Building a Comprehensive Model of Mentorship at the University of Minnesota

Arlene Carney, PhD. and Priscilla Gibson, PhD.
University of Minnesota

Increasingly, universities nationwide want to safeguard their more costly investment, faculty, by not only effectively recruiting but also, retaining. Faculty is important to the prestige and status of a university and its mission to support and infuse diversity throughout. Here at the University of Minnesota (U), diligent efforts continue to retain faculty-of-color. This presentation will address our efforts to retain faculty-of-color by instituting a new mentoring initiative that is evidence-based. Our efforts to retain faculty can be categorized mainly under three areas: providing information and resources, collecting data, and developing programs and resources that are congruent with best practices. The presentation will begin with introductions and an experiential dyadic activity involving faculty’s experiences, challenges and suggested strategies for retaining faculty-of-color. After participants’ reports on the outcomes, presenters will provide brief lectures on content and facilitate an interactive discussion including questions/answers/comments.

Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs, Dr. Arlene Carney, will discuss our history with providing information and resources to assistant and associate professors on promotion and tenure. She will share her experiences conducting semi-annual informational meetings with faculty. She will also explain the various programs and resources provided to each level as a group and on an individual basis, with special emphasis on faculty-of-color, and partnership with the Office of Equity and Diversity. Dr. Carney will provide strategies that have proven effective over the years for tenure and promotion.

The U has initiated and supported two major data collecting events to obtain evidence-based information on the resources needs and provided to faculty regarding tenure and promotion: the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey and a report from the President’s Emerging Leaders Report (PEL). Dr. Carney will report on the findings relevant to faculty-of-color. Controlling for race and gender, the need for mentoring was one a major finding. She will also discuss how the U will incorporate the finding.
To respond to the need for mentoring of faculty-of-color, the Institute for Diversity, Equity, and Advocacy (IDEA), headed by Associate Vice Provost Louis Mendoza, with the support of the Vice Provost and Provost, initiated a mentoring program for the university. Dr. Priscilla Gibson, co-chair of the Mentoring Initiative will provide general information about mentoring and focus on the aim, process, and future plans of the IDEA’s Mentoring Initiative. While there is no definitive definition of mentoring, effective mentorship that supports career advancement is a topic of concern for every faculty member. Mentoring programs are usually focused on tenure-track, assistant professors, though there is variation across ranks, individuals, and units in needs, requests, current policies, and delivery. Given that at least two surveys administered by different organizations within the University of Minnesota (U) found that mentoring is not only wanted but also very needed by various constituencies at the U, Institute on Diversity, Equity, and Advocacy (IDEA) with the support of the Office of the Provost, has convened a Mentoring Initiative Committee with representation across colleges. The Committee’s purpose is to develop an evidence-based and best practice-informed mentoring program that is voluntary, process and outcome driven, individualized to meet current needs, flexible enough to be attuned to the varying contexts that emerge from differences between academic units, and aimed at promotion, retention, and advancement for faculty at all ranks. The resulting comprehensive mentoring model will be inclusive of the distinct challenges and needs faced by faculty-of-color, women, GLBT, and faculty with disabilities but also incorporate a universal design approach to ensure functionality for all faculty members. The program will be built on current mentoring efforts, publicized, and regularly evaluated.