Fostering Inclusion for Black Faculty

Ember Skye W. Kanelee   **Joya Misra**   **Ethel L. Mickey**
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Abstract

In the midst of a global pandemic, people have been rallying across the world to protest the continual state-sanctioned violence against and the structural inequalities faced by Black people in the United States. In response to this, many non-Black academics within higher education have circulated reading lists and written statements at a dizzying rate. While reading lists are a good starting point, we encourage allyship in the form of praxis. This article offers concrete ways for faculty to engage in praxis to dismantle systems of oppression within higher education. We detail the unique challenges Black faculty experience within higher education and suggest specific ways non-Black faculty can support Black faculty at every stage of their career. Using data from interviews conducted with diverse faculty members, we suggest several action-oriented steps to address how organizational practices, policies, and culture in higher education may be altered to create more equitable and inclusive environments for Black faculty.

Keywords: praxis, higher education, race and work, intersectionality

Ember Skye Kanelee is a social activist and doctoral candidate in sociology who works collaboratively with others within and outside of higher education to examine how inequalities manifest within organizations at the micro and macro levels of analysis. Her work focuses on praxis-centered solutions driven by rigorous research and data collection. Joya Misra, PhD, is a professor in sociology and the School of Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her work focuses on mediating inequalities within institutions, such as universities, and at the societal level. Ethel L. Mickey, PhD, is a sociologist and postdoctoral research associate at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, with the UMass ADVANCE Program. Her research centers on analyses of power and oppression in the innovation ecosystem, contributing to understanding how and why to include women and BIPOC individuals in knowledge production.

In the midst of a global pandemic, people have been participating in rallies across the world in direct response (Buchanan et al., 2020) to the murders of Black people in the United States through state-sanctioned violence. Many non-Black academics, often collaborating with professional organizations and academic groups, have compiled and circulated materials about anti-Black violence at a dizzying rate (Johnson, 2020).

While creating reading lists and joining book groups are good starting points (Adam et al., 2020) and appear to be changing public perceptions of racism (Mumford, 2015), taking informed action is a critical next step if we aim for true change. According to Karl Marx, *praxis*, the practice of theory in action, is essential to creating change (Petrovic, 2006). How can we engage in praxis that dismantles systems of oppression within higher education? How can organizational practices, policies, and culture in higher education be altered towards equity and inclusion of Black faculty at every step of their career?

Adia Harvey Wingfield's concept of *systematic gendered racism* (2009) describes the overlap of gender and race, resulting in different outcomes for individuals. Within academia, systematic gendered racism results in using a white-dominant framework at work, which obscures the issues Black academics experience.[1] Navigating systematic gendered racism within academia is exhausting (Daut, 2019) for Black academics, often more so for Black women academics, who regularly engage in the hidden labor (Matthew, 2016) of mentoring undergraduate and graduate students from minority backgrounds. Black faculty face numerous obstacles (Perry, 2016) in their path to advancement. Although Black people make up more than 13% of the United States' population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), Black faculty comprise (DOE, 2019) approximately only 6% of all full-time faculty, which drops to 2% for Black women.

As researchers, we have conducted interviews with STEM faculty across race and gender groups about their career experiences, focusing on challenges and possible interventions. Our research team consisted of three women: one East Asian American researcher, one South Asian American researcher, and one white researcher. As non-Black researchers, we cannot know fully what Black faculty experience. In this action-oriented article aimed at dismantling privilege within higher education, we draw upon interviews with Black STEM faculty to center and share their experiences and identify strategies to support them as a form of our praxis.

Our research suggests that Black faculty members feel more invisible and devalued for their work than their peers. Black STEM women also struggle to find collaborators who treat them with respect. Black faculty describe needing to develop a solid foundation of trust with colleagues to ensure that their ideas and contributions will be valued and credited fairly in their research collaborations and departmental life.

Yet, it should not be Black faculty members' responsibility to develop that trust. Non-Black faculty can implement several action items—praxis—to create more inclusive environments. Some of these suggestions come directly from the Black faculty in our sample, other items reflect stories from Black faculty whose colleagues have created more inclusive spaces, and others come from our responses to the experiences we have heard. We aim to offer concrete actions beyond reading lists,

recognizing that the items below are just the first step on a steep staircase that we, as non-Black academics, must climb to address inequalities within our departments and organizations.

Treat your colleagues with respect and recognize them as whole individuals *always*, not just when anti-Black violence makes headlines. Your Black colleagues have rich lives both inside and outside of academia. Make space for your colleagues to talk about their experiences without making these conversations about yourself. Make time to take them out for coffee or lunch, allowing for one-on-one conversations that build personal connections and trust. Ask your Black colleagues about their research, teaching, and their broader lives.

With that said, if your Black colleagues are not enthusiastic about engaging with you, do not push the conversation—they do not owe you their friendship. Respect academic communities built by faculty of Color for faculty of Color, like writing groups or mutual mentoring groups (Ong et al., 2018). All relationships take time and effort; do not assume your relationship with Black faculty will flourish after one coffee break. Value your colleagues and their work. Pronounce their names correctly, respect personal boundaries around physical contact (not everyone welcomes hugs or handshakes), and never touch their hair— yes, this still happens (Williams & Gibney, 2014).

Racism and microaggressions are constant (McCoy, 2020), not only when anti-Black violence makes the news. Avoid using your time with colleagues of Color to process your own emotions, as this places an unnecessary burden on Black faculty to perform emotional labor. Bringing up news about violence against Black people with Black colleagues can be obtuse and potentially triggering. Expressing your surprise at something all too familiar for Black colleagues who have experienced racism their whole lives can be hurtful.

Take constructive feedback from Black colleagues seriously: apologize gracefully and commit to doing better. Non-Black academics must recognize their contributions to racism. Even those who seek to be allies sometimes get things wrong; it takes time to build trust. Effective allyship takes continual work, commitment, and introspection. Recognize mistakes without letting emotions get in the way and move forward thoughtfully to avoid repeating mistakes. If you are given feedback from a Black colleague that you have done something problematic, acknowledge it, thank them, and engage in self-reflection to avoid repeating your error. Calling in your behavior is an act of trust from the person doing the call-in.[2] Shutting down or acting defensively makes that person less likely to feel comfortable pointing out moments when you can do better. When non-Black people respond to concerns with anger, fear, and guilt (DiAngelo, 2018), it perpetuates white supremacy and makes it difficult to create meaningful change or relationships.

Hire Black faculty across levels and actively mentor them towards promotion. Be intentional in hiring junior and senior Black faculty to create a critical mass, such as through cluster hires, to help prevent tokenism and inequitable divisions of labor. Recognize the excellence of these colleagues and how their expertise might inform your work. At the same time, offer to read draft grant proposals, papers, book chapters, and op-eds and support their teaching, mentoring, and service work.

Provide Black colleagues with both formal and informal networking opportunities (Gasman & Nguyen, 2019). If you come across resources pertaining to your colleagues' research, pass the information along. If you have a contact in their subfield, make the introduction.

Read, engage with, and cite your Black colleagues. Read the work of Black colleagues and bring it into conversation with your work, citing them consistently to avoid appropriating their intellectual labor. Assess how faculty scholarship in non-generalist venues is evaluated in tenure and promotion reviews and recognize the intellectual rigor of so-called specialist or subfield journals. The *#CiteBlackWomen* campaign notes that "As Black women, we are often overlooked, sidelined, and undervalued. Although we are intellectually prolific, we are rarely the ones that make up the canon."[3] Engaging with the scholarship of Black colleagues enriches and deepens research traditions and widens the canon in important ways.

Collaborate equitably with colleagues while avoiding predatory collaboration. Consider possible connection points between your research and that of your Black colleagues. Do not pressure colleagues to collaborate but look for potential opportunities. When collaborating with Black colleagues, explicitly discuss and document the division of labor and authorship, recognizing the importance of crediting their role and insights. Develop inclusive and equitable collaborations that credit each person's contributions fairly (Misra et al., 2017).[4]

Refuse to participate in panels that are not diverse without overburdening Black faculty. Black faculty often find themselves overrepresented within service

roles, which may be undervalued, while they are underrepresented in opportunities to discuss their research, which tend to be more highly valued. At both the departmental or campus level or the disciplinary level, explain to organizers that you only serve on panels that are diverse by race and gender (Tulshyan, 2019). If there are too few Black faculty in your department or on campus to serve on particular panels, suggest hiring more Black faculty in the area as a solution. In organizing panels, add a statement acknowledging your commitment to diversity.

Ensure that teaching in your department centers on folks of Color. Do not expect Black colleagues to cover diversity for the department. Encourage all faculty to diversify the curriculum (Sathy & Hogan, 2019), course offerings, and syllabi[5], ensuring that all students see themselves in the courses they take. Ensure that Black faculty have opportunities to teach courses they would like to teach, recognizing the impact on students of having faculty of Color offering required courses and not just electives. At the same time, recognize that Black faculty often face negative teaching evaluations (Smith & Hawkins, 2011) from students with anti-Black sentiments and develop more holistic forms of evaluating teaching, such as peer review models.[6]

Make invisible service work visible. Provide faculty with transparent information[7] about advising and mentoring responsibilities, departmental and university committee roles, and other service tasks, including who is serving in what roles. Have explicit discussions (Jager et al., 2019) about how much time different commitments require and how service is valued in your department. Rebalance service to ensure Black faculty, especially Black women (Turner, 2002), do not have a higher service

load, taking into account informal service performed by Black faculty (Jacobs et al., 2002), including mentoring students of Color, inclusion efforts, and community-engaged work. Recognize and value this work by including it in faculty reviews.

Value community-engaged work. When faculty members carry out community-engaged work, they recognize the value and importance of that work (Johnson, 2020). Black faculty may be more likely to work with broader communities and should not have the time spent on that work count against them in personnel processes. Publicize and reward the faculty's work translating their research and engaging with wider communities (McCall et al., 2016).

Ensure all voices are heard in departmental decision-making. Create intentional spaces in meetings for sharing perspectives and ideas without fear of retaliation, such as closed votes or anonymous feedback polls through smartphone apps. Polling and open-ended feedback surveys allow for transparent communication without identifying specific people (Eyre, 2020). Practice active listening and affirm ideas while properly crediting them. Ask Black faculty for their input on items that are not directly related to equity and diversity.

Nominate a colleague of Color for an award or leadership position that is not directly related to diversity. There are many different awards and leadership opportunities at campus and disciplinary levels. Regularly nominate Black faculty members for awards and opportunities related to their research, teaching, or interests (Collins, 2011). If Black faculty members are interested in leadership opportunities related to diversity—support

them. But do not assume that these are the only kinds of opportunities for Black faculty.

Learn the institutionalized history of racism on your campus. Commit to learning the role of race in the history of your institution. Is your university, campus buildings, or campus awards named after slave owners or colonizers? Bring this history into your classroom, department meetings, or conversations with colleagues, and act to unmake. Advocate by acknowledging this history as part of developing a more inclusive campus environment.

Take reflexivity training and bystander training with a social justice lens. Ask that your department and organization provide training on these topics.[8] Ensure the people conducting the training recognize anti-Black racism and are appropriately compensated for their expertise. Provide training often and consistently, encouraging white colleagues to attend.

Take responsibility for creating an inclusive environment. Research existing resources on your campus and within your professional associations regarding support for faculty of Color. Compile a list and visibly post resources on your department and association websites and bulletin boards in common areas. In meetings, track how much time and space white people take up. Hold inclusive Zoom meetings by selecting a moderator at every meeting to call on people raising their virtual hand (Hogan & Sathy, 2020). Point out when white colleagues interrupt or dominate conversations.

Addressing inequality in academia is a never-ending process involving consistent,

ongoing action. It is critical to note: Black academics are not a monolith with one singular experience. Take intersectionality into consideration when thinking through action items to address how systemic racism intersects with gender, sexuality, and nationality to affect Black women, Black queer, and Black migrant academics in different ways; recognizing, for example, that a queer Black foreign-born woman may have different experiences than a Black U.S.-born straight cis man, even within the same field or department.

This list is by no means exhaustive but represents a starting point towards further inclusive action. Investigating and unlearning how racism seeps into our institutions and consciousnesses is uncomfortable but necessary. We must all learn to internalize critique gracefully and without defensiveness.

Black faculty have long developed ways to cope with marginalization within academia. It is past time for non-Black faculty members to work to create more inclusive environments. It can be risky to call out anti-Black racism in our workplaces and organizations, but all non-Black faculty need to step up, take those risks, and actively be a part of the solution through praxis. Only active effort can create an environment in which Black faculty can thrive.

References

Adam, H. J., Barratt-Pugh, C., Jackson-Barrett, L., Somerville, R. S. (2020, July 8). Children's books must be diverse, or kids will grow up believing White is superior. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/childrens-books-must-be-diverse-or-kids-will-grow-up-believing-white-is-superior-140736

Collins, S. M. (2011). Diversity in the post affirmative action labor market: A proxy for racial progress? *Critical Sociology*, *37*(5), 521–540.

Buchanan, L., Bui, Q., & Patel, J. K. (2020, June 6). Black Lives Matter may be the largest movement in U.S. history. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html

Daut, M. L. (2019, July 28). Becoming full professor while Black. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/becoming-full-professor-while-black/

DiAngelo, R. J. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for White people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.

Eyre, P. (2020, May 14). 10 reasons you NEED a polling app in your employee comms meetings. *Vevox*. https://www.vevox.com/blog/9-reasons-you-need-a-polling-app-in-your-virtual-meetings

Gasman, M., & Nguyen, T. (2019). *Making Black scientists: A call to action*. Harvard University Press.

Hogan, K. A., & Sathy, V. (2020, April 7). 8 ways to be more inclusive in your zoom teaching. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/8-ways-to-be-more-inclusive-in-your-zoom-teaching/

Jacobs, L., Cintrón, J., & Canton, C. E. (2002). *The politics of survival in academia: Narratives of inequity, resilience, and success*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Jager, A. J., Culpepper, D., Misra, J., & O'Meara, K. A. (2019, July 24). Needed: Allies for equitable faculty workloads. *Inside Higher Ed*. https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2019/07/24/five-things-faculty-members-should-do-now-help-create-more-equitable-workplace

Johnson, A. W. (2020, June 30). Institutional mixed messaging. *Inside Higher Ed*. https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/06/30/all-faculty-members-should-work-diversity-and-equity-initiatives-and-be-rewarded

Johnson, T. (2020, June 11). When Black people are in pain, White people just join book clubs.

The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/white-antiracist-allyship-book-clubs/2020/06/11/9edcc766-abf5-11ea-94d2-d7bc43b26bf9_story.html

Matthew, P. A. (2016, November 23). What is faculty diversity worth to a university? *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/11/what-is-faculty-diversity-worth-to-a-university/508334/

McCall, L., Hetland, G., Kalleberg, A., Nelson, A., Ovink, S., Schalet, A., Smit-Doerr, L., Lamont, M., Lareau, A., & Wray, M. (2016). What counts? Evaluating public communication in tenure and promotion. *American Sociological Association.* https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/tf_report_what_counts_evaluating_public_communication_in_tenure_and_promotion_final_august_2016.pdf

McCoy, H. (2020, June 12). The life of a Black academic: Tired and terrorized. *Inside Higher Ed*. https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/06/12/terror-many-black-academics-are-experiencing-has-left-them-absolutely-exhausted

Misra, J., Smith-Doerr, L., Dasgupta, N., Weaver, G., & Normanly, J. (2017). Collaboration and gender equity among academic scientists. *Social Sciences*, *6*(1), 25. doi: 10.3390/socsci6010025

Mumford, T. (2015, February 7). The Black Lives Matter reading list: Books to change the world. *MPR News*. https://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/02/07/books-black-lives-matter

Ong, M., Smith, J. M., & Ko, L. T. (2018). Counterspaces for women of Color in STEM higher education: Marginal and central spaces for persistence and success. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, *55*(2), 206–245.

Perry, A. (2016, November 11). Black professors speak out after Trump victory about the routine racism of academia. *The Root*. https://www.theroot.com/black-professors-speak-out-after-trump-victory-about-th-1790857700

Petrovic, G. (2006). Praxis. In V. Kiernan, L. Harris, T. Bottomore, & R. Miliband (Eds.), *A dictionary of Marxist thought* (pp. 435–440). Blackwell.

Sathy, V., & Hogan, K. A. (2019, July 22). How to make your teaching more inclusive. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-make-your-teaching-more-inclusive/

Smith, B., & Hawkins, B. (2011). Examining student evaluations of Black college faculty: Does race matter? *The Journal of Negro Education*, *80*(2), 149–162.

Tulshyan, T. (2019, September 24). What it will take to improve diversity at conferences? *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2019/09/what-it-will-take-to-improve-diversity-at-conferences

Turner, C. S. V. (2002). Women of Color in academe. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *73*(1), 74–93.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). QuickFacts United States. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/RHI225219#qf-headnote-a

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *The Condition of Education 2019* (NCES 2019-144), Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty.

Williams, K. C., & Gibney, S. (2014, October 31). Surviving blackademia. *Inside Higher Ed*. https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2014/10/31/tips-surviving-and-thriving-black-female-professor-essay

Wingfield, A. H. (2009). *Doing business with beauty: Black women, hair salons, and the racial enclave economy*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Footnotes

[1] The authors intentionally capitalize the "Black" throughout this article, while keeping "white" lowercase. They acknowledge the contested, cross-disciplinary dialogue regarding this choice, and yet argue that whiteness does not represent a shared identity of culture and history in the same way as Blackness. They claim this sentiment is echoed and supported by many mainstream media outlets including Columbia Journalism Review, the Associated Press, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and The New York Times.

[2] For more information on Call In vs Call Out culture, see the following resource from Dr. Loretta Ross: https://www.speakoutnow.org/content/speakout-ed-talks-calling-calling-out-culture-compassionate-accountability-these-times

[3] https://www.citeblackwomencollective.org/

[4] See the following resource for examples of research collaboration best practices: https://www.umass.edu/advance/sites/default/files/inline-files/UMass%20ADVANCE%20Research%20Collaboration%20Best%20Practices.pdf

[5] https://researchguides.library.tufts.edu/c.php?g=954214&p=7079725

[6] http://cet.usc.edu/resources/instructor-course-evaluation/

[7] https://facultyworkloadandrewardsproject.umd.edu/index.html

[8] https://advance.fiu.edu/programs/bystander-leadership/index.html