

## **Improving Institutional Commitment for the Success of Academic Women of Color Through Focused Conferences**

### **Dr. Nicole N. Aljoe, Northeastern University**

Nicole N. Aljoe, is an Associate Professor of English and African American Studies and Undergraduate Program Director in the Department of English at Northeastern University. She holds a Ph.D. from Tufts University, M.A. from the University Vermont, and B.A. in art history from Vassar College. She is co-director of the Early Caribbean Digital Archive at NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks, and editor of *Caribbeana: The Journal of the Early Caribbean Society*. Her research focuses on 18th- and 19th-century Black Atlantic and Caribbean literature with a specialization on the slave narrative. She teaches in these areas as well as offers courses on the 18th- century British Novel and Contemporary Postcolonial Literature. She has published essays and chapters in the *Journal of Early American Literature*, *African American Review*, *Anthurium*, the *Oxford Companion to African American Slave Narratives*, and *Teaching Anglophone Caribbean Literature*. She is the author of *Creole Testimonies: Slave Narratives from the British West Indies, 1709-1836* (Palgrave 2012) and co-editor of *Journeys of the Slave Narrative in the Early Americas* (UVA Press, 11/2014) and *A Literary History of the Early Anglophone Caribbean: Islands in the Stream* (Palgrave/Spring, 2018 forthcoming). Currently, she is at work on two new projects: one that examines the relationships between narratives of black lives and the rise of the novel in Europe in the 18th century, and another project examining the aesthetic translations of the neo-slave narrative genre within contemporary Caribbean cultural production.

### **Dr. Stacy Blake-Beard, Simmons College**

Stacy Blake-Beard is the Deloitte Ellen Gabriel Professor of Women and Leadership at Simmons College's School of Business, where she teaches organizational behavior. She is also Faculty Affiliate at the Center for Gender in Organizations at Simmons. Prior to joining Simmons, Dr. Blake-Beard was a faculty member at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Dr. Blake-Beard has also served as Visiting Faculty at the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad, India, for eight years and is currently Visiting Faculty with the Vedica Scholars Programme for Women in Delhi, India. She has worked in sales and marketing at Procter & Gamble and in the corporate human resources department at Xerox. Dr. Blake-Beard holds a B.S. in Psychology from the University of Maryland, College Park and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Organizational Psychology from the University of Michigan.

Dr. Blake-Beard's research focuses on the challenges and opportunities offered by mentoring relationships, with a focus on how these relationships may be changing as a result of increasing workforce diversity. She is particularly interested in the issues women face as they develop mentoring relationships. She also studies the dynamics of formal mentoring programs in both corporate and educational settings. Dr. Blake-Beard's knowledge and expertise on mentoring can be seen in her TEDx talk on mentoring (*The Power of Mentoring as a Transformational Process - TEDxUrsulineCollege*) and in her collaboration with Stanford University's Clayman Institute for Gender (*Mentoring: Creating Mutually Empowering Relationships*).

Dr. Blake-Beard has published research on gender, diversity, and mentoring in several publications, including the *Journal of Career Development*, the *Academy of Management Executive*, the *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *Journal of Management Development*, the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Human Resource Management Journal*, and *The Diversity Factor*. Dr. Blake-Beard is co-editor of a volume focused on women's careers (*Handbook of Research on Promoting Women's Careers*) and a 2017 volume on mentoring (*Mentoring Diverse Leaders: Changing People, Processes and Paradigms*). She received a 2010-2011 Fulbright Award to support her project entitled "Systems of Sustenance and Support: Exploring the Impact of Mentoring on the Career Experiences of Indian Women," in partnership with the Center for Leadership, Innovation and Change at the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad, India.

The recipient of numerous grants, Dr. Blake-Beard has been affiliated with the advisory board of a number of organizations, including MentorNet, Teen Voices, the Harvard Project on Tenure, and the Harvard Medical School Center for the Study of Diversity in Science.

### **Dr. Michele C. Deramo, Virginia Tech**

Michele Deramo is Assistant Provost for Diversity Education in the Office for Inclusion and Diversity. She coordinates the Faculty Women of Color in the Academy conference held annually in Blacksburg, Va. She has over 25 years experience in higher education administration in the areas of civic engagement, diversity development, and inclusive pedagogy. Dr. Deramo is an autoethnographer whose work focuses on narrative identity in diaspora.

### **Dr. Barbara J. Guthrie, Northeastern University**

Dr. Guthrie received her B.S. in nursing from Boston University, her M.S. in Nursing in Family Health from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, and her Ph.D. from the New York University School of Nursing. Prior to arriving at Northeastern University, she was a tenured Associate Professor of Nursing and Women Studies and Program Director for Undergraduate Nursing Education at the University of Michigan. She left University of Michigan to take the position of Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the Yale University School of Nursing (YSN) and the Independence Foundation Professor for Nursing. Currently, she is a tenured Professor of Nursing and Associate Dean for Graduate Education at Northeastern University's Bouve College of Health Sciences.

Dr. Guthrie's long history of collaborative research efforts with ethnically diverse adolescent females within and outside of the juvenile justice system has led to her receiving funding from The National Institute of Drug Abuse, National Cancer Institute (NCI), and National Institute for Nursing Research. She has been the Co-PI for a T32 grant, titled "NIH Women's Health Disparities: Interdisciplinary Training." She has completed a three-year summer program funded by the Josiah Macy foundation for the Josiah Macy Yale-Howard undergraduate interdisciplinary research-intensive summer program. These students participated in academic enrichment seminars, shadowed primary care nurse practitioners, psychologists, and physicians, and actively engaged in health equity-related research with Yale investigators. During the tenure of this grant, 25 undergraduates from Howard University successfully completed this program, and 21 of those students continued their education to complete master's degrees. Dr. Guthrie has received over \$1.3 million from NIMH to implement an R25 interdisciplinary HIV/AIDS postdoctoral and junior faculty summer program. This grant provided her the ability to become the primary mentor for over 15 mentees and secondary mentor for 9 mentees from underrepresented populations. The REIDS program has been refunded for another five years. In addition, she is currently the PI for a National Institute of Nursing-funded P20 grant, which focuses on increasing the number of nurse scientists who focus on a community-based, participatory approach to understanding self-management among urban populations of ethnically diverse elders. The interweaving theme across Dr. Guthrie's research, teaching, and scholarship is her efforts to increase diversity and to promote health equity within underserved and disparate populations. She has consistently utilized an interdisciplinary perspective, which is most evident by her being PI/Co-PI on several research and educational research endeavors that focus on promoting health equity for all, irrespective of race, gender, age, educational attainment, social position, and/or history of incarceration. Dr. Guthrie's past research efforts coupled with her current projects enable her to continue to address the health disparities that communities of color experience generally and women and girls experience more specifically.

### **Kathleen Kenney, Northeastern University**

Kathleen holds a master of public administration degree from the Northeastern University School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs and a bachelor's degree in political science from Boston College. Kathleen worked for five years as the assistant director of Northeastern's ADVANCE Office of Faculty Development and now serves as the manager of human resources and faculty affairs in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities at Northeastern University. Kathleen is pursuing a doctorate in education, concentrating in organizational leadership studies and focuses her research on career development.

### **Dr. Carol B. Muller, Stanford University**

Carol B. Muller is the Executive Director of WISE Ventures, an internal initiative at Stanford, designed to communicate, build networks, and help seed new and needed ventures across the Stanford campus to advance gender equity in science and engineering. She also directs Stanford's Faculty Women's Forum. A longtime university administrator, educator, and social entrepreneur, her past experience includes service as Associate Dean for the Thayer School of Engineering at Dartmouth College, where she co-founded the campus-wide Women in Science Project. She founded and was chief executive of MentorNet, a large-scale online nonprofit global mentoring network advancing diversity in engineering and science (1996-2008). At Stanford, she was consulting associate professor of mechanical engineering between 1998 and 2002, collaborating with faculty and staff to create "New Century Scholars: Teaching, Learning, and Your Academic Career," a summer workshop designed for new engineering faculty members. A Fellow of the Association for Women in Science, Dr. Muller and her work have been recognized with other national awards, including the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring, and the Anita Borg Social Impact Award. She has authored and presented numerous papers, presentations, and workshops. She earned a bachelor's degree from Dartmouth in philosophy, master's and Ph.D. degrees in education administration and policy analysis from Stanford, and continues to build upon research in the design and implementation of programs.

**Ms. Jan Rinehart, Northeastern University**

Jan Rinehart is Executive Director of the Northeastern ADVANCE Office of Faculty Development. She has over 20 years in higher education, with most of her work focused on diversity in STEM fields. She previously served as Executive Director of the Rice University ADVANCE and Director of Engineering Student Programs at Texas A&M University. While at Texas A&M, she was co-PI on NSF RET, S-STEM, STEP grants, and senior personnel on the NSF Coalition and LSAMP grant. She sits on several ADVANCE External Advisory Boards.

**Dr. Rania Sanford, Stanford University**

Rania Sanford is Assistant Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity at Stanford University. She has been responsible for launching Stanford's portfolio of professional and leadership development programs for junior and mid-career faculty since 2013. In her role, she also advises search committees on recruitment, and acts as advocate and coach for faculty, deans, and chairs. She has been working closely with postdocs, faculty, and students at Stanford for more than two decades and is a recipient of the Stanford University Postdoctoral Association Recognition Award (2013). Her research collaboration with Amy Kinch at the University of Montana explores the future of faculty needs and demands within a competency framework across institutions in the United States - work that she published and presented at the PODNetwork and at the Association of American Colleges and Universities. She is a founding member of the Northern California Chapter of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, and the Stanford Markaz: Resource Center for Engagement with the Cultures and Peoples of the Muslim World. She has a B.A. in journalism and M.A. in communication, with emphasis on intercultural communication, an Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership, and is an MBTI Certified Practitioner®.

**Dr. Shawna Vican, University of Delaware**

Shawna Vican is the Director of the UD ADVANCE Institute and holds a secondary appointment as an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice at the University of Delaware. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology from Harvard University. An organizational sociologist, Dr. Vican investigates the adoption and implementation of new employment practices and corporate social behaviors. Across her research, Dr. Vican explores how organizational policies and practices, managerial behavior, and workplace culture shape individual career outcomes as well as broader patterns of labor market inequality. Her current research includes a qualitative study of corporate diversity management strategies and a series of mixed-methods projects on diversity in the academic workforce.

# **Improving Institutional Commitment for the Success of Academic Women of Color Through Focused Conferences**

## **Abstract**

The underrepresentation of women of color in faculty positions in the U.S has presented a longstanding challenge for most universities that desire the benefits of faculty diversity for equity and excellence, student learning, and ongoing knowledge and technology development. Lower status and fewer opportunities for women who are also members of a racial/ethnic minority group lead to their experiencing a “double bind,” with increased consequences for the survival and success of women of color in the academic profession [1], [2]. Women of color in the disciplines of science, mathematics, and engineering are even more scarce and isolated than those in many humanities and social science fields [3].

To improve this situation, some universities have in recent years developed, implemented, hosted, and learned from professional development conferences or workshops engaging academic women of color, and focused on understanding and responding to their needs. This paper describes four such programs, challenges in conceptualizing and implementing their strategies, and frames a discussion about how and why such initiatives offer important elements in the development, advancement, and success of faculty of color and institutional excellence.

## **Introduction**

Underrepresentation of women faculty of color in universities across the nation is persistent and very slow to change. In 2015, nearly half a century after civil rights activism and legislation to support equal opportunity, coupled with affirmation action to diversify employment, among full professors in the U.S., 56% were White men, 27% White women, and 7% Asian/Pacific Islander men, while every other ethnic/sex group comprised 2% or less of the population (Asian/Pacific Islander women, Black men, Black women, Hispanic men, Hispanic women, Native American men, Native American women) [4]. Universities have experimented with different strategies and considerable investment from federal agencies to diversify faculties. There has been some incremental increase at the level of assistant professors where overall percentages in the U.S. include 36% White men, 39% White women, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander men, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander women, 3% Black men, 4% Black women, 2% Hispanic men, and 3% Hispanic women [4]. In science, engineering, and mathematics disciplines, this persistent underrepresentation is more dramatic than in some of the humanities and social sciences, but none of the disciplines have reached parity with the representation of people of color in the population of the U.S. or even commensurate with PhD degrees granted. NACME [5] estimates that by 2050, no one race/ethnic category will be a majority in the U.S. Universities increasingly recognize that diverse perspectives and experiences, academic interests, and cognitive styles add to the intellectual richness of the university and increase creativity [6].

Numerous research studies explore the reasons why women faculty of color do not progress as readily as their male or White counterparts through an academic career [7]-[13]. These experiences need to be addressed by universities to enable their faculty to succeed. Gaps at every

career juncture exist for all women, but for women of color create a double bind [1], [2]. Numerous programs have been undertaken to mitigate the effects of implicit bias in faculty search evaluations [14] and in tenure and promotion processes [15], [16]. Even when women of color are successfully hired, they face additional hurdles at each career stage, with losses from tenure rates [7], [11], and [12], at the stage of promotion to full professor [7], [12], and with advancement to academic leadership roles [7], [13]. Through campus climate surveys [17], [18], faculty of color report feeling isolated in their departments, finding mentoring relationships more difficult to identify, and experiencing more difficulty in obtaining useful feedback. Over time, these numerous inequities compound into an accumulation of disadvantage [7]-[13] and [19].

The increased hurdles for survival and success in the academic profession in Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) faced by women of color lead to isolation and loneliness, the hazards and challenges of chronic distinctiveness and hypervisibility, and uncertainty about the extent to which evaluative feedback may be biased based on race and/or gender [20]. Racism-based trauma may also add to negative effects impacting the physical and psychological health of academic women of color [21].

Despite these extensive challenges (or maybe because of them), many women of color are innovative agents in navigating, persisting, and cultivating success in their academic careers [22]. In a study focused on such agency [22], these individual strategies were identified: 1) choosing to work and learn in safe, welcoming places, 2) participating in diversity conferences, 3) building alternative academic and professional networks, 4) engaging with communities and in activities beyond disciplinary and professional realms, and 5) actively working to change the status quo toward greater inclusion. Evidence of institutional awareness and systemic change also make a difference in the well-being of academic women of color [22].

Conferences focused on academic women of color address all of these strategies, and represent an experiment in creating ways to address isolation, loneliness, and identifying ways to address the challenges of simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility [23].

Universities also benefit when their leaders and other actors deepen their understanding of the nature of the experiences of underrepresented women. Such institutional learning develops more empathetic advocates and allies, and enables more effective design of interventions to counter the negative effects of the experiences that women of color encounter in academic work. Such learning and design then contribute to developing appropriate and relevant solutions towards systemic change in practice and culture, strengthening relationships inside and outside the institution with scholars and intentionally providing a welcoming space to support the careers of diverse women faculty. Furthermore, women of color on the faculty are often the proverbial "canaries in the coalmine" in that conditions that are challenging for them may signal issues also facing other groups (e.g. students, postdoctoral scholars, staff) in academic settings. Changes that improve conditions for women of color may make the academic setting more welcoming and supportive for other groups as well [24].

While women faculty of color are working individually and with allies, where they can find them, to change their institution's policies and practices, they are also seeking out mentors [10], [12], and [23]-[27], and networks of mentors [11], [12], [19] to provide strategies and support as

they move through their academic lives. This paper provides four examples of conferences developed by universities as an avenue to build communities for women of color who are current or prospective faculty members. Goals, strategies, outcomes, and lessons learned from each of the conferences are described. The strategies reflect the varying cultures of the institutions and individuals involved in developing them. The paper concludes with a summary of actions these universities are taking forward to continue to build communities and networks for current and prospective women faculty members of color, and ways in which others may join them to benefit both individual academic women of color and higher education more broadly.

## Case Studies

### **Case Study 1: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) (<http://www.cpe.vt.edu/fwca/>)**

The inaugural *Faculty Women of Color in the Academy (FWCA) Conference* occurred in April 2013, hosted by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The purpose of the conference was to convene women of color in faculty positions to network, engage, and learn with peers from around the country. In subsequent years, the conference expanded its audience to include university administrators, graduate students, post-docs, and undergraduates. The conference tag line is "Connect. Support. Empower."

Over the years, the conference has hosted prominent women of color scholars as keynote speakers, panelists, and workshop facilitators. Notable keynote speakers include: Anita Hill, Professor of Social Policy, Law, and Women's Studies in the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University; Kerry Ann Rockquemore, President and CEO of the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity; Melissa Harris-Perry, the Maya Angelou Presidential Chair at Wake Forest University; and Nikki Giovanni, poet and University Distinguished Professor at Virginia Tech. Conference sessions covered topics related to career advancement, publishing, mentoring, pathways to leadership, building coalitions, and fostering well-being. Approximately 300 women attended the first conference, with participant numbers growing incrementally each year.

In 2016 Dr. Menah Pratt Clarke, one of the founders of the FWCA conference, assumed the position of Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Vice Provost for Inclusion and Diversity at Virginia Tech. With her move, the FWCA conference transitioned to Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. The sixth annual FWCA Conference is planned for April 5-6, 2018. Conference highlights include keynote speakers Maria Hinojosa, Senior Correspondent for the Emmy Award-winning broadcast news magazine NOW on PBS. Hinojosa is also the anchor and managing editor of NPR's "Latino USA," and Brittney Cooper, Associate Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Africana Studies at Rutgers University and co-founder of the popular Crunk Feminist Collective. Also planned are a President's Panel, workshops by the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity, a Multicultural Career and Graduate School Expo, and a post-conference writing retreat offered by Inkwell Academic Writing Retreats. We anticipate having up to 500 women enroll in the 2018 event.

The FWCA conference has proven to be both professionally useful, as well as personally enriching insofar as it created a space for women of color to share their common concerns and

find support from one another. Evidence of the remarkable impact of the conference on the women attending is apparent in these testimonial comments:

*"It was uplifting, encouraging and energizing to find myself for once in a room full of highly educated women who looked like me and through whose different experiences and stories about struggling and making it despite all odds in academia mirrored my own."*

*"A very productive conference as it offered practical advice how to overcome academic challenges."*

Clearly, the FWCA conference is meeting a need among women of color in the academy. However, we continue to develop the conference. One challenge we face is keeping conference costs affordable for participants, especially those from smaller institutions and minority-serving institutions where professional development funds may be limited. In order to provide a high quality conference at an affordable price, we seek both corporate and university sponsors to supplement direct costs. One strategy for attracting sponsors is the Multicultural Career and Graduate School Expo that gives corporate representatives direct contact with undergraduates. In 2017, Deloitte joined as a sponsor and in return sent a recruiter who staffed a table at the Expo as well as offered a mini-workshop on resume development. Similarly, university sponsors receive up to six complimentary registrations and have a seat on the conference planning committee.

Another challenge we face is planning a conference that appeals to all women of color. One critique we have heard is from Latina and Asian women who say that the conference seems geared to Black women. We are addressing this critique by broadening our outreach and intentionally inviting women from Latina, Asian, and Indigenous communities to participate in positions of higher visibility such as keynote speakers and on the President's Panel.

**Case Study 2: University of Delaware** (<http://sites.udel.edu/advance/conference/>)

The University of Delaware (UD)'s ADVANCE Institute organized and hosted the *Women of Color in the Academy: What's Next?* conference April 29-May 1, 2016. The conference was a programmatic element of the NSF ADVANCE-IT grant proposal, supporting the broader objective of drawing attention to actions and discussion of diversity on campus. Designed as a national conference, the intended audience included women of color faculty, post-doctoral fellows, and graduate students, higher education administrators, and diversity researchers. Given that existing conferences targeted either social scientists conducting research on diversity in higher education or women of color faculty within specific academic fields, this conference was designed to bring these two populations together to share research findings and lived experiences within academia.

The UD ADVANCE leadership team began conference planning in Fall 2014 by meeting with campus administrators involved in diversity efforts, securing co-chairs for the conference committee, and selecting a date and venue. The conference committee was made up of faculty from across the university, representing a range of disciplines and ranks. This group met regularly to develop conference themes, identify keynote speakers, and draft the call for proposals. The UD ADVANCE team oversaw this effort, while also securing institutional

support for the conference from the President and Provost, Vice Provost for Diversity, Philosophy Department, and Center for the Study of Diversity (CSD).

As conference planning progressed, the conference committee chose to keep the goals of the conference quite broad, hoping the conference would provide diversity researchers, particularly those with a focus on women faculty of color, a venue both to network and to identify potential research subjects. Conference organizers also wanted to encourage the development of scholarship on the participation of women of color in the academy which would incorporate lived experiences and insight from this population of women, they sought to seed interdisciplinary research and support networks among attendees, and to inform administrators of evidence-based best practices to address the underrepresentation of women faculty of color in academia.

UD ADVANCE and the conference committee disseminated a call for conference submissions in summer 2015 and spent much of the fall semester drafting the conference program. Given the goals of the conference, the conference schedule was designed to include multiple types of sessions and varied topics including: 1) keynote addresses on subjects such as best practices in faculty mentoring; 2) moderated panel discussions on lived experiences of faculty women of color, including “surviving and thriving” strategies; 3) sessions on diversity research; 4) hands-on workshops focused on career development strategies; and 5) a screening of the documentary “Living Thinkers: An Autobiography of Black Women in the Ivory Tower” followed by a Q&A session with the filmmaker. The conference was also designed to encourage networking and included a poster session, a breakout session where small groups brainstormed solutions to career problems, and an evening networking reception.

The conference drew 181 attendees from more than 50 institutions across the US, including university faculty, administrators, post-doctoral fellows, and graduate students. While most participants were from within the academy, the conference also attracted individuals from government, professional societies, research labs, and private companies.

The UD ADVANCE internal evaluator surveyed conference participants and found very positive ratings. Ninety-five percent of respondents indicated they had made connections with other participants with whom they will maintain contact, suggesting the conference was successful in seeding professional networks for faculty women of color. A large majority of conference attendees agreed that the conference included information that was personally relevant, featured knowledgeable presenters, and included a good mix of engaging topics. More than three quarters of respondents reported they learned new strategies for professional growth and that their goals for attending the conference had been fully met.

In addition to serving the needs of participants, the conference was valuable to the UD community. While this was a national conference, there was strong representation from UD with more than 25 women of color faculty, staff, and students in attendance. Many campus administrators also participated in one or more conference events. The campus online news, *UDaily*, featured a three-part story on the conference, drawing attention to the experiences of women of color in the academy. To further disseminate conference materials, the UD ADVANCE team created a website with resources such as videos of the keynote presentation



slides from research presentations, the *UDaily* articles, and documents summarizing the conference and main takeaways.

The UD ADVANCE leadership team learned a great deal during the process of developing and implementing the conference. One very successful component of the conference was financial support from the Vice Provost for Diversity and the Philosophy Department specifically earmarked for conference scholarships. This support allowed UD ADVANCE to offer scholarships to 30 individuals to help offset the cost of attendance and made for a more inclusive conference. These scholarships were particularly important for graduate students who might otherwise not have been able to attend.

Recommendations for institutions considering similar conferences include carefully budgeting for the time and administrative support needed to host a conference and developing strategies to engage key campus administrators in the conference. While the conference committee took a leadership role in developing conference themes, the core UD ADVANCE team largely did the conference planning and administration. This required nearly full-time efforts on the part of the UD ADVANCE Director and Administrative Assistant over the course of the semester. While UD administrators offered generous financial support for the conference and attended several of the keynote addresses, they were largely absent from other conference sessions such as panel discussions on lived experiences of faculty women of color. Having UD administrators participate in these types of sessions would have been beneficial, particularly to ongoing university efforts to recruit, retain, and promote women of color on campus.

A final takeaway from the conference was the importance of engaging with other campus stakeholders to institutionalize post-conference events and activities. Rather than planning for UD ADVANCE sponsored conference follow-up, the team envisioned the conference would serve as a catalyst for future campus action and encourage the UD administration to continue the important work of the conference. In that vein, UD offered a second screening of “Living Thinkers” followed by a panel discussion by UD faculty and moderated by one of the conference co-chairs. Another proposed follow-up, a yearly campus event to highlight the work of women of color in the academy, would be initiated at UD and ideally spread via conference participants to their home institutions.

### **Case Study 3: Northeastern University (<https://web.northeastern.edu/woc/>)**

The 2017 Northeastern University Boston-Wide *Women of Color in the Academy: Building Strategies for Career Advancement – The Time is Now* was conceptualized and co-chaired by two women faculty of color: Nicole N. Aljoe, Associate Professor of English and African American Studies and Undergraduate Program Director in the Department of English and Barbara Guthrie, Professor of Nursing and Associate Dean of Graduate Studies in the College of Health Sciences. They assembled a Planning Committee composed of faculty and staff representing the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, ADVANCE Office of Faculty Development, Community Affairs, the Bouve College of Health Sciences, and the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. The conference was sponsored by each of the nine university college deans; Northeastern’s Program in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; Northeastern’s Program in Urban Health Research and Practice; Tufts University Office of Diversity and Inclusion; Boston University ARROWS Program (Advance, Recruit, Retain & Organize Women

in STEM); HERC (Higher Education Recruitment Consortium); the Consortium for Graduate Studies in Gender, Culture, Women, and Sexuality.

The goals of the conference were twofold: to address barriers related to career progression to tenure, promotion, and/or to administrative positions within the academy and to share strategies to enhance timely career progression. The workshop topics and keynote speakers were asked to address three inter-related themes of: 1) maintaining personal health and creating personal agency; 2) navigating institutional structures; and 3) developing tools and strategies for career advancement. Registrants received a set of questions before the conference and a Career Action Plan template was available in the conference book. The conference was designed for individuals to leave with clearly articulated goals and strategies for immediate support.

There was considerable interest in the conference with 156 registrants. The largest ethnic group of survey responders were African Americans at 57%, followed by 29% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 5% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Native/Alaskan/Hawaiian Native, and 5% two or more races. Participants represented 23 different universities. Assistant professors were the largest group of participants (38%), followed by graduate students (23%), associate professors (2%), and full professors (6%).

On a participant survey, respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the experience with 100% reporting they would participate again.

Participants reported there were three things that most resonated with them from the conference:

- the connection and networking with other women of color in academic positions;
- the very hands-on real strategies and tools provided to enhance their academic careers;
- a sense of community - they were inspired and uplifted by hearing and sharing stories with other women of color faculty.

Responses to “why did you come to the conference”:

- 88% reported wanting to develop new collegial relationships with other women of color
- 77% reported wanting to develop new mentoring pathways
- 63% reported wanting to build more self-efficacy
- 58% reported wanting to develop new understandings of careers in higher education
- 50% reported wanting to better understand how to mitigate implicit biases

Participants reported their practices would change as a result of attending the conference. The practices most mentioned were mentoring better and seeking more mentoring; refocusing on their academic career; and building an intentional network of peers.

*“I will be more intentional about developing my scholarly identity and learning how to articulate it well and align my research and service.”*

*“I have identified new mentors both inside and outside of my institutions. I have developed a plan for this year and the next five years that will help me achieve my goals and stay focused.”*

Participants were asked what was one thing they would like their university to do to improve the climate/culture for faculty women of color. There were five areas suggested: 1) encourage, provide space for, and support the building of community for women of color which includes mentoring; 2) on a regular basis meet with and listen to the women of color and consider them partners in the university; 3) hire more women of color; 4) protect their time through less service; and 5) provide trainings on implicit bias, racist/sexist/heterosexist actions.

This very positive experience has generated the creation of a Boston-wide Women of Color Advisory Committee. The committee is composed of faculty and staff from eight local universities: Boston University, Brandeis University, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, MIT, Northeastern University, Tufts University, University of Massachusetts Boston, and Wellesley College. The committee meets monthly to plan on-going initiatives and facilitate networking connections. The initiatives include a second annual conference, quarterly soirees/gatherings, and an online space to connect women faculty of color.

#### **Case Study 4: Stanford University and Simmons College School of Management**

<https://facultydevelopment.stanford.edu/programs/women-color-academy-staying-fit-mind-body-and-soul>

In March 2017, *Women of Color in the Academy – Staying Fit: Mind, Body, and Soul* conference featured a variety of interactive sessions designed to develop skills, strategies, and knowledge for building successful academic careers as well as opportunities for informal networking. The idea was initiated in fall 2016 by two faculty development staff professionals, who started the process in conversations with pre-tenure faculty of color on the Stanford University campus. The co-chairs recruited a team of diverse senior women faculty of color as advisors as well as Stacy Blake-Beard, an external co-chair from Simmons College School of Management and the northeast-based Center for Gender in Organizations. Dr. Blake-Beard was also a speaker at the Northeastern University Women of Color in the Academy conference discussed in Case Study 3. In doing so, the Stanford co-chairs were able to deepen our ideation about the conference, test ideas with a knowledgeable and experienced academic woman of color not already a part of Stanford University, extend networks for outreach, and have a check on the "groupthink" and assumptions that can arise from limiting planners to those working within the same institutional culture. The three co-chairs comprised a multicultural team that brought experience from different vantage points in the academic sphere – faculty and staff – and their diversity added strength to the planning process.

The conference aimed to boost resilience, extend networks, and leverage scholarly and professional development resources at Stanford, while providing an opportunity for campus faculty members and leaders to learn about and from the participants, and to engage productively in conversations to inform institutional aspirations to recruit a diverse professoriate. The conference brought together women early in their academic careers – pre-tenure faculty members, postdoctoral scholars, and advanced PhD students – for a conference of professional

development, meetings, and networking. The conference objectives were to: 1) promote practices for the success of academic women of color; 2) provide research-based findings and practical skills to advance individual capacity to appreciate challenges and opportunities that face academic women of color; 3) cultivate participant self-awareness and skill-building within a supportive and safe space for dialogue and discussion; 4) expand participant and institutional faculty networks, and learn from colleagues – peers, near-peers, advisors from our university and other institutions; and 5) support opportunities to develop and implement action plans for academic career success.

Stanford covered all conference expenses through special funding from the Provost that allowed for 50 participants (2/3 of whom would be from outside Stanford). A call for applications yielded 965 individuals from across the U.S. (affiliation with a U.S.-based university was required). Applicants represented broad definitions of diversity across gender identity, immigrant status, socioeconomic status, parental status, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, national origin, and career paths, among others. The profiles of applicants and their responses to the applicant question about their backgrounds illustrated the salience of intersectionality in their experiences as aspiring women in the academy. Our criteria for selecting participants were focused on: 1) the applicant's desire to pursue an academic career; 2) creating a diverse group of participants based on self-described identity, career stage, discipline, geographic location, and current institutional affiliation; 3) the anticipated value of the workshop for the participant; and 4) the anticipated benefit for others as a result of the applicant's participation. The large number of applicants, coupled with qualitative criteria for selection, made the selection process a considerable task.

Conference participants were 22 early career faculty members, 19 advanced doctoral students, and 9 postdoctoral scholars. They were scientists and scholars from astrophysics, chemistry (biochemistry and analytical chemistry), environmental engineering, forestry and conservation, geology, bioengineering, civil engineering, materials engineering, computer science, clinical psychology, biology, classics, education, ethnic studies, American studies, Latin American studies, history, law, linguistics, political science, sociology, psychology, and feminist studies. Thirteen participants came from Stanford University while 37 came from public and private institutions, liberal arts as well as research-intensive and teaching-intensive institutions across the United States.

The conference featured 20 faculty presenters in 19 sessions, women and men, from Stanford, University of California-Santa Barbara, University of California-Berkeley, San Francisco State University, and the Simmons School of Management. The co-chairs sought to provide research-based findings and practical skills to advance individuals' capacity to address the challenges and opportunities that face academic women of color, to cultivate self-awareness and skill-building within a supportive and safe space for dialogue and discussion, to enable participants to expand networks and learn from colleagues – peers, near-peers, advisors from the university and other institutions, and gain insights into the commonalities and differences between academic disciplines.

Presenters and panelists discussed the U.S. higher education, types of institutions, patterns of academic careers, mobilizing one's own independence and interdependence for professional success in the independent cultures of institutions of higher education, juggling family and

various work decisions, the nature of academic work, and aspirations past the early stages of one's career. Workshops focused on identity and intersectionality, networking, negotiation, and writing. Participants were also engaged in interactive discussions focused on implicit bias, one-on-one career coaching, taking care of one's physical and mental wellness, exercise, and meditation. The conference arranged for several participants to meet with the chairs of their relevant academic departments at Stanford. As organizers, the conference co-chairs also wanted to learn what they can do in the context of their roles to develop institutional practices that enhance and support academic women of color.

The participants highlighted the considerable professional development benefit they gained from participation in the online conference evaluation that followed. They particularly valued having a community of support and palpably experienced validation and camaraderie; many of them had had no encounters previously with other women with experiences similar to theirs. Nearly all respondents agreed that they: 1) were feeling better prepared for an academic career; 2) were feeling more informed about the factors that can impact their success in an academic career; 3) had a better sense of what they needed to do in order to thrive as a faculty member; and 4) had some ideas to take back to colleagues and institution to support faculty diversity. In terms of individual conference sessions, all were rated by nearly all respondents as *extremely useful* or *very useful*.

Conference organizers also received critical feedback from participants about ways to enhance their experience of and learning from this conference. Suggestions included adding more practical tips on navigating academic work and environments, providing more time for interaction among faculty and conference participants, and delving more intently into the intersectional identities that participants brought to the table. The choice of the colloquial and broad term "women of color," despite its limitations, avoided the constraints of categorical definitions, allowing individual participants to describe the reasons for their interest in and affinity with the conference theme. Participants needed and expected a "safe space," and for some, that safety was at odds with the presence, opinions and/or behaviors of men and women who are White. This feedback pointed to the deep need for spaces dedicated to women of color to convene. The conference organizers learned that clear, intentional, and inclusive outreach to individuals and communities of color is necessary for effective engagement.

## **Discussion: Tensions**

All of our conferences involved tensions in both planning and implementation, tensions which have usually been tacit in nature rather than explicit, indirect and not directly addressed. We believe these tensions should be anticipated, expected, and to the extent possible, addressed. Innovation and learning both require risk and failure. We can build upon our past experience, but if we truly seek to change the current status quo of academic cultures that fail to include women and people of color fully, with a "double bind" for women of color, we need to take those risks.

Among these tensions are the lurking questions, decisions, and pros and cons of involving White women and men, focusing on one ethnic group vs. several, focusing on a narrow set of disciplines or broadening the tent to find commonalities and differences across disciplines, identifying goals and objectives that are within reach but require stretching, identifying the most

important topics for focus, and determining what's next and what happens after the conference. We need to consider the unique qualities of academic reward and recognition systems – what cultural humility and what hubris do we bring to creating such initiatives for women of color, and who benefits, and how much, in terms of agency, visibility, publications, successful grant writing, and other "credits" recognized in academic accounts?

Based on long histories of exclusion and isolation, women of color may be understandably reluctant to trust their White colleagues. Building trust among women of different privilege and racial backgrounds requires an intentional practice of cultural humility, time, awareness of privilege, and thoughtful engagement [28]. Men and White women are not always welcome in gatherings of women of color. What defines "safe" space for one woman of color is not the same for all, further supporting the need to engage with intended beneficiaries of such conferences in their design, as well as the need for clear communications about these potentially sensitive issues at the outset.

Resource-related tensions are also inevitable. It takes a great deal of time to organize a conference effectively, and the old African proverb, "To go fast, go alone; to go far, go together," has particular application. A conference will be better if many diverse perspectives have contributed to its planning, and that kind of consultation requires time. Stakeholders include women of color who are faculty members and staff members, those whose roles can impact critical institutional support for academic women of color, students, academic leaders, and others. Further, financial resources are almost always tied to specific stakeholders whose interests and ability to set priorities for access to resources need to be considered and balanced. Institutional resources are often available, but may come accompanied with expectations of avoiding challenging the practices of the institutions providing them.

We need to consider the importance of transparency in leveraging available resources, the dynamics of identifying needed resources, obtaining them, working with the funding sources, and considering the priorities and values established in these processes. Developing transparency takes more time, but also offers opportunities for deepening understanding of the experiences and needs of academic women of color.

### **Effective Practices and Recommendations**

In providing information about past experiences with these conferences, including making the tensions explicit rather than tacit, we hope to inspire and encourage future conferences and related actions to improve institutional support for academic women of color. From experience, we know that adequate time for advance planning is not only essential for successful implementation but also part of the critical path for institutional and individual learning. Those seeking to replicate such conferences need to tread a fine balance between tapping into the expertise and energy of academic women of color and not overwhelming them with new "service" obligations. How might we reach out to prospective participants to learn more about the topics of greatest interest to them, during the course of planning?

Different institutional and individual players in the design and development of such conferences will shape the focus of each. No "one size fits all" strategy for success exists; rather, recognizing the assets and priorities of those engaged in any given conference can help focus and clarify goals and related program design. "Women of color" has no one definition, and women of color are also infinitely diverse among themselves. Clarifying as much as possible the objectives, anticipated participants, specific programmatic components, expected outcomes, underlying motivations and values of the conference, and other aspects of the conference in advance, will help individuals ascertain congruence with their own interests and goals. Ensuring diversity on the planning teams, including inter-institutional diversity and diversity in roles and experiences, as well as diversity by gender, racial, and national identity, helps to avoid blind spots and landmines in planning a successful conference.

Given the overwhelming interest in such meetings, how might we work together collectively to address the interests, both in conferences offered, in developing and deploying sustainable funding models, and in setting up ways for participants to stay connected after the conference? How might we best share the resources of effective diverse speakers and mentors? How can we develop future speakers and mentors?

## **Conclusion**

Evidence suggests that conferences represent an effective way to build valuable professional communities to advance the success of academic women of color, with benefits for both individuals and institutions. As indicated by the four case studies, conferences focused on the experiences, support, and development of academic women of color are initiated with varying motivations specific to individual institutions and those working within them. Yet, they also have much in common in the value they bring to participants in creating reasonably safe spaces for professional development, critical psychosocial support, and the development of valuable mentoring networks.

Further, the development and implementation of such conferences provide for important learning experiences which can contribute to the growth of awareness of more nuanced, empathic, and authentic understanding of the experiences of academic women of color among institutional actors. While all are aware that involving women of color in conference development will be important to the utility, value, and quality of the program, recognition of unequal privilege and power among those teaming up to implement the program can also add a critical dimension. From an institutional perspective, these conferences create positive effects in building important institutional commitments to the success of academic women of color, and create changes that spill over in beneficial ways to others beyond the direct participants.

Anticipating in advance the desire for post-conference follow-up activities is wise, as is leaving such plans with flexibility to enable conference participants to engage in their design and implementation. The opportunity to develop conferences designed to improve institutional commitment to the success of academic women of color is present for many institutions, and leaders within them. Creating more such opportunities can provide important opportunities for thousands of prospective and current faculty members, as well as developing institutional

support, needed learning for allies and advocates, and priming the institution for cultural changes that will be beneficial for others. The process of planning and implementing such endeavors is likely to lead to increased appreciation of the different experiences and needs of our faculty, and further ways we can support their success, instrumental to the success of higher education and its students more broadly.

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