

Recruiting and Retaining African American Male Administrators at Predominantly White Institutions

DeWitt T. Scott
Chicago State University

The primary objective of this study is the development and articulation of research-based suggestions for strengthening recruitment and retention practices of African American male senior-level administrators at predominantly White colleges and universities. A contextual analysis of conditions surrounding current African American male administrators at these institutions, as well as ways these conditions affect Black male administrator recruitment and retention, is illustrated. Conclusions suggest that responsibility for increasing the number of Black male administrators at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), as well as their length of service at these institutions, is shared between institutional leaders and aspiring African American male administrators. Recommendations in this essay are directed at both parties.

Keywords: African-American male administrators, PWI, administration

In recent years, scholarly literature on higher education has given increased attention to the state and presence of Black college students and faculty (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000; Banks, 1984; Blackwell, 1989; Hughes, 2004; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; King & Watts, 2004; Moore, 2001; Morales & Troutman, 2004; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Stanley, 2006; Watson, 2001). Researchers have attempted to find causes and solutions to the underrepresentation of Black students and faculty, particularly at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Developed from this research is a collection of studies that concentrate exclusively on Black males as students and faculty, and the inability of this group to graduate college and obtain faculty positions to the same degree as their White and female counterparts (Green, 2000; Harper, 2006, 2009, 2012; Hopson, 2000; Kunjufu, 2005; Marks, 2000; Perma, 2001; Rowley, 2000). While such studies have proven to be informative and valuable, they have only partly examined the experience of Black males at PWIs.

Often ignored in the higher education literature is the experience of Black males in upper-level administrative positions at PWIs. This lack of literature on Black male administrators is directly related to the lack of deliberate attention PWIs have given to increasing the number of Black males in their administrative ranks, particularly in comparison to the consideration given to increasing the number of Black male students and faculty. To date, there has not been a deliberate, comprehensive effort among PWIs to significantly diversify their administrative ranks in ways comparable to student and faculty diversification efforts. Statistics show that in fall 2011, Black men held 3.6% of all executive, senior, and upper administrative positions in U.S. higher education institutions (Howard, 2014). That number includes historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) where Black males are overrepresented in executive administrative positions (Gasman & Commodore, 2014).

The fundamental aim of this essay is to shine light on ways PWIs can increase the recruitment and retention of Black male administrators. Institutions that are committed to the ideals of diversity and inclusion should model such standards not only in their student and faculty ranks, but in senior administration as well. Theories proposed throughout this article will not only contribute to the gap in research literature on the topic of Black male administrators, but will also

present practical ideas for institutions seeking to diversify their administrations as well as African American males aspiring to senior administrative positions in higher education.

Literature Review

Considering that the investigation of the experiences and history of Black male administrators at PWIs is scarce in higher education scholarly literature, topics reviewed to contextualize this subject include administrative hiring in higher education and Black male academic performance at the college level.

Research on administrative hiring in higher education has called into question the supposed meritocracy of academia. Data have shown that, traditionally, the majority of administrative positions at PWIs are obtained through personal and professional networks rather than job performance (Dingerson, Rodman, & Wade, 1980). Through the “old boy” network, PWI leaders ask friends and colleagues within their networks to recommend individuals for positions (Dingerson et al., 1980, p. 11). The main issue with old boy networks is that they tend to be homogenous in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and educational background. Considering that the face of PWI leadership historically has been White, middle-class males from elite educational backgrounds, the old boy networks usually produce candidates and hires of the same demographics. Such practices disproportionately disadvantage women and people of color, which adds context to the low representation of Black male administrators at PWIs.

Analyzing the old boy network from a different perspective is Jackson and Leon’s (2010) study on social closure theory. Social closure theory is defined as the preservation of opportunity and resources by the dominant group to the exclusion of non-dominant groups. Jackson and Leon (2010) assert that top leadership positions in higher education are not made widely available to minorities and women as a result of social closure theory. Consequently, a glass ceiling develops that makes it extremely difficult for minorities and women to obtain and maintain senior administrative positions at PWIs. Similar to the old boy network, social closure locks out individuals of unfamiliar communities and backgrounds from equal opportunities in higher education administration (Jackson & Leon, 2010).

Additionally, literature on Black male academic performance in college was analyzed, specifically to gain a better understanding of the Black male administrator candidate pool. Kim and Hargrove (2013) used resiliency theory as a conceptual framework for examining and explaining Black male academic performance. Considering the dismal statistics of African American men who succeed in college (Allen, 1992; Brown, 2011; Harper, 2006, 2009, 2012; Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998; McJamerson, 1991; Sutton & Terrell, 1997), Black males who have matriculated to doctoral programs and placed themselves in position to successfully compete for faculty and administrative jobs in the academy have exhibited resiliency to a great degree. Prayer, peer support, and campus engagement are all factors that were identified as contributing to the academic success of the young men in Kim and Hargrove’s (2013) study. These factors were reiterated in Maton et al.’s (1998) study along with academic engagement of parents and strong support from extended family. Both studies critically examined ways that the number of Black males that succeed in college can be increased, thereby expanding the Black male candidate pool for higher education administrative positions.

Current State of Black Male Administrators

Lack of literature exploring the issue of Black male administrators at PWIs can be attributed to one glaring fact: there are just not many Black males in these positions. Historically, the large majority of senior administrative positions at PWIs have been held by White men (Chenoweth, 1998; Jackson, 2000, 2003; Roach, 2001). A number of reasons are given for the

low representation of Black male PWI senior administrators. Chief among them are the feelings of alienation and isolation many Black males experience on PWI campuses, regardless whether they are students, faculty, or administrators (Allen, 1992; Allen et al., 2000; Banks, 1984; Bell, 1994; Bjork & Thompson, 1989; Blackwell, 1989; Hughes, 2004; Jackson, 2001b; Jones, 2001; Stanley, 2006; Watson, 2001). Experiences in the former two roles are critical considering that the average administrator was once a student and faculty member before moving to administration (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001). If Black males have unsatisfactory experiences as students and faculty members, it is highly unlikely that they will pursue administrative roles.

Jackson (2001b) specifically addresses the issue of isolation in his study of African American administrators. According to Jackson (2001b), Blacks at PWIs often remark that they find unwelcoming climates on campus. A lack of appreciation, recognition, and acknowledgement of Black culture, excellence, and achievement is prevalent at many of these institutions, causing significant numbers of Black students, faculty, and administrators to feel disconnected from the larger campus community. Such experiences can compel promising and talented Black male administrators to leave an institution or academia altogether and ultimately reinforce the lack of Black male administrative presence at these institutions.

Institution-Based Solutions

Strategies for remedying the lack of Black male administrators at PWIs can be categorized in two ways: institution-based solutions and individual-based solutions. Institutions can begin by giving the same amount of attention to diversifying senior administration that is given to diversifying student and faculty ranks. Many PWIs are eager to portray their campuses as pillars of inclusion and diversity and often point to initiatives and strategies implemented to recruit and retain increasing numbers of minority students and faculty (Guillory, 2001). Nothing says diversity and inclusion more than diversifying the ranks of senior administration. According to Jackson (2001a), the truest measure of an institution's commitment to diversity is displayed in the demographic composition of its administration. Compounded with this thought is Fikes' (2004) point that many PWIs spare no effort, energy, or resource to recruit Black men for their athletic teams. If even a portion of these efforts were directed to recruiting Black males for administration, underrepresentation would not be an issue.

Secondly, PWIs will need to do more to encourage current Black male faculty and graduate students to consider administrative careers as options. This solution is deeply connected to the issue of isolation and alienation described by Jackson (2001b). If Black male graduate students and faculty at PWIs feel welcomed, appreciated, and respected, the possibility of these men seriously considering administrative careers will increase. PWI leaders can suggest certain leadership and minor administrative roles to high-performing and promising Black male faculty on campus to introduce them to the field of administration. Such acts not only show Black males that institutional leaders value their work and potential, but it also gives these men the opportunity to display their capabilities as leaders. Those who are successful and enjoy the work can contemplate pursuing larger responsibilities and roles.

Lastly, PWIs will need to begin to seriously consider Black male administrators from HBCUs as viable candidates for administrative hiring. Oftentimes, the disregard for HBCU leaders extends to Black administrators and leaders who may have graduated from HBCUs (Chenoweth, 1998; Roach, 2001). Considering that a large percentage of African Americans who hold doctoral degrees attended HBCUs as undergraduates, avoiding HBCU graduates significantly decreases the amount of Black males available to compete for open PWI administrative positions (Brown & Davis, 2001; Kunjufu, 2002). Arguments are often made that PWI boards of trustees do not tend to want to hire individuals who are not familiar with the nuances and particulars of

PWIs. As sound as this argument may appear, it does not hold up when one considers that a large number of former Black male PWI graduates and administrators who take positions at HBCUs are usually not recruited back to lead PWIs (Roach, 2001). This sends a message that HBCU administrators are inferior and unable to manage a PWI campus effectively. Such messages prevent PWIs from considering viable Black male candidates with proven track records of success, and repel promising Black male HBCU administrators from pursuing PWI positions because of perceived discrimination and prejudice.

Individual-Based Solutions

It is important to understand that the entire burden for increasing the number of Black male administrators at PWIs does not rest solely on the institutions. Not every PWI is afflicted with racist climates that ignore talented Black men and former HBCU leaders. There are some instances where qualified Black males will be fairly considered for positions if they are prepared for the opportunity. Below are some suggestions for Black males who aspire to be PWI administrators on ways they can position themselves for success.

Black men who desire to become administrators at PWIs must first do everything in their power to learn as much about their institution and the different departments on campus. These men should become experts on the inner workings of their campuses, the administrative functions of the departments in which they currently work, and higher education overall. Keeping abreast on the latest scholarly literature on higher education leadership, as well as closely observing and conversing with current and prior leaders who have been successful can be advantageous. The key is that the aspiring administrator should prepare as if he will become the president of the institution (Guillory, 2001).

In addition to acquiring institutional knowledge, aspiring Black male administrators must increase their participation in national networks, organizations, and leadership preparation programs committed to working with aspiring college administrators. Administrator hopefuls need to make sure that institutional leaders know who they are and realize that they desire administrative positions. The bold truth is that administrative hiring at any institution almost always boils down to a referral or endorsement from a respected member of the academic community (Chenoweth, 1998; Roach, 2001; Schexnider, 2013). Black males who do not connect with influential PWI stakeholders will typically find themselves on the outside looking in when positions become available. Participation in national associations and conferences can be helpful in promoting an individual's abilities and qualifications (Chenoweth, 1998).

A critical suggestion for Black males striving for senior administrative positions at PWIs is to resist being pigeonholed into certain administrative roles. Many Black male administrators at PWIs frequently find themselves in positions such as Chief Diversity Coordinator or Director of Multicultural Student Affairs. Being forced into these and similar positions can send a message that the individual is incapable of contributing to the governing of an institution outside of racial matters. Despite the perceived benefits that such a position may afford, Black males who are serious about becoming executive-level administrators should avoid these positions. It is better to take a potentially lower-paying, less prestigious position that keeps one on a path to positions aligned with the senior administrative track, than to become stagnated as the campus administrative expert on racial issues (Guillory, 2001).

Lastly, in order to make themselves more attractive for positions, Black male administrators seeking positions at PWIs must develop adept fundraising abilities. Due to fiscal challenges related to a struggling economic climate and the increasing cost of higher education, fundraising has become an essential component of higher education administration (Pierce, 2012; Tractenberg, Kauvar, & Bogue, 2013; Suggs, 2014). Many institutions currently find themselves

in a position where they cannot survive without the additional revenue that fundraising initiatives bring (Schexnider, 2013). Administrators who can adequately raise funds or contribute valuable resources and networks to institutional capital campaigns instantly make themselves attractive candidates for senior administrative positions. Even institutions that have mediocre track records of diversifying senior administration will be forced to strongly consider hiring a Black male who demonstrates an above average ability to solicit significant financial capital. In order to help develop these skills, potential Black male administrators must inquire about becoming involved with the foundation and development offices on their respective campuses. Figuring out the nuances and duties of various fundraising responsibilities on campus allows one to gain a better understanding of what these endeavors demand and what roles best fit one's strengths (Guillory, 2001).

Implications

Recent actions and initiatives for attaining diversity and inclusion on college campuses have primarily targeted the student and faculty ranks. While admirable, diversifying senior administration has largely been neglected. Recruiting and retaining Black males for senior administrative positions at PWIs can be a significant step toward establishing such diversity.

In addition, many PWIs are realizing that providing access for Black male students is only part of the battle. Institutions must do all they can to support the academic success of the Black male students that they recruit and enroll. Increasing the numbers and presence of Black male administrators at PWIs can contribute to increased academic performance and persistence of these students. Research shows that students tend to perform better academically at institutions where they are represented demographically among institutional leadership (Konrad & Pfeffer, 1991). The same institutions that are invested in increasing success among their underrepresented populations would benefit from diversifying their senior administration.

The recommendations given here are not intended to be exhaustive, but they can serve as a foundation for strategies and actions for increasing Black male administrators at PWIs. As the nation seeks new ways of developing, delivering, and leading higher education, new practices and perspectives will be needed among the leadership. Recruiting and retaining Black male administrators at PWIs, a traditionally underrepresented group at these institutions, can possibly bring unique perspectives and experiences that can help advance an institution in new and innovative ways.

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