoods, communities, schools, and places of worship maintain separate existences. Lack of opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue compounds the historical development so that our day to day existence perpetuates a state of *quiet hostility*. Consequently, we may develop, at best, a level of tolerance for *difference* but never full acceptance and understanding. For those who have not had opportunities to develop their capacity to understand and appreciate "difference", the academic domain may be their first experience in which social space is shared and issues of equity are purportedly on an even playing field. Subsequently, the inherent attitudes and beliefs of students and the manner in which professors of color navigate through this social space may inform the very climate of the learning experience.

Many of our social change models espouse slogans such as "Teaching Tolerance" or other such idioms that tout a superficial level of co-existence. What is implied with the term "tolerance" is that one is expected to "put up with", "endure", or even "resist" others without really accepting, understanding, and truly valuing *differences*. Given the racial

stratification of this society, the state of *quiet hostility* perpetuated by such models only serves to maintain the status quo. Under this non-critical approach to topics of diversity, Euro-centrism, attitudes of white superiority, and ignorance about the lives and cultures of people of color go unchecked. While racially motivated physical attacks on people of color have long been outlawed, public policy such as California's Propositions 187, 205 and 209 unveil a level of restrained hostility though still manifesting psychological and sociological attacks on "difference".

To change the nature of *relationship* between traditionally conflicted groups requires constructive dialogue that moves the level of relationship beyond the level of tolerance to one that upholds the principles of *Community Reconstruction*. Within this construct, difference is valued rather than tolerated while relationships and engagement are sought after rather than avoided. To the extent in which our various domains, long held by dominant white populations, can adopt such principles determines the degree to which this society deconstructs the very blocks on which this racially stratified society was created.

The principles of *Community Reconstruction* actively and consciously promotes efforts to build *subjective understanding* between people within the classroom, a school, a community or any other construct in which people come together. Rather than co-existing under a state of *quiet hostility*, constructive dialogue with and between members of these constructs learn to value difference. Learning to embrace the values, traits, or practices associated with traditionally non-mainstream populations as equal rather than marginal is the ultimate goal. With concerted efforts that impact perception of self in relation to others and perceptions of others in relation to self, the communities created by greater understanding evolve to models of equality that truly believe and practice respect for diversity and difference.

A multitude of factors contribute to the classroom environment that includes but is not limited to professor confidence and student identity. The interface between professors of color and their students creates a confrontation between "difference" and the underlying forces contributing to the existence of *quiet hostility*. This survey reveals how professors of color fare within this domain by examining student responses to a subset of questions pertaining to diversity and to the effectiveness of their professors.

Problem

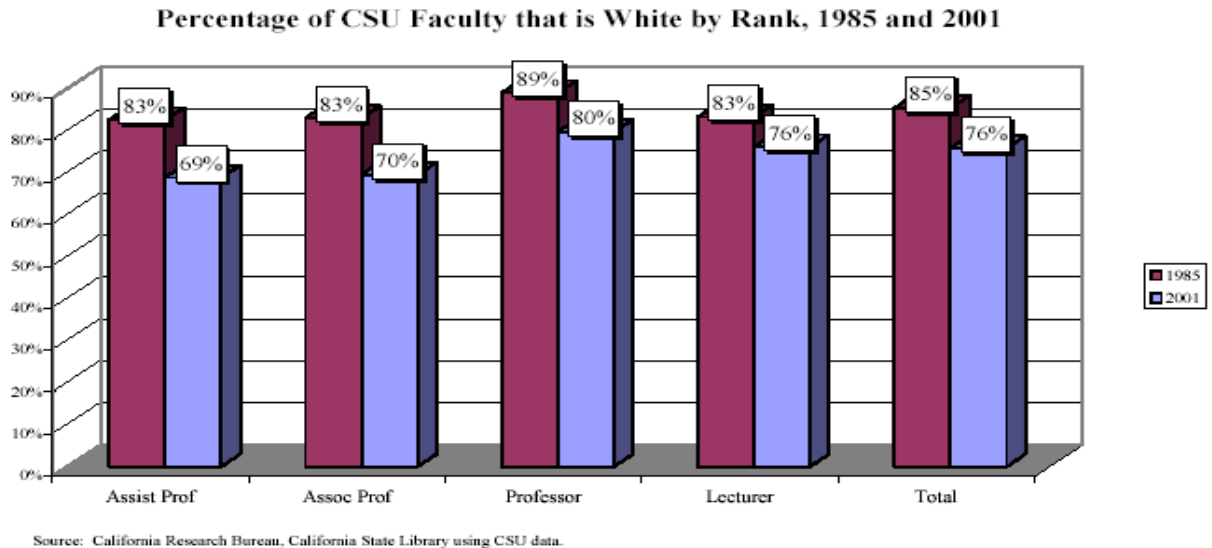
Faculty of color bring a richness of knowledge and practical experience that can enhance the knowledge base of all students, thereby preparing them to meet the challenges of a continuing changing diverse world. Even so, the lack of representation of faculty of color in colleges and universities represents a problem for higher education institutions and, subsequently, the general society. Nationally, the census estimates that in the next fifty years Whites will no longer make up more than half of the population. In California, no ethnic group is currently the majority. Whites are the largest group and make up 47 percent of the population. Latinos are the second largest group, followed by Asians, and African Americans.

Unfortunately, the increasing diversity taking place in the general society and student body is not proportionally represented in the increasing diversification of faculty of color. The lack of faculty of color results in a lack of role models which constitutes a major reason why underrepresented students cite as one of the major reasons institutions

of higher education have difficulty recruiting and retaining underrepresented students (Black Issues in Higher Education, 1987). It is an opportune time for institutions of higher education to increase the pool of faculty of color. The projected retirement of more than a third of the current U.S. professoriate between 1991 and 2010 presents a golden opportunity for achieving greater faculty diversity (National Education Association, 1997).

The dismal pool of faculty of color is reflected in the statistics on faculty of color representation in institutions of higher education. According to Wilds and Wilson (1998) in 1995, faculty of color represented only 12.9 percent of all full time faculty in the United States with Asian American faculty representing the largest group at 5.1 percent, followed by African American faculty at 5 percent, Latino/as at 2.4 percent, and American Indian at 0.4 percent. The California State University (CSU) is one of the largest four-year university systems in the country with 23 campuses, over 300,000 students, and over 20,000 faculty members. In 2001, 76 percent of the CSU faculty were White, 12 percent Asian, 7 percent Latino, 4 percent African American, and 0.7 percent Native American. Figure 1, compare White faculty, between 1985 and 2001 (California Research Bureau, 2003). It is apparent that Whites are decreasing in faculty employment and underrepresented groups of Asian-American, African-American, Latino/as, and native American faculty are making incremental gains during this time.

Figure 1

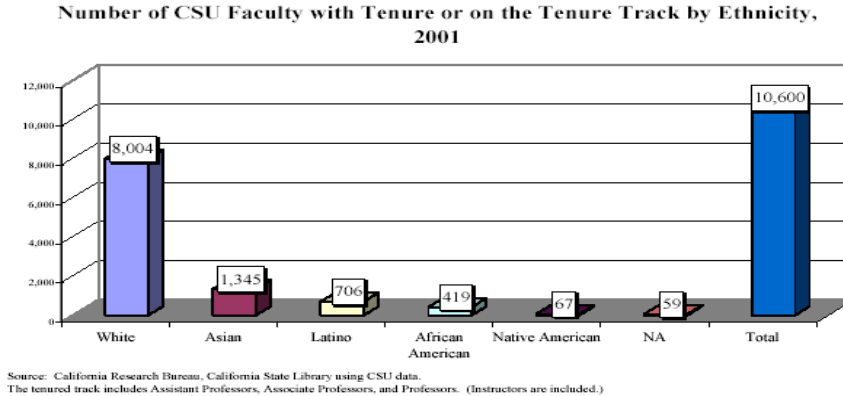


Within a sixteen year span, White faculty in the California state university system have shown a decrease in faculty percentage at every level with the rank of assistant professor showing the greatest decline of 14 percentage points. Underrepresented groups of Asian-American, African-American, Latino/as, and Native American faculty have made incremental gains during this time.

It is important to note that although incremental gains have taken place in increasing faculty of color in institutions of higher education, most of those gains have

been in the lower ranks of faculty positions. Figure 2 illustrates the number of CSU faculty with tenure or on the tenure track by ethnicity.

Figure 2



A brief profile of 10,600 tenure-track faculty shows that a small number of faculty of color are on or have tenure as compared to White faculty in the CSUS. For example, 76 (N=8,004) percent of the tenure-track faculty are White, 13 (N=1,345) percent Asian, 7 (N=706) percent Latino, 4 (N=419) percent African American, and 0.6 (N=67) Native American.

Brown (1988) addressed the lack of parity for some race/ethnic groups on faculties in higher education. She cites Bowen and Shuster (1986) who state that the shortage is due more to the insufficient supply of adequately trained scholars of color, or to the failure of institutions to carry out affirmative action plans in appointment and promotion procedures (Fleming et al.,) After much debate it appears that both inquiries contribute to the lack of representation. Many institutions are realizing that they can't depend on crumbling policies like affirmative action to address the low faculty of color pool and are initiating "grow your own" programs to promote potential scholars through the academic pipeline.

Background Literature Review on Faculty of Color

The concern over the low participation of faculty of color to the professoriate ranks increased during the civil rights movement in the 1960s. To this end, the social battles fought during the 1960s resulted in the use of affirmative action polices as a tool for increasing the participation of faculty of color. Aguirre, Martinez, and Hernandez (1993) state that while affirmative action strategies of the 60s enhanced the image of higher education institutions as embracing openness to equity issues, higher education institutions made little progress in creating a positive environment for students of color, and less so for faculty of color. Menges and Exum (1983) assert that affirmative action has not resulted in massive entry of women and faculty of color, partly because of the complexities of implementation. It can also be attributed to the unwillingness of higher education institution to make it a priority to recruit and retain faculty of color. Thirty plus year later, demographic realities have forced many institutions of higher education to focus their attention on increasing faculty of color that is reflective of the general

population. The acts of these institutions reflect a realization to the benefits of diversifying its faculty pool.

Cole and Barber (2003) provide an overview to why it would be desirable for institutions of higher education to have an ethnically diverse faculty pool. The reasons given follow: 1) increasing proportional representation of faculty of color illustrates progress toward addressing issues of social justice; faculty of color generally are sympathetic to students of color and provide them with the necessary encouragement needed for students to succeed; faculty of color can serve as role models which can facilitate academic and career aspirations. The domain to be considered within the context allows us to examine the contribution that professors of color make in reconstructing the way we perceive issues of social justice within the classroom.

An immediate review of the literature on the topic of faculty of color illustrates a discouraging picture that is portrayed by empirical research. Johnsrud and Sadao (1998) present three theories that seek to explain the incongruence between faculty of color and institutions of higher education. They are: (1) integration theories in which the ultimate goal is for faculty of color to assimilate and fully integrate into what is perceived to be an equitable system; (2) structural theories based on models of institutional racism initiate, implement, and support policies and strategies that favor one group over others; (3) critical theories based on colonial models that are embedded in the psyche of the dominant group to treat all "other" as subordinates.

The following factors; campus climate, affirmative action and legislation, mentoring contribute to the lack of substantial progress among faculty of color. Each area is further explored in the following sections:

Campus Climate

Campus climate refers to addressing the "culture, habits, decisions, practices, and policies that make up campus life" (Harvey, 1991, p. 128). Faculties of color typically encounter a mismatch between the culture they bring and the culture of the institution. Thereafter, it is incumbent upon the faculty member to adapt to the culture of the institution regardless if the institutional practices are equitable or not. Traditionally, failure on the part of faculty of color to transcend these cultural mismatches has been associated to individual deficiencies. A growing body of research places some responsibility on institutions of higher education to assume a greater role in facilitating the success of an increasing diverse faculty pool. Individual characteristics are important, but in order to enact equitable practices, institutions need to assess their role in facilitating success or failure among faculty of color.

Affirmative Action and legislation

According to Menges and Exum (1983) the goal of affirmative action programs was to increase faculty employment opportunities for women and faculty of color. Due to implementation problems, initial expectations in increasing the number of faculty of color have not been fully realized. Disagreement about the use of affirmative action programs, "which in practice ranges from having quota systems or "set-asides" for minority students and faculty to including race as one criterion in the admission and hiring process"(Cole and Barber, p. 5) has thwarted efforts in fulfilling stated goals. Even so, recent events point to the recognition of the higher education community that racial diversity on

campus is a compelling national interest. This was demonstrated when the Supreme Court issued its decisions in the two lawsuits challenging the University of Michigan's race-conscious admissions policies (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2003).

Mentoring

Mentors who can identify with faculty of color and can facilitate their success are not only scarce but are often overwhelmed with responsibilities in which they may lack support from their own administration. This point is supported by Garcia and Moses (2003) who state that even when senior faculty of color are present, they are often overextended and requested to serve as mentors by many. This is unfortunate since, as stated by Bourguignon et al. 1987, faculty of color are generally not as familiar with institutional policies and unwritten rules governing institutions of higher education. It is also well documented that a considerable number of faculty of color feel unwelcome, unappreciated, and unwanted. These combined feelings can overwhelm faculty and the end result is that faculty of color resort to utilizing defense mechanisms in order to withstand hostile environments or worse, leave the academic domain altogether.

De la Luz and Halcon (1988) conducted a study on Chicano faculty. They state that Chicanos, like other faculty of color, find ways to cope. In their study they found four prevalent responses to coping with hostile institutions of higher education: give in, give up, move on, or fight back. Faculty in the "give in" category acculturate and assimilate to policies and practice and tend to not challenge the established institutional culture. In these cases, the institutions and the students attending these institutions fail to reap the benefit of acquiring a diverse teaching staff. The "give up" group has not had the support systems in place to continue, therefore, they soon succumb to disillusionment with the result of leaving the institution entirely. The argument can be made in these cases that the faculties are invariably "pushed out." The "move on" group, as stated by the Halcon and De La Luz "move on to greener pastures"(p. 309). They seek out institutional environments where their interest and expertise fit well with the mission of the department or university. Those in the "fight back" group are considered academic rebels fighting for the rights of others. However, they often pay a heavy price by being marginalized by the university wide community.

Mentoring newer faculty can make a difference in increasing the number of faculty of color, retaining them, and succeeding in an academic environment. Without a network of support that includes a mentoring component, faculty of color can find themselves thwarted in their efforts to fully integrate into institutions of higher education. Subsequently, the dire retention of qualified candidates for professorial positions perpetuates a social imbalance within or institutions of higher learning.

Purpose of this Study

This study examines the responses of a student subset to questions pertaining to diversity and to the effectiveness of their professors. Two broad questions to be considered include, "How are professors of color in the college classroom perceived by their students?" How do professors of color negotiate "difference" in the classroom domain?"

Method

Data for this study derived from a mix-method cross-sectional survey. The survey was pilot-tested with university colleagues to determine whether survey content would elicit the intended outcomes. The method used to administer the survey to the select sample was “live”. The survey was given to students to complete in their classrooms. This approach yields a high rate response, close to 100 percent. The live approach also gave the researcher an opportunity to explain the study and answer any questions that participants had before they completed the survey. The survey consisted of three parts; section 1. Background Section, 2. Likert Scaling, section III. Open-Ended Questions. A total of 240 students enrolled in the College of Education during the Spring of 2003 were administered the survey.

Population

The resident population of Sacramento consists of 2 million residents in a metropolitan area for the year 2000 with Whites representing 66%, Hispanics, 16.4%, African Americans 6.8%, and American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islanders, Eskimo & other 10.8% (Sacramento Regional Research Institute, 2001). The study site is a four-year public university in Sacramento, California, the capital of California. California State University, Sacramento is the sixth largest university in the 23 campus CSU system, enrolling a multicultural student body of 28,588 for 2002-03 with 46.1% of students being White, 12.9% Hispanic, 5.8% African American, 1.0% Native American, 7.9% Asian, 4.0% Filipino, 2.6% Foreign National, 4.5% Southeast Asia, and 14.4% other (Sacramento Regional Research Institute, 2001).

Sample

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to administer both the survey at California State University, Sacramento College of Education. The following programs were represented: Counselor Education; Child Development, Teacher Education, Bilingual/Multicultural Education, Special Education, and Educational Leadership & Policy Studies. The College of Education enrolled 3247 students in Spring of 2003 of which 240 were administered the survey.

Analysis

Responses to the quantitative portion of the survey data (background and likert scaling sections) collected were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Tabulations in the form of frequencies were conducted and reported to inquire how each participant answered the questions. Descriptive statistics allowed the researchers to meaningfully describe data with numerical indices. Two researchers independently and then jointly using an inductive analytic process to code and draw conclusions from the collected data analyzed the qualitative section of the survey. The following are existing conditions of the variables studied.

The sample consisted of 19.4 percent males and 80.2 percent females. The age of participants varied with 49.4 percent of participants stating they were between 18 to 29 years of age, 28.7 percent were between 29 to 39, and 20.8 percent being 40-plus years of age. The ethnic composition of the students was as follow: 65.3 percent White, 11.6 percent Latino, 7.2 percent Asian-American, 5.5 percent African-American, 1.7 percent

Native American, and 8.5 percent other. The majority of the students were graduate students (67 percent graduate and 31.0 percent undergraduates).

The responses derived from the survey were placed on a continuum utilizing Racial Identity Development Theory as outlined by Janet Helms (1990). Using this particular construct in our analysis provides us with greater understanding of the interface between professors of color and their students within the classroom. Noting that we are all shaped by a multitude of environmental and experiential factors, the actual interplay of these factors as they manifest themselves within the classroom are what set the tone for learning and teaching. We elaborate upon this model as a theoretical framework to analyze data results.

Theoretical Background

Janet Helms (1990) defines Racial Identity and Racial Identity Development theory as,

A sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group... Racial identity development theory concerns the psychological implications of racial-group membership, that is belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential racial group membership. (p. 3)

In essence, this framework acknowledges a historical legacy that has laid the foundation for a race conscious society that exists today. Though more prevalent in some regions than others, our segregated neighborhoods, schools, and communities are, on the macro scale, evidence of this legacy. On the micro level, this construct allows us to examine how our students identify themselves in relation to self and in relation to others. Using the various stage developments delineated by Helms, we are able to categorize responses along a three-stage continuum. Helm's Racial Identity Development Model is provided in detail below:

Helm's White Racial Identity Development Model

Two Broad Phases: Abandonment of Racism & Defining a Non-Racist Identity

1. *Contact*: People in this status are oblivious to racism, lack an understanding of racism, have minimal experiences with Black people, and may profess to be color-blind. Societal influence in perpetuating stereotypes and the superior/inferior dichotomy associated between Blacks and Whites are not noticed, but accepted unconsciously or consciously without critical thought or analysis. Racial and cultural differences are considered unimportant and these individuals seldom perceive themselves as "dominant" group members, or having biases and prejudices.

2. *Disintegration*: In this stage, the person becomes conflicted over unresolvable racial moral dilemmas that are frequently perceived as polar opposites: believing one is nonracist, yet not wanting one's son or daughter to marry a minority group member; believing that "all men are created equal," yet society treating Blacks as second class citizens; and not acknowledging that oppression exists while witnessing it (à la the

beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles). The person becomes increasingly conscious of his or her Whiteness and may experience dissonance and conflict between choosing own-group loyalty and humanism.

3. *Reintegration*: Because of the tremendous influence that societal ideology exerts, initial resolution of dissonance often moves in the direction of the dominant ideology associated with race and one's own socio-racial group identity. This stage may be characterized as a regression, for the tendency is to idealize one's socio-racial group and to be intolerant of other minority groups. There is a firmer and more conscious belief in White racial superiority and racial/ethnic minorities are blamed for their own problems.

4. *Pseudo-Independence*: A person is likely to move into this phase due to a painful or insightful encounter or event, which jars the person from Reintegration status. The person begins to attempt an understanding of racial, cultural, and sexual orientation differences and may reach out to interact with minority group members. The choice of minority individuals, however, is based on how "similar" they are to him or her, and the primary mechanism used to understand racial issues is intellectual and conceptual. An attempt to understand has not reached the experiential and affective domains. In other words, understanding Euro-American White privilege, the sociopolitical aspects of race, and issues of bias, prejudice, and discrimination tend to be more an intellectual exercise.

5. *Immersion/Emersion*: If the person is reinforced to continue a personal exploration of himself or herself as a racial being, questions become focused on what it means to be White. Helms states that the person searches for an understanding of the personal meaning of racism and the ways by which one benefits from White privilege. There is an increasing willingness to truly confront one's own biases, to redefine Whiteness, and to become more activist in directly combating racism and oppression. This stage is marked with increasing experiential and affective understanding that were lacking in the previous status.

6. *Autonomy*: Increasing awareness of one's own Whiteness, reduced feelings of guilt, acceptance of one's own role in perpetuating racism, renewed determination to abandon White entitlement leads to an autonomy status. The person is knowledgeable about racial, ethnic and cultural differences, values the diversity, and is no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race. Development of a nonracist white identity becomes increasingly strong.

The various identity stages have been placed along a continuum that ranges from Positive to Negative. The participant responses are then categorized according to their stage of development along this continuum. This allows us to contextualize their relative stage of identity development while understanding the implications of attitudinal forces within these relative stages as they are manifested within the classroom domain.

Positive responses regarding matters of diversity fall under the stage of Autonomy where one's self identity is not only positive, but one is no longer fearful or uncomfortable with the topic and reality of race. Also placed within the positive end of the spectrum are those in the Immersion/Emersion stage. These individuals may still be in

an exploratory phase of understanding themselves and their relationship to others, but express their willingness to build relationships with others. On the extreme end of this continuum lies the stages of Disintegration and Reintegration where one’s identity does not permit or allow for understanding, less appreciation of others who may be different due to cultural values, beliefs, etc... Individuals within these two stages of development may express extreme discomfort and resistance to discussing topics of race, difference, and diversity.

In the middle of this continuum lies another locality that, on the outside, appears neutral, but implicitly, denotes a level of unawareness of one’s own identity and lack of understanding of one’s relation to others. This stage is known as the “Contact Phase.” For purpose of this article, the Pseudo-Independence Phase is placed in the middle of the spectrum as the individual may lack genuine feelings of empathy for others and, thereby, fail to recognize acts of injustice or bias and, subsequently, fail to act as allies. The following scale provides a visual tool by which to gauge where these responses fall on the continuum.

(Autonomy/Immer/Emer)	(Contact/Pseudo-Independence)	(Disintegration/Reintegration)
Positive -----	Neutral-----	Negative
“I think it is great.”	“I do not have any thoughts on this.”	“As a goal, waste of time.
“Increasing diversity should be a priority.”	“I had not particularly noticed.”	As a fact, So what?”
		“Although it makes me uncomfortable, I am working hard to overcome my feeling.”

Noting that our historical development has resulted in a stratified society in which racist ideologies and belief systems drove the very founding and current outcomes, our efforts to deconstruct these ideologies must address the very foundation of racist beliefs. In examining the topic of diversity within the United States and how diversity plays out in the college classroom, we offer a three step working definition of racism from Albert Memmi (2000):

- 1) The identification of difference.
- 2) A negative connotation is attached to the difference.
- 3) The difference is used as the reasoning by which to justify and enact oppressive sanctions.

According to this definition true racism must possess all three characteristics. Simply noting difference, in and of itself, does not constitute racism. Differences can be responded to neutrally or positively without having an adverse affect on inter group relationships. Rather, it is the *value* placed on the difference that elevates the potential for creating negatively charged relationships. The second condition in which the negative value is placed on “difference” perpetuates a climate of racial distrust and tension in the United States. The third and final condition maintains the socioeconomic stratification by the imposition of power which therefore fuels the inequities that exist in this society.

Without a clear understanding of how Racism recreates itself through the attitudes and belief systems that separate members of this society, the potential to Reconstruct our

Communities that move beyond tolerance to actual havens of equality is minimized. Professors of color stepping into the college classroom face the challenge of having to navigate through the climate that is informed by the respective stages of their students' identity development. The degree to which the Professor understands his or her students' perceptions may ultimately affect the professor's capacity to promote their curriculum, and, thereby, improve relationships across the racial divide.

Student Responses Regarding the Topic of Diversity

The opening question to which survey participants responded within the Qualitative section of the Survey was intended to be innocuous. Specifically, the question asked,

“What are your thoughts and feelings about the increasing diversity within this campus community?”

Of the 240 survey participants, the responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive. The following sections affix student responses to a developmental stage as defined by the Helm's Identity Development Model. These stages, as previously indicated, are placed along the continuum from a positive to negative connotation. Our examination begins with the minority of voices that, on the categorical continuum, expressed statements associated with the negative stage of identity development. An analysis of the statements provides an exploration of how these statements are categorized and then is followed by the implications for the impact these individuals may have on not only the classroom environment but on their capacity to effectively work within a pluralistic society.

Dissonance in the Classroom and Society

In all, 25 of the survey participants' responses could be classified on the continuum between Neutral and Negative. A sample of these responses is listed below along with self-identifying information relevant to the survey participant:

This information is offered throughout the article to enhance our understanding of the experiential background of students' exposure to diversity whether it be in their communities or in their classrooms.

“Don't have a problem with this. The professors should be professional though.” (18-28 year old white male, 5 or more professors of color, Diverse Community)

“I had not particularly noticed. I don't see any problems with it. A teacher is a teacher. A teacher is not a skin color! Maybe you need to take your own course.” (29-39 year old white male, 5 or more professors of color, Diverse Community)

“I do not have any thoughts on this matter.” (29-39 year old white female, did not respond to how many professors of color she has had, Diverse Community)

“As a goal, a waste of time, as a fact, so what?” (Did not self-identify gender, race/ethnicity, did not know how many professors of color, Diverse Community)

“I have no problem with it what so ever.” (18-28 year old female, Russian-Jew identified with more than 5 professors of color, Diverse Community)

“It is fine, color should not matter.” (18-28 year old white male, did not know how many professors of color nor the classification of community)

“This survey defeats the whole point of EDBM (Bilingual Multicultural Education) classes! (18-28 year old female who declined to indicate race/ethnicity. Has had 3-4 professors of color and did not know exposure to living in diverse communities.)

“Increasing Diversity? Sac has always been diverse.” (18-28 year old white female who did not know how many professors of color she has had but grew up in a Diverse Community)

“I don’t really think about it because it is not important to me because all I care about is my school work.” (18-28 year old white female, Did not know how many professors of color and grew up in a Diverse Community.)

“Neutral-as long as they are qualified, etc..” (40+ white female, 5 or more professors of color, Minimum to Diverse Communities.)

“I don’t care who teaches me as long as they are knowledgeable. (18-28 white female. Did not know how many professors of color, Diverse Community).

“I have no feelings.” (40+ white male, 3-4 professors of color, Minimum diversity)

“I don’t care as much about diversity as I do increasing intelligent and professional instructors. (40+ white female, 5+ professors of color, Diverse Community)

“It does not bother me at all.” (18-28 year old white female, 5+ professors of color, Minimum level of diversity)

“I really don’t have any thoughts or feelings on this issue. I rarely take notice of the ethnicity of the people around me. I just don’t think that it is an issue.” (18-28 year old female, 1-2 professors of color, Diverse Community)

“It’s certainly a nice sound byte, but I’m rather ambivalent about the idea. I don’t have any information as to the diversity of the campus so I can’t adequately state my thoughts in this area. I’m concerned about the avenues that may be used to increase the diversity-who might this negatively impact? (29-39 white male, 3-4 professors of color, Diverse Community).

“Although it makes me uncomfortable, I am working hard to overcome my feeling.” (40+ white female, 3-4 professors of color, Minimum level of diversity)

Analysis

The Helms White racial identity model (Helms, 1984, 1990, 1994a, 1995) provides a construct by which to determine the developmental stage signified by the above responses. For example, the responses that seem to indicate neutrality or color-blindness such as, “It does not bother me,” “I have no problem”, “I have no feelings”, “I don’t care who teaches me...”, “...I rarely take notice of the ethnicity....”, “It is fine, color should not matter”, “I had not particularly noticed. I don’t see any problems with it. A teacher is a teacher. A teacher is not a skin color! Maybe you need to take your own course” point to the initial identity status classified as the Contact stage in which the person appears to be oblivious to racism. These individuals seldom perceive themselves as “dominant” group members, of having biases or prejudices, and do not perceive racial and cultural differences as important. They lack critical thought or analysis in their understanding of how racism is perpetuated in society yet may be complicit in maintaining racism by unconsciously or consciously accepting the status quo rather than seeking to change it (Sue, 1998).

Intonated with several of these responses was an attached negative connotation to the difference inherent to the definition of racism. In other words, noting that diversity

has the potential to “bother” or that a “problem” does not exist conveys a sense of resistance/dissonance with the very idea of diversity itself. The claim to color blindness under responses such as “rarely take notice”, “color should not matter” points to perhaps levels of tolerance in having to co-exist but not truly coming to terms in regards with one’s relationship with others, less so with one’s own role as a potential agent of change. This is summed up by an individual enrolled in the Child Development program who stated, “I just don’t think that it is an issue.” The neutral response to a seemingly innocuous question reveals responses that categorically fall under a level of “tolerance.” Lacking the deeper understanding and meaning of “difference” within the United States, they are incapable of effectively engaging future generations in creating communities of harmony.

The survey participant’s response, “Increasing Diversity? Sac has always been diverse” points to a lack of historical knowledge cognizant that our college communities have not reflected the diversity of our society. Rather, conscious effort(s) through policy and practice have contributed to incremental gains so that diversity can be achieved at the college level. Then, the individually focused response of, “I don’t really think about it because it is not important to me because all I care about is my school work” points to an unconsciousness regarding the impact of one’s surroundings and experiences on her development. Submerged in one’s own “work” without understanding the interplay of connectedness (or lack of) with others perpetuates, this individual provides us with a clear example of imposed isolation leading to a lack of exerted effort toward positive relationship building with others.

Several of the responses reveal high levels of discomfort with the topic of diversity. For example, “As a goal, a waste of time, as a fact, so what?” “Although it makes me uncomfortable, I am working hard to overcome my feeling.” The first response categorically falls under the Reintegration phase in which there is regression in one’s attitudes or development, a firmer and more conscious belief in White racial superiority and racial/ethnic minorities are blamed for their own problems. Individuals in this category would not see anything defective within our institutions or systems that oppress but would rather expect that people of color are deficient if they are not able to overcome inherent obstacles that may exist in their path. In contrast, the second response leans toward the Pseudo-Independence Stage in which the person “begins to attempt an understanding of racial, cultural, and sexual orientation differences and may reach out to interact with minority group members (Sue, 1998).” In the case of the latter individual, she not only identifies her feelings of discomfort but is actively working to overcome them.

Of the 25 negative respondents, the majority (16) claim to have been exposed to living in multicultural communities. What this points to is the inherent social distance that can exist between members of diverse populations though they live in the same community. In other words, just because one has grown up in a community in which one has been exposed to different cultural/racial groups, does not mean that one’s attitudes and perceptions of “difference” are positive and, thereby, leading to new and improved ways of relating to one another. When lacking constructive opportunities for engagement and social interaction that can lead to Community Reconstruction, people are left to their own guises to make sense of the world around them, their relative position in this world, and the relative positionality of others in relation to their world.

Several of these respondents provided more insight to their discomfort with the discussion of race/ethnicity and took the opportunity to express their feelings when responding to the final question that merely stated, "Any other thoughts and feelings." The responses were,

"After taking this course, this survey seems ironically prejudiced!"

"This survey, like the class would be funny if its agenda weren't so destructive."

"This is the stupidest survey in this history of my life. Please do me a favor and don't ever give this survey again!"

"This was the most ridiculously stupid survey ever. Why does color have to be such an issue. You guys create racism."

"I do not feel this survey was appropriate!"

"This survey is insulting"

Findings from the qualitative section of the survey are supported by analysis derived from the quantitative section of the survey. For example, survey question number ten asked participants:

In comparison to white instructors, instructors of color are biased when engaging students on issues of diversity in the classroom?

15. 2 percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Twelve point three percent stayed neutral in responding to this question.

The combined responses to this question indicate that a significant number of students perceive professors of color as biased and or would rather avoid discussion about diversity.

Reconstructing a society that will overcome its' racialized legacy, requires a level of understanding that includes talking about our history so we may understand the present and make improvements that impact the future. To change the present and the future, one must recognize the themes that exist so they can be acted upon. This is only possible if one is not submerged in reality (Freire, 1998). What is evident in the above comments, however, falls in line with the arguments related to pregnancy prevention educational efforts by educators. One of the criticisms faced by those attempting to reduce pregnancy rates is that by talking about prevention actually encourages promiscuity. This line of thinking is expressed by the pointed comment "You guys create racism" which underscores a high level of discomfort with the topic of diversity. By bringing the topic up and choosing to respond negatively, this particular subgroup does not attach a positive value to the matter though the majority of the survey participants did.

Implications for Dissonance with Diversity

It must be noted that all of the respondents who expressed tones of neutrality, i.e. "It does not bother me at all." (disguising potential underlying discomfort), or extreme adverse reaction to the topic of diversity, i.e. "I had not particularly noticed. I don't see any problems with it. A teacher is a teacher. A teacher is not a skin color! Maybe you need to take your own course" were self-identified as white (two declined to provide their Race/Ethnicity).

Of the 240 respondents, approximately 156 (almost 65.3%) of the survey participants identified as White. Of these participants, 10% (25=n) expressed dissonance

with the topic of diversity. As a working force, educators (comprised of administrators, teachers, counselors, etc...) are comprised of a mainly white work force yet the communities they will serve in California are comprised of a population consisting of primarily ethnic and racial communities whole numbers are growing. The capacity of this workforce to engage their clientele and to improve the status of racial/ethnic minorities, particularly those who have been marginalized through historical/sociological circumstances, points to the need to properly train potential educators so they may be responsive to the needs of these communities. The risk faced when not moving white educators in training past the stages of Contact, Disintegration and Reintegration have significant negative impact on the lives of children and their families.

Building Communities of Hope

Student Responses Regarding the Topic of Diversity

The vast majority of the respondents 88% (211) responded positively to the opening question,

“What are your thoughts and feelings about the increasing diversity within this campus community?”

Of these 211 respondents, 36% (76=n) explicitly stated a positive value associated with learning and living within a diverse campus community. A sampling of the responses from this subgroup follows:

“I appreciate the diversity, as it brings various perspectives to the classroom. This is especially important for aspiring classroom teachers.” (18-28 year old white female)

“I feel as many differences as possible are a good thing. They offer different and/or new views.” (18-28 year old white female.)

“I feel that increasing diversity within this campus community will be very beneficial to the university because students and staff will be more aware and sensitive to the different cultures.” (18-28 year old Asian American female)

“Makes it a much richer experience. Everyone benefits.” (40+White female)

“I think it is a more comfortable environment. I look for campus’s that are diverse, and avoid campuses I feel are not.” (18-28 year old white female)

“I think it’s great. If we are every going to live in a world without discrimination everyone has to be exposed to different ethnicities in every part of life.” (18-28 year old white female)

“It’s great! It would be boring to be taught by the same professors. We need different viewpoints, different teaching styles, and a new openness.” (18-28 year old white female).

“This is a reality – there are many cultures we all come in contact with throughout our lives. The sooner we all can learn to become culturally proficient the happier we will be.” (40+ year old white & Native American female).

“Diversity is the key to dialogue. Dialogue is the key to understanding one another and learning to live together. For me, this is the key to the future.” (40+ white female)

“The more exposure students can take with culturally diverse instructors the better. Students can get rid of fears and myths and become more open-minded.” (18-28 year old white female.)

“That would be a great opportunity. I think the more we learn about others the less ignorance and hatred. (18-28 year old Filipino Female)

56 (74%) of the 76 survey respondents who perceive a *positive value* in difference and openly engender principles that foster positive rebuilding of our communities are white. A closer look at the composition of these 56 survey participants reveals 43=n (76%) are female. This nearly parallels the proportion of female to male participants in the survey that consisted of 80% female. Approximately half (26=n, [46%]) of the 56 within this subgroup claim to have grown up in multicultural communities. The fact that the other portion (30=n, 54%) of the 56 white respondents who saw positive value in difference were from minimally diverse communities draws attention to the possibilities for positive change in our society. As previously noted with the group who expressed negative associations with diversity, though some had had exposure to diverse communities, this particular group may not have had constructive opportunity to engage in positive dialogue with people who are different than them, yet, they seek to learn and engage with others who are different. What would be of interest are the conditions that have fostered the desire to seek positive change in cross racial/ethnic relationships and how Professors of Color negotiate within the domain of the academic classroom to promote such change. This domain is further examined in the following section.

Balancing the Scales

A major theme emerging from 38 of the respondents (16% of the total survey participants) was the need for more diversity within the college community which includes not only the student body but the teaching ranks. Also expressed is the need for greater communication between ethnic groups which leans toward a desire to dissipate the *quiet hostility* that exists between racial/ethnic groups. In some cases, the responses revealed sentiments of desiring equity within domains of our society that have not been fully realized. A sampling of these responses follows along with their age and racial/ethnic identity:

“The increasing diversity within this campus community is really growing. I feel that they need to include more teachers of color in the community and the campus to address the needs of diverse students.” (40+ year old Asian American Female)

“Need more. African-Americans are still rare here.” (40+ year old White Male)

“I see it as positive, but the university should set in motion some programs to encourage positive interethnic relations.” (29-39 year old White Female)

“I hope that the campus is able to move towards a more diverse population of instructors.” (29-39 year old white female)

“I think it would be awesome.” (18-28 year old Female)

“There should be more effort in recruiting minorities for masters and Ph.D. work.” (18-28 year old African-American Female)

“Needs to be done. I am glad to see a survey such as this to address this issue. I have long felt the college community/course content has been way too dominated by white individuals/histories/theories... NOT BALANCED! Whites are just ONE group of many in America. I'd like to see more balance and education regarding other ethnic groups.” (29-39 year old white female)

“I think percentages of ethnicity should reflect those in the social population. If this is not happening, we need to look at the elements keeping this from occurring. (29-39 year old Latino)

“I think it’s about time – our communities and our work environment is diverse – why not our education? (29-39 year old Latina)

“It is not only important to increase diversity but also to provide a framework for collaboration, contact, learning, understanding.” (40+ white Male)

“California is a state of great diversity. The campus community needs to make a commitment to bringing instructors of color to our campuses. It needs to begin as students enter college and preparing them for careers as professors. Including them in research and teaching assistant positions.” (18-28 year old Mexican-American Male)

“I think it is better late than never. Especially here in Sacramento, our communities are becoming more and more diverse. Our campus should be reflective of the real world, not just a place for the privileged.” (18-28 year old Latino)

“I think it is not enough. This is a very diverse community we live in but the staff and sometimes the student population does not reflect that diversity.” (40+ white female)

Of the 38 individuals explicitly stating a desire for more diversity, 17 identified as White with 15 of these individuals claiming to have exposure to living in diverse communities. The other 21 individuals from this group represented a variety of ethnic groups including Mexican American, African American, Asian American, Native American, Latino, and one Russian Jew. 30 or 79% of this particular group claim to have been exposed to living in diverse communities. What can be determined from this pocket of respondents is not only an expectation for diversity as a standard but as a norm to be achieved. This desire cut across color lines. This section clearly illuminates a considerable population in which the participants’ consciousness calls for increased diversity and who see a *positive value* to multiple perspectives and voices that are *different* than their own. Their perspective stands in stark contrast to the survey participants on the opposite end of the scale and whose responses were noted in the first analysis section of this article.

HOW PROFESSORS OF COLOR ARE PERCEIVED IN THE CLASSROOM

Of particular interest was the response pattern for those responding to “How do you think the Professor handled the class topic? Provide specific examples...” Predominantly, students who expressed negative comments had self-identified as White while positive comments about the Professor’s capacity in the presenting the class topic was generated from all Subgroups. It is unclear as to whether students of color are overwhelmingly satisfied with the way the professor handled the class topic, if there is a sense of allegiance that precludes their expression of any dissatisfaction, or other reasons for contributing to the disparity. Examples of such responses include:

“Don’t think she did a very good job. It was never clear what she wanted and assignments changed all the time. I don’t think it had to do with her color and more to do with her inexperience.”

“...lacked the skills to teach clearly and systematically.”

“O.K. but fairly scattered at points.”

“Well, there were issues with broken English, but overall, the class topic was thoroughly handled and explained.”

“She knew her information but did not know how to teach it to the class, she had a hard time communicating her ideas.”

As noted by several of the responses, matters of language proficiency may have presented some difficulty but did not necessarily translate into questioning the credentials or qualifications of the professor. Other responses did point to the need for greater preparation and/or mentoring that would help to develop the professor’s capacity to facilitate difficult and sensitive class topics and, therefore, building his or her capacity to navigate turbulent waters inherent when venturing into controversial topics.

How the professor is perceived by his/her students has implications on the climate of the classroom. Students’ identity stage has potential to impact the ease by which controversial topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, etc...are addressed. Those students whose identities are in a lower phase of identity development may actively resist or even undermine constructive dialogue. If a student is in the Reintegration phase of their identity development in which people of color are blamed for their outcomes in society, oppositionality to constructive dialogue may impede not only their own development but the development of other students in the class. The following are examples of responses from a class in which the topic of bilingual/multicultural education was the focus. The responses are grouped to contrast and compare how students exposed to the same course content may have completely divergent reactions.

In response to, “How do you think the Professor handled the class topic?”

“I feel as though she pushed a specific agenda.”

“I sometimes feel professors of color are too cautious. Sometimes I feel that professors of color try to not offend.” (40 year old white female)

Polarity of responses ...

“I think she handled the topic well. I don’t think that whites should be made to feel guilty or be made to feel that they’re automatically biased, though.” (40 year old white female)
vs.

“She handled each subject carefully, making sure that certain students didn’t feel attacked or as if their perceptions were wrong/bad.” (18-28 year old Mexican American Female)

In response to the survey prompt, “Any other thoughts and feelings”

“Overall, I was disappointed with the class.” (40+ year old white female)

vs.

“Great class!” (40+ white & Native American female)

Students may perceive that an “agenda” is being pushed on them when the Professor is covering standardized course content yet, the nature of the “difference” brought by the Professor of Color may trigger the students’ perception that such content is subjective material emanating from the Professor. In these particular instances, the “difference” that the Professor brings elicits defensive reactions from students who need greater work in developing their awareness of multicultural issues and/or the professor needs to develop his or her capacity to work with student’s identity development stages.

In contrast to the first quote provided as an example in this section, another student from the same class stated,

“She did a good job, but didn’t reach all the students. Sometimes I think she could have challenged biased students more, but I’m sure some of them wouldn’t have responded anyway.”

“She handled each subject carefully, making sure that certain students didn’t feel attacked or as if their perceptions were wrong/bad.”

Other examples of students who responded at two ends of the continuum but who were in the same class include,

In response to, “Any other thoughts or feelings.”

“I’m glad to take part in this survey.” (29-39 Year Old White Male)

vs.

“Kind of a silly survey.” (29-39 Year old White Male)

“I took offense to this survey and answered only those questions I was comfortable with. Good luck.” (29-39 year old White Male)

vs.

“Nice survey... I bet you get some interesting feedback!” (40+ year old white male)

Again, this points to the polarity of responses and reactions that students may have within the class. Determinants contributing to the range may include the identity development stage of the student, the “difference” carried by the instructor and whether or not this “difference” holds negative or positive connotation for the student, and, of course the capacity of the professor to facilitate through the perceptions held by students wherever their stage of development may fall. These and other factors color the climate of the classroom, therefore, placing tremendous responsibility on the professor to not only understand where his or students are in their identity development stage but also to possess and utilize the skills by which to successfully navigate in the classroom domain.

A professor’s effectiveness in handling issues of diversity may serve to impede the progress of students in their own identity development or move them toward greater awareness and self efficacy. The following examples were volunteered by two participants as examples of ineffective teaching related to the topic of diversity:

“One time I had an African American teacher in junior college who was teaching African American history. She began to cry in class and accused my friend and I of contributing to racism. We were the only two non-AA students in class. This was an isolated incident.”

“I had a Native American teacher that taught Ethnic 100. All he based the class on was his background & culture not of any other ethnic groups. I didn’t learn well in that class.”

With the rare opportunity for students to enter into constructive dialogue about issues and topics of diversity, these two examples point to missed opportunities for

community reconstruction. Having now examined student perceptions of professors of color, we now consider how professors navigate in this environment.

WHAT DO PROFESSORS OF COLOR DO TO OFFSET ANY NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS? IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

In responding to, “How do you think the Professor handled the class topic? Provide specific examples” there were students who identified how the experience of *difference* brought by the instructor even in regards to sensitive issues such as race and diversity were enhanced by the professor’s personal qualities and ability to share within the context of the course.

In striking a delicate balance of student perception and student receptivity, the professor of color teaching sensitive issues must overcome student biases in the classroom. For example, already noted are those who perceive an “agenda” being pushed upon them. In these cases, any movement toward the positive end of the continuum on the identity development scale may be impeded unless the professor utilizes pedagogical approaches that foster non-confrontational growth. On the other hand, students of color may also have their own perceptions about what professors of color should be addressing and how these issues should be addressed. For example, the following statement,

“I think it is very important because people often don’t realize their biases until they are confronted.” (29-39 year old African-American female)

This response conveys an expectation that Professors of Color take a confrontational stance. If students of color expect their professors to use their position of authority in such a manner then these students may be disappointed when the professor does not meet their expectations. In all, this places the professor in a delicate tightrope where a multitude of factors including student perceptions and professor capacity may impede or promote the principles of Community Reconstruction.

In a democratic society that promotes shared responsibility for furthering the principles of community reconstruction, who actually commits to and expends the effort on promoting social justice? In examining the role of professors of color at the University level to what extent should they assume responsibility for rectifying the inequities within our society? Assuming shared responsibility, the qualities that a professor of color brings along with the confidence and pedagogical strategies to address such issues will only develop students’ capacity to move along the continuum of identity development to a place where students of all backgrounds can assume responsibility for social justice efforts. This is expressed by the following statement,

“We need instructors of color to help educate the issues behind racism, oppression, and they help provide diversity. Having these professors helps us break away from traditional Euro teachings and education. (18-28 white female)

The following responses convey the capacity of several professors whose difference not only enhanced the learning environment but coupled with a variety of pedagogical strategies, were able to effectively manage the racial tightrope while promoting growth.

“...provided personal experience that provided a look at different cultures I had not experienced.”

“...draw lectures from their diverse experiences, making classes a little more interesting.”

“I had an African American professor in a race and ethnicity course. He was a good professor not because of his race but it did help that he had experienced some issues of racism. He could give us his point of view.”

“She was pragmatic. We’ll be counseling many ethnicities so we need to learn to provide for their needs in appropriate ways, as the instructor showed us.”

“Let us express our views. Talked openly about all cultures.”

“She handled the topic carefully and thoroughly, giving lots of varied experiential opportunities to discover the material – field trips, praxis, fish bowl, personal sharing.”

“I feel the professor handled the class topic in a very professional, culturally sensitive and informative manner. I never felt offended by her discussions. Instead, I felt very enlightened.”

“...creates more empathy with different cultures to have them personally represented by an instructor.”

Additionally, numerous responses indicated what Professors DO within the classroom that promotes their credibility and mastery of the topic. These responses include descriptors such as,

“She tapped into all of our senses with speakers and field trips.”

“A combination of lecture, class discussion and videos provided a comprehensive course study.”

“Highly structured, yet empathetic to our needs. Superior guest speakers and excellent feedback.”

“She knew all the material and was prepared for class everyday. For example: everyday she would write the daily schedule on the board so we knew exactly what we would be covering.”

Results/Conclusions/Point of View

As professors of color step into the college classroom, they enter a domain representing a frontier in which deeply imbedded student perspectives manifest themselves in the very nature of the human dynamic between professor and student. From the sampling of College of Education students who participated in this survey, it is apparent that the topic of diversity and all its’ inherent meaning still plays on the psyche of our communities. The capacity of the Professor to successfully navigate through this domain can impact not only student learning but also the Professor’s experience within his or her chosen career.

Evident from the responses were several major themes. First of all, a significant number of participants calling for greater diversity and more meaningful interaction between diverse groups within our society desire improved inter group relations. These individuals also call for greater diversity within our academic communities while acknowledging that the experiential nature will improve their own capacity to effectively serve members of a pluralistic society. When the “difference” of race is perceived positively by the students, then an emic perspective to teaching is not only valued by the students but desired.

On the other end of the spectrum are a minority of students who resist the topic of diversity. These individuals perceive the topic and perhaps anything related through a negative lens. The responses from these individuals as solicited through the survey portray a subgroup whose identity development requires careful guidance. This leads to the final conclusion which points to the capacity of the Professor to navigate through student perceptions of “difference.”

In the final analysis of student perceptions, we conclude that key strategies in use by Professors enable them to transcend any hostility that might be directed to them. Rather than perceivably making their own “difference” as the impetus for the topic, the utilization of teaching strategies that promote identity development within a safe environment has implications for successful integration of Community Reconstruction. Though criticism due to other variables such as language fluency, accent, etc... may be accorded disproportionately to Professors of Color, there are also other impediments to effective teaching that can be remedied by proper mentoring.

Finally, as we examine this frontier of Professors of Color in the college classroom, we must highlight the implications for promoting social justice principles. To ensure longevity of these individuals within this profession, we have uncovered various elements of the classroom domain that Professors must learn to successfully navigate. This includes an understanding of the students’ identity stage and the extent to which institutions are working to ensure that Professors are prepared to enter this domain with the necessary skill level and support to navigate through the potential challenges. In the end, the gains that our society makes in deconstructing racial inequities means supporting efforts that improve the dynamic taking place between the interface of those Professors of Color who gain access to this domain, and the students who they are charged with teaching.

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