

E-ISSN: 2581-8868

Volume-04, Issue-03, pp-340-347

[www.theajhssr.com](http://www.theajhssr.com)

Research Paper

Open Access

## ARE UNIVERSITIES READY FOR CHANGE? IMPROVING FACULTY DIVERSIFICATION

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### ABSTRACT

The faculty demographic in the American academy has been slow to change even as the student demographic has shifted drastically. The barriers and benefits of faculty diversification are of critical concern to the academy in terms of outcomes for students, for faculty and for the sustainability of the organization itself. Successful faculty diversification is facilitated by the readiness model and the identification of the change factors presented in foundational change management theory. Addressing these factors is critical in preventing some of the resistance to diversifying the faculty within institutions, in combating hiring biases and addressing the demographic shift in the student constituency. This article shows how this model can be adapted to universities seeking to diversify their faculty.

**KEYWORDS:** Diversity, Equity, Faculty Diversification, Inclusion, Management Theory, Social Justice, Recruitment and Selection, University, Readiness to Change

### I. INTRODUCTION

Universities have adopted diversity offices, implemented targeted policies to increase faculty diversity, and yet faculty diversification is still stagnant. As early as 1947, there have been numerous conversations both inside and outside academia on how to implement successful change initiatives leading to a diversified faculty body. Despite these conversations, change remains slow. Using the framework of the Change Readiness Model (CRM) developed for corporations, this manuscript explains how the change factors presented in foundational change management theory can be used by institutions of higher learning to enhance the heterogeneity of their faculty members. Diversifying faculty is essential for student success. Universities are quickly becoming more representative of the country's demographics, enrolling a myriad of students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Rowe & Trickett, 2018). What has been slower to change, however, is how these students are represented in both mentor and faculty roles. In the past 25 years there has been scant progress in hiring more diverse faculty members, and when they are hired, retaining, and promoting them to tenure proves difficult (Llamas et al., 2021).

As discussed in the document, successful changes imply the identification of a need and importance of a change, stakeholder perception of the correctness of potential responses and their understanding of the benefit for the change. Successful changes also require that stakeholders perceive that the organization has the ability to implement change. This process is applied to the university setting. CRM reduces the risks of failure in both institutional change and in providing successful mentorship tools for an increasingly diversifying student body; additionally, failure to address this representational need of diverse students increases the potential for attrition in these populations (Llamas et al., 2021). Note that even if change management is a more highly skilled craft than a science, the insight it offers are truly valuable. We thus hope that University administrators will utilize the theoretical perspectives outlined in this manuscript to initiate conversations (if not done yet), establish effective protocols, and alter the current hiring and diversifying strategies within their university policies.

The model can also be used to evaluate progress and to identify the impediment to diversity. In particular, models of change can aid leaders in preparing their organizations for new ways of achieving set goals. This manuscript includes four sections. The first section briefly highlights how that history of American academia is long-standing and prone to resistance against change. The second section presents the demographic change that characterized institutions of higher learning and emphasizes our new challenge of addressing the potentially unique needs of students of color, one that cannot be addressed without the diversification of mentors and academic culture within campuses that enroll diverse students. The third section explores how organization change management theories can be used to diversify the faculty. The last section concludes this article.

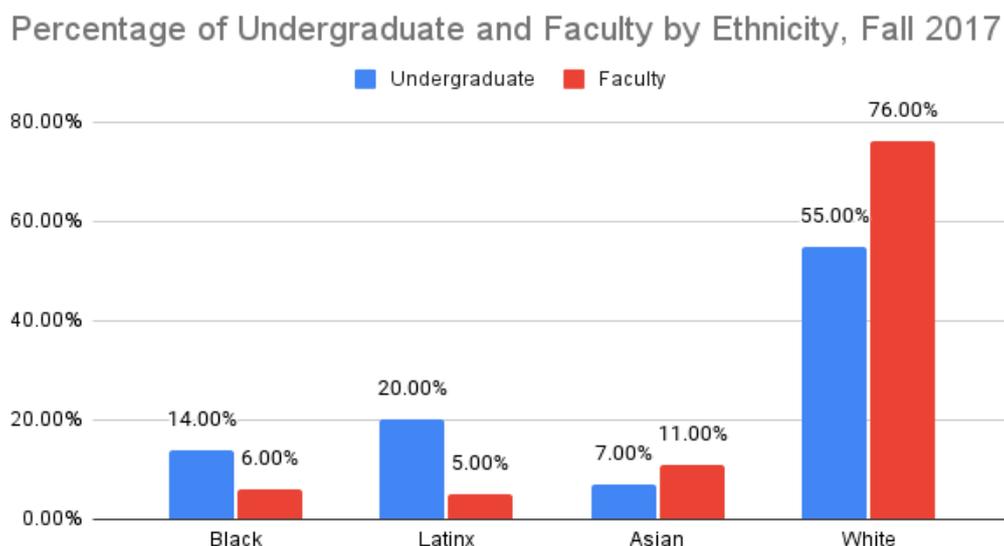
## **II. ACADEMIA'S HISTORY**

In American academic societies, the disparity between classes of wealth and marginalized groups is noticeable throughout educational stages. Often known as “low-income students,” those with educational backgrounds in impoverished environments that may lack needed supplies, extracurricular activities, and educational support are challenged to achieve equity in education (Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2004). Students from these backgrounds are further met with an unfamiliar academic culture that diminishes their experiences (Du Bois, 1973). These students are culturally predisposed to acquiesce in the face of authoritarian structures, like the academy, further alienating them (Lareau, 2003). This is unfortunate since students might very well distrust those who are in place to assist them with learning and navigating the academy’s unspoken rules of engagement. Even as institutions increase outreach to first-generation, low-income, and racially/ethnically diverse students, it is not a simple task to meet students where they are. We made progress and must continue to evaluate them and to challenge our way of addressing students’ needs. Perceptions towards academia differ between wealthier and more marginalized students, as the former view education as a symbol of power and entitlement (Jencks & Reisman, 1968), whereas the latter view academia as an opportunity to break from societal limitations (Du Bois, 1973). Therefore, challenges to institutional culture may be disliked in academia, especially as there is historical precedent that continues to maintain the status quo of higher education. The history of academia proves a challenge for diverse students as well; providing education to marginalized groups was viewed as not essential and only appropriate when training them for service and labor jobs. When higher education was initiated, education was designed to benefit the elites and families of wealth and rank (e.g., clergymen, merchants; Thelin, 2004). The targeted demographic during these early years were young white men who originated from wealthy families (Thelin, 2004). College admissions did not begin to diversify until the Truman Report in 1948, which made college more accessible and affordable to marginalized groups (Karabel, 1972). This history of American academia is long-standing and prone to resistance against change; however, the diversifying of students seeking higher education will continue to challenge the status quo, and universities need to be prepared.

## **III. STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

In the next 40 years, the non-Hispanic white population is expected to decrease from 62% in 2014 to 44% in 2060, thus no longer being the dominant race in America (U.S. Census, 2018). In terms of population trends, by 2060, it is believed that there will be a significant increase in Hispanic (14%), Black (2%), Asian (3.1%), and Native (3%) ethnicities and a 20% decrease for the white population (U.S. Census, 2018). The diversifying of students seeking higher education will thus continue to challenge the status quo, and universities need to be prepared. The success of these students is correlated with our ability to diversify faculty which remains sluggish. Figure 1 compares the percentages of students and faculty members within each ethnic group. As shown, contrary to the increasing rate for Latinx students, the percentage of Latinx faculty remains constant, increasing from 3% in fall 1997 to 5% in fall 2017. Similarly, Black faculty represents only 5% of the total in 1997 and 6% in 2017. The number of faculty for Asian and white is higher than the number of students in these groups. In fall 2017, Asian students made up only 7% of total students while Asian professors made up 11% of the total. Even more jarring, although White students made up 55% of the student population, they represented 76% of the faculty population. Additionally, a larger share of assistant professors (junior faculty without tenure) were nonwhite in fall 2017, compared with fully tenured professors (27% vs. 19% respectively). But junior faculty haven’t diversified much faster than their senior, fully tenured counterparts. Between fall 1997 and fall 2017, the share of nonwhite assistant professors grew by 10 percentage points, compared with 8 points for professors.

FIGURE 1: STUDENTS AND FACULTY DISTRIBUTION



Adapted from PEW Research. Total percentage share may not reach 100% as not all ethnic backgrounds are taken into consideration for these data. == <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/31/us-college-faculty-student-diversity/>

The slow change in the faculty demographics is surprising. The literature about student success is clear: diversifying faculty demographics improves academic success among students of color due to students feeling represented and validated (Gilkes Borr, 2019; Savas, 2014). Not only does research emphasize the need for diversification but faculty members also indicate that it is essential to provide validation and support for students from historically oppressed populations (Gilkes Borr, 2019; Harper, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Faculty also recognize that a lack of sociocultural support for students of color can contribute to a noticeable degree-success difference, also known as achievement gap, between students of color and their white peers (Washington, 2019).

Students tend to seek mentorship and advisors from same-race faculty (Cole & Griffin, 2013). According to Chanland and Murphy (2017), faculty-student mentoring has a significant impact on student persistence and degree attainment. Along with faculty-student mentor relationships, having a diverse group of faculty combats hostile campus environments towards minority groups due to students relying on cultural networks (Chanland & Murphy, 2017). Past attempts of diversification have indicated a positive increase of self-efficacy, academic outcomes, and racial-cultural engagement among the ethnic student population (Denson & Chang, 2009).

Diversifying the faculty improves the well-being of current faculty, potentially reduces the amount of discrimination claims and is positively view by prospective faculty (Phillips, 2002). Federal laws require employers to have clear affirmative action processes showing how they plan to eliminate discrimination from the workplace (Phillips, 2004). Faculty members of color also experience devastatingly negative circumstances due to biases and phobias (Mentoring: A Black Community Response, 2003). Faculty of color often feel neglected in their departments, schools, and colleges, and they often find themselves working under the spotlight (Laden & Hagedorn, 2000). A survey prepared by the Bernard Hodes Group at the request of the PhD project<sup>1</sup> shows that diversity in front of the classroom improves the educational experience for all. According to the survey, 99% of the participants believe that having a minority professor has a positive impact on their experience with 84% of respondents reporting that minority professors positively impact the experience of non-minority students. Increasing the diversity of faculty members will improve the advising and mentorship burden that faculty of color experience. Alleviating mentorship and advising burden for faculty of color will lead to better promotion and tenure outcomes (Antonio, 2003; Turner et al., 2008); faculty diversification will provide students of color with more mentor relationships with faculty that represent their needs and relate to their experiences.

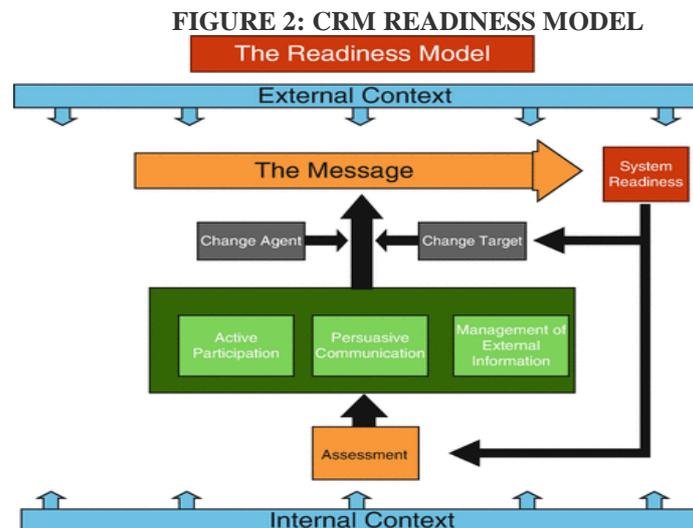
Therefore, despite data and research supporting the importance of representation, faculty diversification has been a slow process. Some believe that the slow pace of change is partially due to the complex past race relationships

<sup>1</sup> An organization focusing on increasing the diversity of business professors

that has sometimes been characterized by violence, fear, and anger due to misunderstanding and ignorance on behalf of ill-informed individuals (Harrington & Pavel, 2013; Harper, 2015). Change is not easy; in fact, challenges to familiarity can be conceptualized as a loss, leading to resistance (Drucker, 1999; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Lines, 2005; Schlossberg, 1981). Organizational change readiness addresses the “urgency for change, appropriateness of the response, the beliefs and ideas of those affected by or responsible for the change, support for the change by leadership, and a belief that the change is possible” (Rawls, 2020). CRM addresses the implementation of practices and problems associated with altering the foundation and formal structure of institutions (Lines, 2005).

#### IV. ORGANIZATION CHANGE MANAGEMENT: READINESS MODEL

As shown in figure 2, the CRM model of Organizational Readiness for change includes several steps. In the model readiness for change implies that the members of the organization are committed to the change and have confidence in their ability to implement the change (change efficacy). Organizational readiness for change varies as a function of how much organizational members value the change and how they evaluate: (1) the resources available, (2) environmental factors and (3) the amount of work to be accomplished. When organizational readiness for change is high, organizational members are more likely to be on board and to be cooperative. Organizational members' readiness is determined by numerous factors including, the environment, the message, change agents and assessment (figure 2)



Self (2017) <https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry>

**External Environment :** The current and future student body needs are not satisfied by the Euro-American system of education that was designed to serve a uniform student body. America is a multicultural society in which the educational system must support the success of different students. For those of us thinking that education is the great equalizer (or should be), supporting student success is our duty; “education is the great equalizer in a democratic society, and if people are not given access to a quality education, then ... we are ... creating an underclass of people who will challenge our very way of life” (Turner et al., 2008).

The external environment, i.e. the gap between the new demographic, student success and the composition of the faculty is discussed in Armenakis and Harris (2009) who identified five key change beliefs; the first being discrepancy (e.g., change is necessary) and the second appropriateness (e.g., change will address issue), efficacy. Armenakis and Harris (2009) recommends to identify the five key change beliefs: discrepancy (e.g., change is necessary), appropriateness (e.g., change will address issue), efficacy (e.g., change can be successfully implemented), principal support (e.g., formal leaders will support), and valence (e.g. how the individual feels the change will benefit them). These five beliefs play a vital role in diagnosis and change implementation (Armenakis & Harris, 2009).

**The change message and the change agent<sup>2</sup>:** The change message conveys the nature of the change and shapes the sentiments that determine reactions to the change (Bernerth, 2004). Everybody benefits from diversity in academia. Since universities are made of individuals with different cultures, the change message should lead to behavior acceptance of a diverse body of faculty. The ADKAR model (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement) provides a tool for improving the connection between individual performance, organizational change management and business results (Hiatt, 2006). The model explains behavioral acceptance; specifically, it describes the steps towards successful individual change (Hiatt, 2006). The first step necessitates making organization members aware that change is needed so they can understand and be motivated to participate. The second step is to build members' desire to engage in the change. The third step is to provide knowledge and information on how the change will occur and how the members will be expected to change. Finally, the fourth and fifth steps in the model are working through members' ability to accomplish the change and then reinforcing the change in order to maintain it (Hiatt, 2006).

Weiner (2009) shows that organization members need to be convinced that changes are necessary regardless of the reasons why they believe so. Some members might believe that change is needed because their leaders support it, while others might be persuaded by their peers. Diversification is easier when leadership understands why change is essential. The buy-in from faculty members is paramount.

In the organization change model, Rogers (1962) introduces the advantages of working with individuals willing to champion the initiative. Champions help others to feel more comfortable with the new goal and or the new direction (Weiner, 2009). The assistance of colleagues who exhibit a positive attitude toward diversification (e.g. valence - how the individual feels the change will benefit them - Armenakis and Harris (2009)) and knowledge of what diversifying will entail (ADKAR; Hiatt, 2006) is a significant element to success. Kotter's 8-Step Change Model (Kotter, 1996) suggests to create urgency and eagerness for change. According to the author, champions should lead the initiative, prepare a comprehensive strategy; ensure communication, address obstacles, report short-term accomplishments and evaluate progress toward long-term goals. Kotter's (1996) model emphasizes the gradual buildup of acceptance for the change, the impact of the organization culture and the importance of leadership and stakeholders in order to achieve success. The second step in the Armenakis and Harris (2009)'s model mentioned above emphasizes active participation toward change; organizations need strong advocates that will fight for change and not be discouraged when faced with resistance (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Additionally, having active participation decreases discrepancy and establishes the need for change (Armenakis et al., 1979; Armenakis & Harris, 2009). The third step is effective organizational diagnosis, in which issues that necessitate the change and the root causes for the changes are recognized (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). The fourth step is the organizations need to evaluate their readiness to change by selecting change agents who will create and sell a proactive program to members of the organization (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). The fifth step is that organizations must strategically present and promote change during the process. Leaders must emphasize the five change recipient beliefs throughout the adoption process and articulate the necessary strategies required to initiate change.

**Assessment:** Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993) propose that readiness was a precursor of resistance and adoption behaviors. In their model, assessment helps in determining just how ready for change employees are before organizational changes are implemented. Armenakis and Harris (2009) identified six major steps for successful change that outline both the preparation and implementation areas of change. In step six the organization needs to analyze how effective the change was; if the change was not effective, then the organization needs to ask why it failed.

The literature shows that assessment can be conducted using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. A recent dissertation by Rawls (2020) uses the Organizational Change Recipients' Belief Scale (Armenakis & Harris, 2009) is a 24-item, seven-point Likert scale used to measure the organizational and individual levels of readiness for change. When previously used, the scale has shown good convergent validity, internal consistency, and content validity.

**Internal Environment:** An organization's internal environment includes employees, management, and its corporate culture, which defines employee behavior (Wang et al., 2008). Although staff members play an important role in universities, the literature mostly focuses on administrators and faculty members as those impacting the internal environment.

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<sup>2</sup> In a recent dissertation, Lindberg and Svenson (20,20) explore how middle managers make sense of their role as both target and agent of change during a cultural change process and how their actions influence the change process. Middle managers are both agents and targets. They are expected to both accept and change themselves while at the same time persuade others to accept change.

In Lewin's (1947, 1951) 3-stage model, a successful change implies that faculty recognize the lack of diversification within their own departments, understand that this issue is vital as their student body demographics continue to change, and are willing to change practices (e.g. addressing biases in the racial and ethnic makeup of faculty applying to their department). Weiner (2009)'s model presents the conditions to promote organization change based on motivation theory and social cognitive theory. Weiner (2009) shows that university stakeholders must have evidence that change is required (i.e. change valence) and have clarity on what the change will bring (i.e. change efficacy, their understanding of what the change will be). Weiner (2009) also recognizes the impact of the organization's contextual factors; i.e. the organizational culture, policies and procedures, and members' past experiences; on the change valence and the members' attitude toward a change. Reluctance to diversify is sometimes explained by biases when faculty believe diversification is harmful to themselves in terms of social standing or economic outcomes. Assessing readiness to serve on a faculty hiring committee would determine whether faculty believed hiring diverse faculty members benefits the student and the institution, and whether they desire diversification.

Peter Drucker (1980, 2006) reports that organizational culture can be a deterrent to change. Organizational culture originates from cultural artefacts (e.g., visible structure), beliefs/values, and assumptions broadcasted by the organization's leaders and decision-makers (Armenakis et al., 2011). In other words, since organizational culture is heavily shaped by the leaders and reflects the collective beliefs and values of its members, having the support of organization leaders is essential to organizational change.

In order to implement faculty diversification, it is necessary to understand the role of university faculty members in the hiring process. Faculty members can be seen as the "gatekeepers" of who gets hired on, being thoroughly involved in the hiring process (e.g. interviews; Kayes, 2006). Due to their important role in the hiring process, it is essential to measure and evaluate the readiness of change initiative and beliefs of diversification for university faculty. Diversification relies heavily on perceived harm or benefit to the institution; those who feel threatened by diversification are more likely to resist change initiatives. Resistant faculty who play a vital role in hiring decisions can halt diversification. Therefore, universities need to assess the level of preparedness and willingness of diversification of faculty members of the committee. Their task begins with the position description and its content. Recruitment of diverse faculty implies that these faculty understand why they must disseminate information about the position widely as possible. A diverse faculty benefits campus by providing support to students from diverse backgrounds, by serving as symbols of interest, by creating a sense of comfort for culturally diverse students, by broadening the range of what is taught and how it is taught and by lending new ideas and collaboration in pedagogies and serving as role models to the students (Antonio, 2003).

## V. CONCLUSION

It is imperative that the academy take all viable steps to ensure the diversification of faculty to improve student outcomes, faculty well-being and, in the long-term, their own survival. Using change management theories, we present the organizational theory readiness model and discuss how this model is of relevance for the goal of faculty diversification. We also emphasize the need for diversification by reviewing the demographic shift and summarizing the most significant contribution of the literature about student success. As discussed in the document, successful changes imply the identification of a need and importance of a change, stakeholder perception of the correctness of potential responses and their understanding of the benefit for the change. Successful changes also require that stakeholders perceive that the organization has the ability to implement change. This process is applied to the university setting. Furthermore, the results of change must be tangible and withstand the test of time. Many may prefer a certainty that ensures their personal comfort and are unwilling to relinquish their social position or access to resources. When an individual perceives harm to their standing or economic future, they may resist the change that might disrupt their place in the academy.

We hope that universities will utilize this article to initiate change on their campuses and enlighten administrators on university campuses. We also hope that future research will be undertaken to evaluate and continue to document the benefits of diversification. What is now essential is to assess beliefs and attitudes toward diversification and fair and equitable hiring practices. It would be useful for universities to know how the stakeholders feel about proposed changes. Do they believe that diversification is appropriate? Do they think that the institution is ready to implement changes? Do they think that diversification will benefit them personally? Without the assessment of faculty, staff, students and administrator attitudes and readiness for change, diversification and policy changes can fail (Lines, 2005; Oreg et al., 2011). The future of the academy depends upon its ability to review the social and economic context underlying its hiring procedures and act to ensure social and economic biases do not impede institutional goals.

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