

Supporting the Pathway to the Professoriate: A Descriptive Overview of a Faculty Development Program

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This article describes the Asa G. Hilliard III and Barbara A. Sizemore Research Institute on African Americans and Education, a future faculty program designed to encourage doctoral students to enter the professoriate and study the African American experience in education.

In light of the complex issues affecting educational outcomes for African Americans, increasing the number of college faculty who empirically examine the African American experience in education has become an important priority. As a result, in collaboration with the American Educational Research Association, since 2008, the Asa G. Hilliard III and Barbara A. Sizemore Research Institute on African Americans and Education has made efforts to better prepare doctoral students to navigate academia while at the same time encourage scholarship that focuses on African Americans in educational settings. Given the underrepresentation of college faculty pursuing research on the African American experience in education, the research institute provides information regarding how to develop a scholarly agenda, conduct research concerning the education of African Americans, and pursue a faculty career. Additionally, the research institute provides learning experiences to increase doctoral students' awareness of career success strategies.

Program Overview

The research institute honors the life and legacy of Dr. Asa G. Hilliard III and Dr. Barbara Sizemore, two African American scholars who had stellar careers conducting research on African Americans in education. Their careers, both independently and collectively, exemplified excellence and a commitment to increase educational opportunities for African American students. In the spirit of their work, the goal of the research institute is to create a scholarly community in academia that is committed to advancing the plight of African Americans

in educational settings via research and advocacy. Accordingly, the primary goal of the research institute is to introduce doctoral students to the fundamentals of developing a research agenda and academic career. A secondary aim of the research institute is to encourage the next generation of scholars to examine the multitude of comprehensive issues that shape the African American experience in education. During the research institute, participants receive strategies for developing manuscripts and conducting quantitative and qualitative research studies. Moreover, in light of the expectations for faculty to publish in peer-reviewed journals, a primary goal of the research institute is to encourage participants to develop research skills and publish a manuscript. To achieve these objectives, institute participants submit a research prospectus. Following a review of each prospectus, research institute personnel provide feedback to participants regarding how to enhance and improve their study. To support participants' success in the academy, research institute personnel also aim to provide professional mentoring lasting throughout participants' faculty careers.

Theoretical Foundations

Gottfredson's (2002) Theory of Circumscription, Compromise, and Self-Creation informs the design and implementation of the research institute. Gottfredson's theory suggests that individuals consider occupational choices through a process of self-creation where aspirations adjust to exposure to external forces. As individuals narrow their career options, they tend to eliminate

unacceptable alternatives in order to carve out a social space—leaving a smaller subset of acceptable career options. This dynamic process, wherein one compares his or her own self-image with those of others in similar and different occupations is particularly relevant for the research institute, which seeks to broaden and enrich the occupational images to which doctoral students are exposed.

Research highlighting the factors influencing doctoral students' development also informs the research institute. For example, findings from a study conducted by Sweitzer (2009), assessing the relative importance of relationships on doctoral students' persistence and socialization, suggests that the relationships that doctoral students develop outside of their institution might be extremely important for their professional development and psychosocial well-being. This finding, which is consistent with other research (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Ibarra, 1999), accentuates the importance of encouraging doctoral students to establish scholarly communities that provide helpful information and social support. As a result, the instructional component of the research institute includes opportunities to discuss the challenges associated with the faculty experience in higher education. These learning experiences provide a scholarly atmosphere to discuss the factors that influence the personal and professional lives of college and university faculty. In this regard, the research institute attempts to prepare future faculty to meet the academic and social challenges of earning tenure and promotion.

Implications for Future Research

To date, the research institute has worked with six cohorts. Among the six cohorts, approximately one-fifth of the participants are currently in faculty roles. To systematically assess the program's effectiveness, future evaluation studies will investigate the relative success and impact of the program. Moreover, these studies will collect qualitative and quantitative data, utilizing traditional and web-based modes of data collection. Additionally, future research will explore the extent to which participation in the research institute positively influences doctoral students' career attainment outcomes and scholarly productivity in academia. Another objective of future evaluation studies will be to collect and analyze data regarding the ability of the research institute to enhance doctoral students' perspectives

about navigating an academic career and producing scholarship examining the African American experience in education. Findings from these evaluation studies may be relevant to university administrators who seek to establish or enhance future faculty programs.

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