



Opinion

How efforts to recruit black professors rob poorer colleges of diversity

by **BERNARD MILANO**
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Divided We Learn

After Hechinger's "[Divided We Learn](#)" collaboration reported that poor and minority students are drastically underrepresented in key areas of higher ed, Editor in Chief Liz Willen issued a call for [solutions](#) to the widening campus inequality gap. This OpEd is one of the answers we received.

Student unrest over the educational experience of black students has led several universities to start searching for faculty who look more like the students they teach.

It's a step that evidence and experience suggest will have a positive impact. That's why four prominent universities — Yale, Brown, Johns Hopkins and the University of Cincinnati — included significant funding for minority faculty recruitment in recently announced diversity initiatives totaling nearly \$200 million. By next year's annual faculty migration, more of the new faces at those institutions presumably will be African American.

For those fortunate enough to learn or teach at one of those aggressively hiring colleges, this is a great move. But what of the hundreds other U.S. colleges and universities — the colleges from which African American professors will depart, without being replaced, to accept those new job offers?

That's the problem with these otherwise laudable "go-it-alone" diversity recruitment efforts: they create a zero-sum game.



Bernard Milano is president of The PhD Project and treasurer and a director of Campus Compact and Beta Gamma Sigma International Honor Society.

There are pitifully too few minority college professors. As State University of New York Chancellor Nancy Zimpher has noted, “Minority faculty are a magnet for minority students.” And that matters more than ever: The phrase “minority” will soon be a misnomer in U.S. colleges: by 2020, a majority of college students in the US will be nonwhite. Meanwhile, These one-time talent searches will simply relocate some in an already thin talent pool from one campus to another. That pool isn’t being replenished. What’s needed is a coordinated, nationwide approach to achieving more diversity at the front of all college classrooms.

We need a comprehensive effort by colleges working together to attract, encourage and support African-, Hispanic- and Native Americans to become the professors who will attract and sustain the next generation of minority undergraduates. Then comes another daunting task – mentoring and encouraging those future professors through the arduous process of securing their credentials and finding employment on faculties.

I know it can be done. For more than 20 years I have run such an initiative that has literally changed the face of one slice of academe: business schools. When we started The PhD Project in 1994, there were just 294 African, Hispanic and Native American business faculty *combined*, in the entire country. Several leading universities had none. Today, that number has more than quadrupled to 1,312 despite the demanding five-year doctoral studies prerequisite.

“Minority faculty are a magnet for minority students.” Nancy Zimpher,
Chancellor, State University of New York

PhD Project professors today are deans, department chairs, tenured faculty and respected professors. Avalanches of anecdotal evidence have shown that our ultimate goal is being achieved: undergraduates are benefiting incalculably.

Admittedly, business schools have advantages some disciplines may not: corporations are eager to hire the students of color they produce, and they compensate them well.

Accordingly, the business community has steadfastly funded programs like ours that can improve the recruitment and preparation of minority business students. But other disciplines – law, medicine, science and engineering to cite a few – are also backed by employers and organizations with similar interest in creating a more diverse undergraduate pipeline. Those groups can and should partner with the academic community on programs, including minority faculty recruitment, that aim for that goal.

Virtually any academic discipline can partner with its natural allies and do what The PhD Project does: market an academic career in that discipline, introduce those potential professors to the university programs where they will study, and then pre-qualify, prepare, and support them as they earn their academic credentials.

Yes, it will take money. But with employers and academia increasingly resolved to improve undergraduate diversity, it is reasonable to expect an increased financial commitment to achieving the goal.

If four colleges alone could direct \$200 million to their diversity efforts, imagine what the entire country could summon up if it were to truly embrace the notion of a more comfortable, more successful educational experience for the millions of minority undergraduates who yearn for it.

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