

## **African American Faculty Experiences in the Construction of Academic Life at a Community College**

This qualitative study analyzed the perceptions of African American faculty in the construction of their work experiences and interactions with their colleagues and students at a Central Valley community college. The study consisted of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews which were aimed at exploring the perceptions of African American faculty in relation to their work experiences, challenges, concerns and motivations while being part of a predominantly White community college campus.

Three main findings were reported. First, African American college professors described their work context as a hostile environment characterized by a lack of mentoring, racism, minimal diversity, and interactions with colleagues that were perceived as denigrating or demeaning. One of the biggest obstacles in the construction of a culturally diverse institution at this particular community college was the negative perceptions and bias among people from different cultural backgrounds. The existence of prejudices and bias contributed to the enactment of acts of microaggression which resulted in an unwelcoming work context for faculty of color.

Second, faculty overcame the adversities of the context by developing a resilient self. By creating a culture of hard work and persistence, African American faculty in this community college became resilient professionals capable of overcoming the adversity they found as part of their interactions with colleagues, administrators or even students. Being resilient meant developing strategies that allowed them to perform their teaching activities and support students.

Third, factors that motivated persistence involved relationships outside and inside of the work environment. Faculty cited that the support of family and church helped maintain their ability to perform on a campus where they, at times, felt devalued. The faculty also related that their relationships with the students, through instruction and mentoring, were a coping mechanism that motivated them to stay at the college and perform professionally.

Faculty diversity can be an important factor in student retention and increased participation in further educational experiences. A study by R.D. Opp (2001) found that the strongest predictor of student diversity was related to faculty diversity. Opp's (2002) study reported that faculty diversity improved institutional success and enhanced student success rates at two-year colleges. The variety of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives, which come from an ethnically diverse faculty, brings to a higher education institution the expanded resources needed to meet the mission of community colleges.

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