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September 2020
\$3.99



Women of Color Need Courageous Allies in the Academy

INSIGHT Into Diversity hosts an open dialogue with White and Black women addressing racial and gender equity in higher education

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University of Houston Makes Major Advancements in Faculty Diversity Thanks to Targeted Programs

By Mariah Stewart

Paula Myrick Short, PhD, the provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at University of Houston (UH) and senior vice chancellor for academic affairs of the UH System, has had a long and distinguished career as a higher education practitioner, often serving as the first woman in male-dominated spaces.

As an advocate for women and underrepresented groups, Short has led UH in achieving remarkable success in the hiring and promotion of diverse faculty. She began her position with the university in 2013; over the course of the next five years — from 2014 to 2019 — the number of ethnically and racially underrepresented faculty who are tenured or tenure-track has increased by an impressive 41.58 percent.

“I fully appreciate both challenges of the academy and am an advocate for women and underrepresented minorities,” Short says. “There are enormous contributions that can be made by them if we have an equitable and inclusive institution.”

Other significant growth in faculty diversity over the course of Short’s time at UH include the following:

- Black women tenured/tenure-track faculty increased 117%.
- Hispanic women tenured/tenure-track faculty increased 44%.
- Hispanic men tenured/tenure-track faculty increased 27%.
- Women tenured/tenure-track faculty increased 25.5%.

Short has been instrumental in establishing the recruitment, retention, and advancement strategies that make this kind of growth possible. She helped create the Cougar Chairs Leadership Academy for Department Chairs, the Foundations of Excellence initiative,



Dr. Short (third from left) has been instrumental in establishing innovative diversity, retention, and recruitment strategies at UH since her appointment in 2013.

Houston Guided Pathways to Success, and several other major initiatives for faculty, staff, and student success.

Center for ADVANCING UH Faculty Success

One of the largest projects launched under Short’s leadership is the Center for ADVANCING UH Faculty Success, which was funded by a \$3.3 million Institutional Transformation grant from the National Science Foundation. The center uses a data-driven approach to systemically transform institutional practices and campus climate in order to recruit, retain, and promote women and underrepresented faculty.

Aside from simply developing new methods for recruiting and supporting diverse faculty, the center tests and evaluates what it has put into practice. If a new program or resource consistently results in more diverse candidate pools, the center will move forward with the effort. Successful efforts that have come out of the center include required anti-bias training for faculty search committees and mid-career workshops for women in STEM.

Another major resource from the center is the Powerhouse Faculty

Recruitment Toolkit. Developed by Erika Henderson, associate provost for faculty recruitment, retention, equity, and diversity, the toolkit includes hiring strategies, guidelines, and practical suggestions.

In order to truly effect change, leaders at the center also developed search committee training. Since 2016, more than 175 individuals have participated in the Search Committee Chair Training workshop, which covers issues such as behavior-based interview questions and dual-career programs for couples.

“Utilizing feedback from the piloted

FACULTY DIVERSITY

Having a multicultural faculty is especially important for an institution like UH, which has one of the most diverse student bodies and communities in the U.S. Nearly 35 percent of its undergraduate population is Hispanic or Latinx, 24 percent is White, 22 percent is Asian American, and 10 percent is African American.



UH women faculty gather at the Center for ADVANCING UH Faculty Success. The center offers sustainable activities and programs that are part of a systematic effort to transform the university.

training, we started training all search committee chairs. We soon began to see more diversity in our applicant pools,” Short says. “Specifically, when more than one member of a search committee attended the training, searches resulted in a more diverse applicant pool.”

The result was a 52 percent increase in Latinx applicants, a 70 percent increase in Black applicants, and a 41 percent increase in applicants overall, according to Short.

Other efforts supported by the center include:

- The Distinguished Scholars Program gives underrepresented tenured and tenure-track women faculty in STEM and social or behavioral sciences an opportunity to host leading experts in their discipline for a two-day visit to the UH campus.
- The Administrator Fellows Program provides opportunities for women faculty to receive mentoring, visibility, and skill development through a special project sponsored by a UH administrative leader.
- The ADVANCE regional network (ARN) Postdoc Network and Database allows faculty to expand

interactions and events with regional colleges and universities.

- The Underrepresented Women of Color Coalition (URWoCC), a faculty resource group, provides holistic support for and promotes the success of members through scholarly collaborations, peer advocacy, and more.

Members of the URWoCC often report that it “has been a source of refuge and renewal,” Short says. The group meets regularly to address the isolation that can be felt by women of color in the academy. It also advances research and scholarship by hosting writing circles, connecting members to research stimulus grants, and more.

For other universities hoping to diversify and help underrepresented faculty advance in their careers, Short advises administrators lead by example, support and recognize initiatives that work, and empower teams to be innovative.

At UH, administrators plan to continue moving forward by using data to improve faculty recruitment, Short says. “We will also enhance our efforts to support all faculty members who wish to seek promotion to become full professors and to pursue leadership roles, but we will pay special attention to women,” she notes. ●

STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES

Provost Paula Myrick Short is credited with helping to establish multiple support programs for underrepresented youth and college students at UH, in addition to her dedication to advancing faculty diversity. Among the programs created under her leadership are:

Houston GPS, which boosts postsecondary attainment and graduation rates by supporting students who transfer from local community colleges to Houston-area universities.

Cub Camp, a student-run program for incoming UH students held the week before classes at an off-campus retreat center. For three days and two nights, campers learn more about UH, its traditions, and the campus community.

Provost Summer Read Program, which promotes academic learning and fosters community among first-year students by having them read a selected book over the summer — provided electronically through the office of the provost — that is discussed inside and out of the classroom with faculty and peers.

UHin4, a graduation agreement between UH and first-year students that provides tools and resources to help identify a clear path to complete an undergraduate degree within four years. Those who participate in UHin4 have the option to take advantage of a fixed tuition rate. Eligible students include incoming freshmen in a qualified major and transfer students with fewer than 30 credits.

Mariah Stewart is a senior staff writer for *INSIGHT Into Diversity*. University of Houston is a 2016–2019 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award recipient.