Investigating Policies and Procedures for Recruiting, Retaining, and Promoting Underrepresented Minority Faculty at Yale School of Public Health

Executive Summary

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December 2009

Grant Funding provided by:

Confidential and Limited Distribution: Intended for YSPH Deans, Faculty and Administration
Acknowledgements

The Emerging Majority Affairs Committee (EMAC), a standing committee of the Association of Yale Alumni of Public Health (AYAPH) conceptualized and initiated this project.

Funding was provided by a grant from the Connecticut Health Foundation and Yale School of Public Health (YSPH). Administrative support was provided by Dawn Carroll in the Office of Alumni Affairs at Yale School of Public Health, and by the Office of Grants and Contracts at Yale University.

We greatly appreciate the thoughtful input and guidance from the YSPH Senior Advisory Committee that was established for this project.

Special and considerable thanks to all the faculty and senior administrators who were interviewed for this study.
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Executive Summary

Introduction

This document summarizes findings from a study commissioned by the Emerging Majority Affairs Committee (EMAC), a standing committee of the Association of Yale Alumni in Public Health (AYAPH). The specific aim of this project was to examine the current “policies and procedures” for the recruitment, retention and promotion of underrepresented minority (URM) faculty at Yale School of Public Health (YSPH). The goals and objectives of the study were to document, and compare current practices to best practices nationwide as documented in the literature, at comparable institutions.

For the purposes of this report current practices will be defined as the policies and procedures documented and followed at YSHP through this study. Best practices are defined as “policies and procedures” recognized by higher education experts that yield improved results in the recruitment, retention, and promotion of underrepresented minority faculty at schools of public health.

The Executive Summary is intended to serve as a high level report for the Deans and Advisory Committee. Funding for these activities was provided by the Connecticut Health Foundation and Yale School of Public Health.

Methodology and Data Analysis

A mixed-method approach was used to examine the recruitment, retention and promotion of underrepresented minority (URM) faculty at Yale School of Public Health (YSPH) (Greene and Caracelli, 1997; Greene, 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Weiss, 1998). This method provides a model for interpreting qualitative and open-ended interview responses from structured interviews of a purposely sampled study population, including faculty and senior administrators. In addition to the interview data, the study was enhanced by a more detailed understanding of the recruitment, retention and promotion process that resulted from interpretive analysis of documents and handbooks made available by YSPH, compared to other similar Schools of Public Health across the nation. Prior to beginning the study, an Advisory Committee, made up of YSPH senior faculty and Deans was established. Educational consultants met with the Advisory Committee for insights into the school environment to gain buy-in and support for the study process that was to take place. Finally, best practices of their counterpart Schools of Public Health, which were identified in the most recent higher educational literature, were charted and compared to Yale’s current practices.

Study Population

Twenty individuals agreed to participate without receiving any personal incentives. All of the underrepresented minority (URM) junior faculty (4) were interviewed—three African-American and one Hispanic American. Twenty-one (21) majority (non-URM) junior faculty were invited to participate in the study through e-mail invitation, with four responding to the invitation. The remaining participants were comprised of senior faculty and senior administrators. The interview protocol was designed to elicit information about the interviewees’ experiences related to the four areas in question for URM faculty, i.e. recruitment, retention, mentorship and promotion. Common themes were tracked in analyzing the responses. Findings were integrated by comparing results from these interviews with findings from the literature.
Major Findings and Recommendations

The interviews revealed a number of promising practices that have taken place at YSPH. Promising practices will be defined as those practices undertaken at YSPH and documented through this study that resulted in a positive outcome for the institution. However, these are not best practices because they may have occurred only once, or may be an anomaly of practice that was observed by the coding of the interview data but is not a part of the policies or practice of YSPH.

The interviews also generated several recommendations from junior faculty, senior faculty and administrators about improvements that are necessary towards the recruitment, retention and promotion of URMs at YSPH. Henceforth, this report synthesizes all recommendations obtained from the interviews, along with the best practices identified in literature and those occurring at counterpart Schools of Public Health (Appendix 2).

The sections are organized according to the most common themes that emerged during the interviews – Climate and Culture, Recruitment, Retention, and Mentoring & Promotion.

Major Themes

1. Climate and Culture

Themes specific to senior and junior URM faculty included:

- Feelings of invisibility
- Feelings of isolation
- Gender issues were greater than race
- Mistaken identity based on stereotypes and assumptions on campus
- Regional/northeast climate described as “off-standish”

1.1 Recommendations

- Have senior administrators and faculty leadership communicate a sense of urgency regarding the need for greater diversity within the faculty ranks.
- Have senior administrators and faculty leadership make a commitment to implementing initiatives for faculty diversity. This can be demonstrated through:
  - The YSPH mission statement and strategic plan;
  - Allocation of time for faculty to plan, develop and promote safe space for forums and discussions about race and racial incidents that arise;
  - Use YSPH documents to communicate a commitment that the institution is inclusive.
- Make race relations training mandatory for all faculty and staff at YSPH, and offer such training on an annual basis and set schedule.

2. Recruitment

All study interviewees – junior and senior faculty, as well as senior administrators – commented on how the institution [YSPH] might become more effective by developing a process to attract, recruit and retain underrepresented minority faculty. Expanding the candidate pool might be accomplished by focusing on the following:
• Community connections
• Future pipeline
• Interdisciplinary collaboration options
• Persistence
• Professional affiliations and networking
• Spreading the word about openings

2.1 Recommendations

• Advertise positions in minority-serving journals to cultivate relationships with local and national minority organizations, special interest groups, students, faculty and Schools of Public Health that have high enrollments of URM graduate students.
• Ensure that faculty search committees reflect diversity in race and gender, and if necessary call upon senior faculty outside YSPH to achieve this diversity.
• Invite early stage URM investigators to give presentations on campus even if there are no immediate job openings available, and make sure that all interactions are honest and genuine.
• Give URM job candidates the opportunity to meet alone with URM faculty and administrators at YSPH during their campus visit.
• Suggest that YSPH senior administrators and faculty leadership remain optimistic about the possibility of identifying and recruiting URM faculty to the School.

3. Retention

Junior and senior faculty suggest several incentives that may help to improve retention of URM faculty at YSPH, which take various forms.

3.1 Recommendations

• Develop a retention plan for new URM faculty prior to recruitment, which includes specific targets for research, teaching, community service and milestone achievements with a mentor(s) who are available to help junior URM faculty overcome obstacles.
• Supply new URM faculty with essential information about departmental operations months before their arrival on campus.
• Follow-up with the new hire URM faculty regularly:
  - To answer any concerns that might develop in the first few days/weeks/months; and
  - To introduce and warmly promote new URM faculty members to students and other faculty at the beginning of the semester.
• Support junior URM faculty in building their reputation as researchers, within and across institutions (e.g., mentoring support for planning and submitting grants, increasing visibility, and other career guidance).
• Protect junior URM faculty from excessive teaching, advising and service assignments so they have time to build their research portfolio.

• Use NIH Diversity Supplements as a mechanism to fund salaries for early stage URM investigators, who are building their research portfolio.

4. Mentoring and Promotion

Interview responses from all the senior administrators, and several senior faculty, suggest that the Dean of YSPH will provide URM junior faculty with the necessary support to build their reputations as researchers. The Deans’ Office confirms that the charge to the senior faculty and staff will be to design and implement a process that corrects the deficits in the mentoring system at YSPH. This will be accomplished by:

4.1 Recommendations

• Actively working to help all new junior faculty make scholarly connections within and outside the department.

• Developing and implementing a formal mentoring process/program to match senior and all junior faculty in areas of common research, as well as personality.

• Maintaining consistency about the necessary steps required to achieve success in the promotion process. All junior faculty should receive the same information from faculty and administrators within their respective divisions, and School-wide.

• Implementing institutional recognition and incentives for teaching, mentoring, and research, to affirm the value and importance of faculty to the institution.

• Assigning a department member to help guide all junior faculty through the publication and promotion process.

Conclusion

Through an in-depth analysis of the study findings, the researchers identified promising practices which are currently underway at Yale School of Public Health. In addition, the literature review on best practices provides the School’s administrators with strategies that can help to improve the climate and culture, creating a welcoming environment for the heterogeneous faculty it desires. Both types of practices can serve as guidelines for all School’s of Public Health throughout the nation.

In conclusion, the efforts described herein towards increasing the diversity within the ranks of the current and future faculty at Yale School of Public Health serve as a testament to the institution’s commitment to improve the quality of education for the student body and faculty. The researchers are grateful to the Association of Yale Alumni in Public Health for supporting this study, and to the Connecticut Health Foundation and YSPH for funding this important endeavor.