

Giving Voice to Underrepresented Faculty

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We often observe that the variability of COACHE results, on any parameter, is greater between faculty members at the same institution than between institutions. Some faculty subgroups on your campus are probably feeling less satisfied and less supported than others. This module—designed by COACHE with support from a provost, our “Visiting Practitioner”—is meant to help you arrive at the right way to engage your faculty about differences in their experiences.

1. Why is it important to specifically engage faculty from underrepresented groups?

In our experience working with institutions across the board, one pattern that emerges is that faculty from underrepresented groups are consistently less satisfied with their jobs and with their home institutions than are faculty from majority groups¹. This continues to hold true when we parse the COACHE data by [race and ethnicity](#), by [gender](#), as well as when we slice it into even smaller cohorts (consider, for example, women in STEM disciplines).

There are many reasons for this comparative dissatisfaction, of course: the absence of a critical mass of others within one’s institution, the often-unrecognized and uncompensated racial, cultural, and/or gender tax that pervades higher education, the very real bias that exists throughout our industry, to name just a few. Remember, the narrative or story of one’s professional satisfaction differs depending on one’s lived identities.

Many of these faculty feel “excluded from an informal network” within their departments. This can amount to increased disadvantages as the marginalized faculty members find themselves having less clarity about tenure processes, institutional policies, and how generally to navigate the academic landscape to their advantage.

It is thus critical that you involve these cohorts as part of your overall engagement strategy. Providing a space for underrepresented groups of faculty to discuss the COACHE findings will achieve several goals:

- it will provide an important and powerful voice to colleagues who often feel marginalized;
- it will allow these particular cohorts access to power;
- it will provide institutional leadership with an opportunity to learn about strategies that will help particular groups;
- and it will signal an important commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Based on our observations of and interviews with COACHE partners, our team strongly suggests that you work closely with various cohorts *separately*, yet *concurrently*, from the overall faculty. Provide opportunities for groups of underrepresented faculty to come together, in small cohorts, to discuss



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the data. Finally, we suggest that you approach these collaborations openly and transparently, informing *all* faculty of your plan to gather various cohorts together.

2. When should the engagement happen?

Engagement with faculty from underrepresented groups should be an ongoing enterprise at every college and university, but it is particularly important to organize conversations during Year 2 of the COACHE partnership.

COACHE partners suggest disseminating the COACHE data and reports to the *entire* faculty in the fall of your second COACHE year because it maintains the momentum of the survey and it signals a commitment to transparency and collaboration.

Typically, the dissemination of the reports is followed by meetings and conversations about what the data reveals. It takes time to unpack all of the stories from the COACHE data. Those meetings are then followed by invitations to various constituencies to further interpret the results and to brainstorm ideas for implementing change. It is here that partners typically will isolate cohorts of faculty from underrepresented populations to give them a special voice in the conversation.

3. What are promising practices for engaging your faculty from underrepresented groups?

Several COACHE partners have successfully provided a forum for underrepresented groups to explore and discuss the data. At Loyola University Maryland, the Vice President for Academic Affairs organized a series of conversations with the faculty during the spring semester of Year 2. As part of that effort, she convened separate meetings with faculty of color, non-tenure-track, faculty, and women faculty, to dissect and discuss the COACHE findings. Wisely, she included overall demographic information about the entire faculty so as to provide context for the specific COACHE data. Those conversations led to the resurrection of certain affinity groups and ultimately informed the recommendations that emerged from Loyola's "Faculty Affairs Committee."

Other approaches have worked as well. Skidmore College has established a working group that meets monthly to explore ways in which the COACHE data can help bring about concrete climate change. The "COACHE Collaborators," as this working group is called, is made up of one member of each academic department/program carefully selected to maximize broad representation among the faculty. They have a wide mandate, but they have been charged by the Dean of the Faculty to pay particular attention to the ways in which the College might further support faculty from underrepresented groups. To date, the COACHE Collaborators have helped create model personnel procedures, proposed expanding the family leave policy, modified the mass email use policy, shared best practices for building inclusive departments, among other initiatives.

Involving your Chief Diversity Officer in the entire process is wise. The CDO could participate as a member/moderator of your cohort conversations. At a minimum, sharing the COACHE data with the CDO and encouraging her/him/them to help define institutional priorities and solutions can be a key component for success. Additionally, it might be difficult to incorporate perspectives in cases where

the number of minority or female faculty in certain departments is too low. The CDO's overarching grasp of these issues may be even more valuable then. However, you might also consider including emeriti faculty from the underrepresented groups.

4. What about confidentiality?

This is a critical question that all schools must consider. Should a promise of confidentiality accompany the invitation to these meetings? Faculty from underrepresented or marginalized groups often look for the pledge of confidentiality—or at least an assurance that the meeting will be a safe space in which to discuss sensitive topics—in order to commit to meeting with CAOs and/or COACHE Advisory teams. There are real power differentials in that room. Moreover, the conversations that inevitably emerge are ones that typically focus on the myriad challenges faced by faculty from underrepresented groups and the comparative less challenging professional experiences of faculty from majority groups. Such sensitive topics require confidence on the part of the speaker that she/he/they can be open and frank. At a minimum, ground rules for difficult and potentially emotionally-charged conversations should be set prior to the commencement of the meetings. In the end, encouraging open and candid conversation is key. Questions of confidentiality are thus important to consider prior to scheduling the gatherings.

A strategy to consider here would be allowing the CDO, or facilitator of these group discussions, to uninvite the concerned senior administrator/s (i.e. Provost, Chief Faculty Affairs Officer or others). The senior administrators can be assured that the meeting facilitator will provide detailed and unfiltered, but anonymized, notes from the meeting to them. This would help encourage more frank discussions with no fear of attributions to individual speakers. In such cases, the fact of the senior administrations' recusal must be clearly communicated when invitations to participate in the meeting are sent to the faculty groups.

5. What unanticipated issues can I expect?

It's hard to anticipate every possible development in these important conversations, but one should keep a few things in mind.

- 1) It is easy for these conversations to start with a clear focus on the COACHE data and the survey results and then quickly shift to national trends in higher education. It is important to remember that the COACHE data is both school-specific and comparative. Doubtless, other schools are experiencing similar challenges, but the COACHE results are unique to your institution. While connecting campus circumstances to a broader narrative should be encouraged, the participants' focus ought to be turned back to the institution-specific COACHE data.
- 2) It will be hard for some faculty from majority groups to accept (or understand) the perspectives of faculty from underrepresented groups. Recognizing that reality at the beginning of the process will help you navigate these sometimes-difficult waters. (See, ['Managing Difficult Conversations – Advice for Academic Leaders'](#))

- 3) Success in partnering with faculty from underrepresented groups will depend on how early those groups are brought into the process. COACHE encourages partner schools to engage faculty from underrepresented groups early in *Year 1*. If these faculty members feel invested in the entire COACHE process, from the very beginning, the chances of successfully moving to shared initiatives is dramatically improved.

6. Selected readings

[Understanding the historic challenges faced by underrepresented faculty:](#)

1. *Job Satisfaction Among Faculty of Color in Academe: Individual Survivors or Institutional Transformers?*
Author(s): Berta Vigil Laden and Linda Serra Hagedorn. Source: New Directions for Institutional Research, December 2002, Volume 2000, Issue 105, pp 57-66. Link: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/ir.10505>
2. *Racial Privilege in the Professoriate: An Exploration of Campus Climate, Retention, and Satisfaction*
Author(s): Uma M. Jayakumar, Tyrone C. Howard, Walter R. Allen & June C. Han. Source: The Journal of Higher Education, Volume 80, 2009, Issue 5, pp 538-563. Link: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00221546.2009.11779031?src=recsys>
3. *Gender differences and job satisfaction: a study of university teachers in the United States.*
Author(s): John O. Okpara, Michael Squillace and Emmanuel A. Erondou. Source: Women in Management Review, Vol. 20 Issue: 3, pp.177-190. Link: <https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420510591852>
4. *Faculty Job Satisfaction: Women and Minorities in Peril.*
Author(s): Martha Wingard Tack and Carol Logan Patitu. Source: ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 4, 1992. Link: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED353885.pdf>

Supporting the success and satisfaction of underrepresented faculty

1. *Improving Campus Climate to Support Faculty Diversity and Retention: A Pilot Program for New Faculty*
Author(s): Fred Piercy, Valerie Giddings, Katherine Allen, Benjamin Dixon, Peggy Meszaros and Karen Joest. Source: Innovative Higher Education, January 2005, Volume 30, Issue 1, pp 53-66. Link: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs10755-005-3297-z.pdf>
2. *The Truly Diverse Faculty: New Dialogues in American Higher Education*
Editors: Stephanie A. Fryberg and Ernesto Javier Martínez
Link: <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9781137456052>

3. *Effectively Recruiting Faculty of Color at Highly Selective Institutions: A School of Education Case Study.*

Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 2011, Vol. 4, No. 4, 212–222.

Link: <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0025130>

4. *Mission possible: Empowering institutions with strategies for change for women of color STEM faculty.*

Author(s): Jovanovic, J., & Armstrong, M. A. Source: *Peer Review*, 16, 21–24, (2014). Link:

<https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/mission-possible-empowering-institutions-strategies-change>

5. *The Revolving Door for Underrepresented Minority Faculty in Higher Education: An Analysis from the Campus Diversity Initiative.*

Authors: José Moreno, Daryl G. Smith, Alma R. Clayton-Pedersen, Sharon Parker, and Daniel Hiroyuki Teraguchi. Source: A 2006 research brief from the James Irvine Foundation Campus Diversity Initiative Evaluation Project. Link: <http://hdl.handle.net/10244/50>

6. *Bringing Accountability to Life: How Savvy Data Users Find the “Actionable N” to Improve Equity and Sustainability in Higher Education.*

Authors: Dowd, A. C., Witham, K., Hanson, D., Ching, C.D., Liera, R. and Castro, M.F.. 2018. American Council on Education, The Pennsylvania State University Center for the Study of Higher Education, and the University of Southern California Center for Urban Education. Link: <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Viewpoints-Bringing-Accountability-to-Life.pdf>

7. Email template for communicating a plan to engage underrepresented faculty.

Dear colleagues,

As you know, we continue to partner with COACHE to try to improve the professional lives of our faculty. Most of you took the COACHE survey last spring and we remain very grateful for your time and effort. You may further recall that COACHE delivered the data and reports to us this past summer. The COACHE Advisory team (and/or the Provost’s office) is currently working with the Faculty Executive Committee on a comprehensive strategy to disseminate and discuss these data.

As part of our effort to engage faculty, we will be holding a series of meetings. We will, of course, discuss present and discuss the COACHE data with the entire faculty. It is important that we gather together, as a collective group, to explore the data and the possibilities for implementing change. We will also convene meetings with specific groups on campus, including faculty of color, women faculty, tenure-track faculty, and non-tenure track faculty. We believe it is critical that we provide a forum for cohorts of faculty who often feel minoritized. Indeed, they, like all faculty, have an important voice in the future of our



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institution. The details of those meetings/conversations are being worked out. For now, I simply wanted to alert you to the overall plan.

Very truly yours,

8. Sample meeting agenda

Topic: Provost/VPAA Conversation with Faculty of Color

Meeting objectives:

- (1) To get acquainted with the COACHE data and what it reveals about faculty experiences here
- (2) To begin the work toward a shared understanding of what might be done to improve the experience of all faculty.

Facilitator: _____ *Note taker:* _____ *Time keeper:* _____

To prepare for this meeting, please:

- (1) Review the COACHE data/reports
- (2) Reflect on what's worked and where we've fallen short at this campus concerning our work in faculty development, diversity and inclusion, work/life, and other faculty affairs.

Schedule [90 minutes]

# min	Activity
15	Introductions, goals, and mutual expectations
15	<p>What is COACHE?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A diagnostic and comparative management tool; a snapshot, not report card. • A beginning, not an end: Opportunity for rich conversation and informed actions. • Underlying premise: Improving the faculty experience (by faculty <i>and</i> administrators) improves the student experience, institutional climate, and educational quality. <p>What does our COACHE data tell us?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas of strength (“bragging rights”) and areas of concern (room to grow) • Areas of concern: Group differences (women, faculty of color, midcareer, NTT) • Closer look: Faculty of color <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Top reason to leave institution Best and worst aspects Where experiences differ most

15	<p>What does our own data tell us?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographics overall, by rank, and hired in last 10 years <p><i>Conversation:</i> Distribution of faculty of color across curricula / departments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty retention: Turnover Quotient (TQ) (See “Revolving Door,” 2006) Best practice to track replacement rates, not just departures (net change/new hires); accounts for big hiring years. <p><i>Conversation:</i> Retention: faculty who stay or faculty who stay thriving? High profile departures versus overall landscape (perception/local experience)?</p>
15	<p>Possible areas of inquiry and action: What we’re thinking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on midcareer professors [or insert other areas of focus here; place this conversation in context of other issues] Faculty salary equity study Chair workshop on faculty evaluation best practices, implicit bias, hiring <p><i>Conversation:</i> How best to create cross-department networking and support?</p>
20 or more	<p>Conversation</p> <p>What do you think? Are we reading the results correctly? What have we missed, what more can we understand?</p>

adjourn

Review next steps from this meeting. *For example:*

- Reach out to the offices, committees, etc. who could partner to advance priorities
- Follow up with COACHE about connecting with other partner institutions to explore promising practices, including any questions raised.

Plan for next meeting:

- What questions need to be addressed? Who is missing from the conversation and how should we go about inviting the absent voices?
- Assess what worked well about this meeting and what we would have liked to change, below:

What we liked (plus)

What we'll change (delta)