

Talk About Diverse Hiring Often Means Faculty. What About Staff?

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Courtesy of Jenny Kwon

Jenny Kwon, an administrator at the U. of California at Berkeley, did a study that found "blockages in the pipeline" for minority-group staff members who hoped to advance their careers on the campus.

When colleges talk about diverse hiring, much of the focus — and the funding — goes to recruiting and retaining faculty members from underrepresented minority groups. But a program in the works at the University of California at Berkeley is looking at new ways to elevate an overlooked cohort: minority staff in nonacademic areas, like student-affairs administrators and office managers.

Training sessions will be tailored to the experiences of midcareer staff members from minorities. The sessions are aimed at helping participants understand topics like strategic networking, how the university works, and how to negotiate.

Participating employees, 24 at a time, will be sponsored by senior executive administrators, who can help advocate for those looking to move up to different or higher positions at the university. That's something Jo Mackness, interim assistant vice chancellor for human resources, says is crucial to the program.

"It's an opportunity for them to build their networks beyond the participants in the actual cohort or in the program itself," she says.

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The program, in four sessions over four to six months, is likely to be ready to offer during this fiscal year, Ms. Mackness says. It is based largely on the University of California system's [Women's Initiative for Professional Development](#).

"If more people see people of color in higher levels of the organization, the idea is that we will hope to inspire people in lower levels to grow and develop and strive for those higher level positions," she says.

The push for the program was bolstered by a dissertation by Jenny Kwon, a special-projects administrator in the office of the chancellor. In two studies — one on Berkeley and one on 10 other public universities — she found that staff diversity at the management level was not increasing at the same rate as student diversity.

While minority students made up about 58 percent of the student body at the 10 public universities, minority staff members accounted for only about 35 percent at the management level. By comparison, 65 percent of managerial staff members are white, while just 42 percent of students are white.



For the study of Berkeley, Ms. Kwon put job positions into three categories: operations and technical, like groundskeepers; professional, like student-affairs employees; and supervisory and managerial, including departmental and senior administrators.

Minority staff members were overrepresented in the lowest job classifications and underrepresented in the highest, she found. Conversely, white staff members were underrepresented in the lowest job classifications and overrepresented in the highest.

Ms. Kwon calls the situation "blockages in the pipeline."

"At Berkeley, even though we're making progress in some areas, you can actually see specifically at which job classification each race group is stalling or hitting a wall of progression," she says.

These blockages don't all happen at the same level, she notes. While some minority staff members get stuck in the lower levels of management, others struggle to reach management positions over the course of their careers.

"As someone who's in an administrator role and can see visibly on a day-to-day basis that there aren't a lot of staff of color at the administration level, of course I value efforts to get more diversity, racial diversity at the top," Ms. Kwon says.

"But to be honest, I started my career ... in that mid-lower professional level, and I know that that's where the majority of staff of color are stuck. And so if we want to think about biggest impact, it would be great to see us focusing on where people are hitting a wall."

So at what juncture could a university intervene with a career-development program?

That was a question Ms. Mackness had to consider when determining the target audience for Berkeley's program. With limited resources — it will cost the university about \$2,000 per person, probably funded by the human-resources department and the office of the chancellor — she says the program will be aimed at staff members in lower to mid-level management positions. About 110 such employees are at Berkeley now.

"That's a manageable number for us to be able to ... reach that audience and really make an impact," Ms. Mackness says.

The program, created by Berkeley's human-resources department in partnership with the university's [Division of Equity & Inclusion](#), will seek applications from staff members. Ms. Mackness says she hopes to expand the training eventually to reach lower layers of staff as well, and to improve how the human-resources office works with affinity groups for minority staff and faculty members.

"I don't think that there's just one program or one solution that's going to be the miracle or the thing that's going to jettison us into where we want to be," she says. "I'd like to go at this from a number of angles."