SUPPORTING EARLY CAREER FACULTY AT MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS

ELEVATE
CENTER FOR MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS

RESEARCH TEAM:

Marybeth Gasman
Alice Ginsberg
Natalie Passov
Magy Georges

Katherine Castro
Serafina Smith
Koor Thomas
Paola Esmieu

R | RUTGERS–NEW BRUNSWICK
Graduate School of Education

Center for
MSIs

Faculty diversity is a cornerstone of academic excellence, one that brings a wealth of perspectives and experiences that enrich the learning environment for students (Gasman, 2022; Smith, 2024). Despite its recognized importance, most colleges and universities still struggle to achieve a truly diverse faculty (Gasman, 2022). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), 72% of faculty are white, while 7% of faculty are Black, 6% are Latinx, 13% are Asian, .5% are American Indian/Native Alaskan, and .5% are Pacific Islander.

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) stand out in this landscape, boasting the most diverse faculty in the nation. Studies show that faculty of color are more prevalent at MSIs compared to the national average (Blake, 2018; Esmieu, 2019; Esmieu, 2023). For example, African Americans account for 7% of faculty nationally, whereas at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) they represent 57% of faculty. Similarly, Latinx faculty make up 6% of faculty nationally, but account for 21% of faculty at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Asians make up 13% of faculty nationwide but make up 16.4% of faculty at Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). And though Native Americans and Alaska Natives make up less than .5% nationally, they account for 46% of all Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) faculty (Blake, 2018; Esmieu, 2019; Esmieu, 2023). MSIs also boast considerable diversity across all racial/ethnic groups, not only the race/ethnicity aligned with their federal designation (Esmieu, 2019; Esmieu, 2023). They play a critical role in higher education by providing opportunities for the underrepresented and fostering an inclusive academic community.

However, faculty at MSIs often face unique challenges that can impede their professional development and overall career satisfaction. High teaching loads, extensive advising responsibilities, and limited resources for professional development are common issues that can hinder the growth and effectiveness of faculty members. This lack of support can lead to burnout and affect the quality of education that MSIs strive to provide (Brooks & Al-Asfour, 2020; Blake, 2018; Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Esmieu, 2019; Esmieu, 2023; Gasman & Nguyen, 2019; Rajasekar, 2023; Schmidt, 2022).

The literature on faculty development underscores the need for targeted support and resources to help faculty thrive (Blake, 2018; Brooks & Al-Asfour, 2020; Rajasekar, 2023; Schmidt, 2022). Professional development opportunities are essential for faculty to stay current in their fields, enhance their teaching skills, and advance their careers. Unfortunately, due to lack of resources and funding, such opportunities are often scarce at MSIs, exacerbating the challenges faced by their faculty.

The Enrich Learning, Enhance Visibility, and Train Educators (ELEVATE) program, developed by the Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education—funded by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and The Kresge Foundation—seeks to address these issues. This program is designed to support the professional development of early career faculty at MSIs by providing them with the tools, resources, and networks they need to succeed. Through ELEVATE, faculty members gain valuable insights into their careers, work-life balance, and the unique challenges and opportunities of working at MSIs.

Drawing directly from the experiences of early career faculty at MSIs, this report explores why they choose to work at these institutions, the challenges they face, and the types of professional development support they receive. We examine the themes of work-life balance, career advancement, and the impact of the ELEVATE program on their professional growth. Lastly, we shed light on these faculty members' experiences and highlight the critical role of professional development in fostering a diverse and dynamic faculty at MSIs.

WHAT IS ELEVATE?

MSI faculty members are life-long learners and educators in pursuit of personal and professional excellence. ELEVATE brings together early-career MSI faculty to equip them with support, training, and an opportunity to create a close-knit network of peers. ELEVATE began in 2015 and is about to recruit its 10th cohort of early career MSI faculty. ELEVATE fellows benefit from mentoring from tenured faculty, most of whom either work at or were educated at MSIs nationwide. Fellows receive professional development in teaching, research development, grant writing, achieving tenure, work-life balance, self-care, mentoring, and publishing. The original idea for ELEVATED was conceived by Paola Esmieu, while in her role as Program Coordinator at the Center for Minority Serving Institutions.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The ELEVATE program offers a valuable research opportunity to better understand the experiences of early career faculty at MSIs. In advance of program participation, our research team interviewed ELEVATE fellows, beginning in 2019 through 2024, and surveyed all fellows between 2015-2024. We conducted interviews with cohorts 6, 7, 8, and 9. We asked questions about their motives for wanting to teach at an MSI, their challenges in tenure-track positions, their accomplishments, and their exposure to a variety of professional development topics. This information, coupled with their application materials, represented the first stage of data collection.

After the fellows attended the ELEVATE program and had time to interact with other fellows and mentors, we conducted a second round of interviews. Through the second round of interviews, our team gathered information that was both formative to the program's assessment, but also illustrative of the experiences of the fellows. We asked questions about their faculty roles, challenges, and how they were using what they learned to better navigate the tenure process at their MSI. After completing the interviews, we had the audio recordings transcribed, coded the transcripts, and looked for emergent themes in the data. Because we only began interviewing fellows in 2019, we surveyed all ELEVATE fellows in 2024, asking for updated demographic information, tenure status, accomplishments, and how ELEVATE helped them in their tenure process and in their faculty roles. Our survey had a 70% response rate. This report highlights many of the themes. However, in-depth work on these themes and others from the overall data set will also be the subject of peer-reviewed work in academic journals. We aim to inform the growing literature on early career faculty at MSIs.

Our ELEVATE Mentors and Speakers

Timothy Fong, Sacramento State University

Stacye Blount, Fayetteville State University

Bryan Kent Wallace, Fisk University

Anne-Marie Núñez, University of Texas, El Paso

Cheron Davis, Florida A&M University

Robert Palmer, Howard University

Andrés Castro Samayoa, Boston College

Alice Ginsberg, Rutgers University–New Brunswick

Taryn Allen, Texas Christian University

Gina Garcia, University of California, Berkeley

Marybeth Gasman, Rutgers University–New Brunswick

Kimberly Griffin, University of Maryland

Sergio Gonzalez, University of Pittsburgh

Susana Hernandez, California State University, Fresno

Levon Esters, The Pennsylvania State University

Ignacio Hernandez, California State University, Fresno

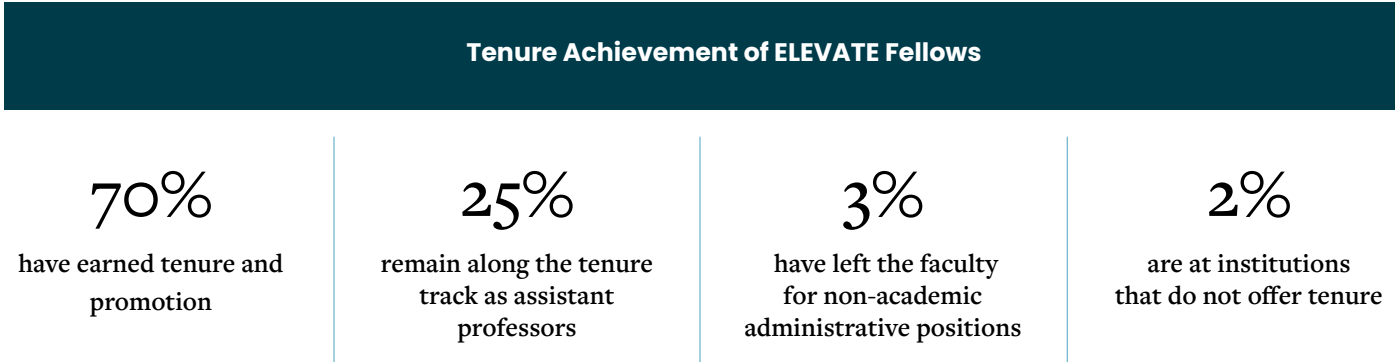**Andrew Arroyo**, Virginia Commonwealth University

Felecia Commodore, University of Illinois

Since 2015, ELEVATE has provided professional development for **167** faculty at Minority Serving Institutions.

fig. 1 Types of MSIs Represented by ELEVATE Fellows

- HSI
- HBCU
- AANAPISI
- PBI
- TCU
- NASNTI

56%
4%
20.5%
37%
2%
.5%

Note: Some institutions are classified as multiple MSI types rendering the total more than 100.

fig. 3 Racial and Ethnic Representation of ELEVATE Fellows

- Black
- Latinx
- Asian
- White
- Native American
- Middle Eastern

44%
34%
12%
6%
3%
1%

fig. 2 Gender Representation of ELEVATE Fellows

- Women
- Men

63%
37%
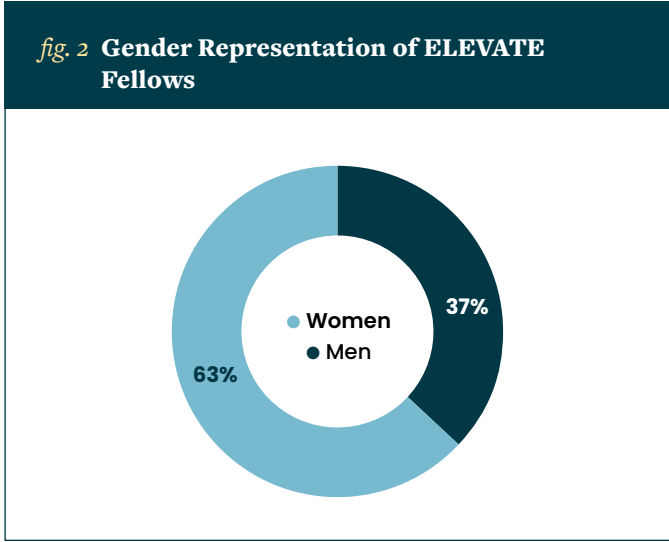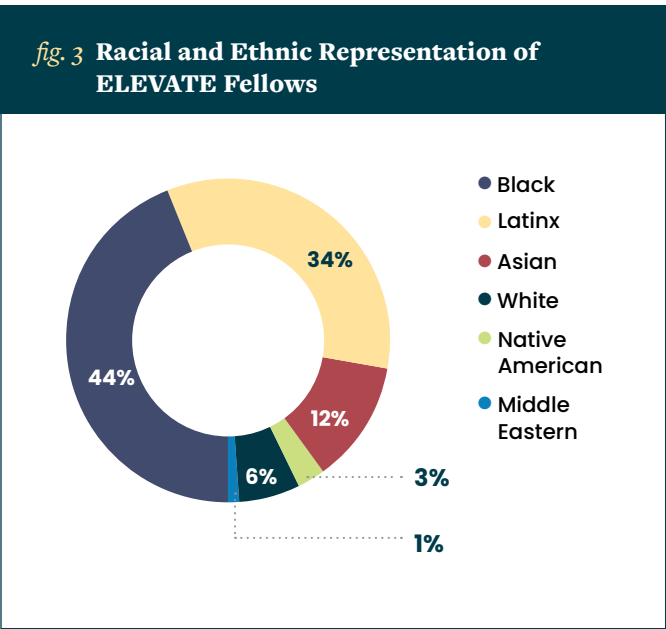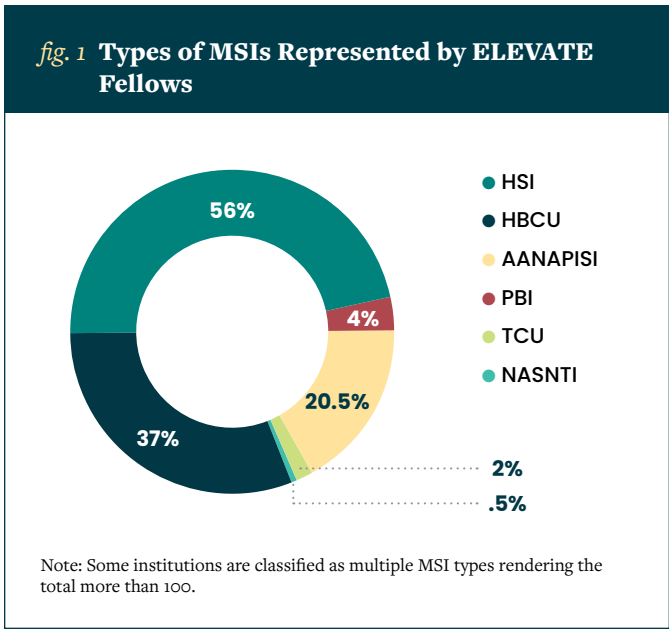
Major Accomplishments of ELEVATE Fellows

$5 million+ in grant funding from organizations such as National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Educational Testing Service, and the Ford Foundation

16 authored and edited books

273 peer reviewed articles

106 teaching, research, and service awards

Tenure Achievement of ELEVATE Fellows

70%
have earned tenure and promotion

25%
remain along the tenure track as assistant professors

3%
have left the faculty for non-academic administrative positions

2%
are at institutions that do not offer tenure

Why Do Fellows Choose to Work at an MSI?

While not every ELEVATE fellow made a conscious decision to work at an MSI, the majority felt strongly that this environment was better aligned with their values, goals, and long-term motivation for being a professor. Fellows noted several reasons why they chose MSIs, including a "family-like" atmosphere, a commitment to equity and student success, and the opportunity to both give back and nurture the next generation of leaders of color.

"Every Student that Graduates, We Know their Name"

Many fellows shared something to the effect of working at an MSI "is done out of love," and that they felt that MSIs were more than just degree granting institutions of higher education. They were "communities" and "families." As one fellow shared: "Every student we know that graduates, we know their first name and last name. We know where their family is, who their family is, and everything. So, that's what I like." Many fellows emphasized that they saw their students as reflections of their younger selves and could personally relate to their struggles and triumphs. For example, one fellow who taught at an HSI shared: "Being one of the few Latina faculty members who is first gen, who was raised in a low-income community and is the child of immigrants.... It's complex, but I feel like one of the greatest joys is seeing their faces when I tell them my story." Likewise, a fellow from an HBCU told us: "I'm a Black woman at an institution that was created for Black women. It informs my experience as a faculty member because I see myself in my students." Another fellow echoed this sense of connection, sharing that: "The students need to see you. They need to see minorities represented, otherwise they don't think it's possible." The family-like atmosphere that fellows described at their institutions did not stop at graduation. As one fellow shared, she started to cry at her HSI's first graduation ceremony because in addition to celebrating the students, they asked the parents, grandparents, and children of graduates to stand up: "I think it just really affirms that many of our students have families and their extended families or their children, they do play a role in helping them to pursue higher education."

> "You don't realize how much of a difference you can make, unless you have somebody that needs you to make that particular difference."
> —ELEVATE fellow

> "My relationship with my students extends beyond the classroom as I try to find different ways to connect with them to better serve the campus community and the community outside of the institution as well."
> —ELEVATE fellow

Somebody to Believe in Them: Serving Underrepresented Students

Many fellows stated that they wanted to be at an institution that was committed to serving and protecting students of color, students whose needs are often overlooked and underserved. One fellow shared: "To me, the MSI status and the HSI status is highly relevant to the region of people that we serve, that we took an oath to protect." Fellows further underscored that when they took the job at the MSI their decision rested less on the resources or reputation of the college, and more on their commitment to prioritizing student success and educational equity. For example, one fellow shared that they chose to work at an MSI "out of a belief in the best of our student's past and the possibilities for who they can become. That's what motivates a lot of my work." Another fellow noted that: "I am reaching a group of students who have been told by society many times that they cannot do it, that they are less than, that they are not very capable, so that creates a number of unique learning challenges for them, and it positions my role as someone working to empower them through classroom learning." Likewise, another fellow told us that: "I feel very privileged because 70% of my students are first in their family to get a college degree, and it's something where they just need somebody to actually believe in them and show them the possibilities, and it is an absolute honor to be a part of that to let them know it is possible."

"The HSI designation was a main draw for this position. It means a lot to me. It's revolutionary. I feel like it's a beautiful journey. I feel like being a faculty member at an MSI is by far probably one of the most amazing experiences of my life." –ELEVATE fellow

ELEVATE FELLOW

marcus harvey

marcus d. harvey is an assistant professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance at Montclair State University. He is also an award-winning performer, writer, director, educator & cultural strategist. His specializations are acting, directing, solo performance, and Black theatre. His work currently explores the question, "What does the Black body do in white artistic spaces when the white rage is too much?" marcus decided to teach at an MSI because: "I think it's important for students to see themselves reflected in the classroom. As an undergrad and graduate student, I faced many difficulties when it came to faculty who didn't look like me, but when I found those who looked like me it made a world of difference in my learning. They saw me. I am teaching at an MSI because I want the students to know I see them!" marcus applied to ELEVATE because, in his own words, "As an artist, I was struggling with navigating the world of academia. I found myself having many, many challenges in my MSI when my department's faculty doesn't reflect the student body we serve. I felt overwhelmed with it all. I was interested in ELEVATE because it would allow me to gather tools for my toolbox as I navigate the waters." After participating in ELEVATE, marcus reflected that: "I am walking away more certain of how my creative work can live within the academy especially how I can expand my view of my own work. I honestly can say, I now have a network of scholars around the U.S. who I can learn from and lean on throughout this journey and road to tenure. My fellow fellows and the mentors have made themselves available to me in ways I was yearning for from my own institution." According to marcus: "I honestly was considering not returning in the Fall '24 to the academy but ELEVATE renewed me in a way that I can see a light in the darkness that can be the academy."

"Giving Back" and Cultivating the Next Generation of Leaders

A number of fellows chose to work at an MSI because they themselves had attended an MSI and told us that they wanted the opportunity to "give back," such as the fellow who shared that he had attended two HBCUs and knew that when he graduated, he was going to teach at an HBCU: "I didn't really care which one it was going to be…. It's about giving back to students like me, the same way that my professors did for me. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them, and, I'd like to be that for students at my university, as well." Further, another fellow noted that her institution's HBCU status means a lot because it reinforces a commitment to "give back to the community versus going to an institution where they have all the resources in the world." This fellow further emphasized that her institution was looking for "that faculty member that really is there for this reason, not for the money." Fellows felt strongly that MSIs were places where the next generation of leaders of color could be cultivated, such as the fellow who told us: "To me, it's all about giving back. It's all about trying to train, equip and educate women of color, Black women in particular, to be leaders in any and every field that they can conceive. To me, I feel like there is a special place and a huge need for historically Black colleges and for Minority Serving Institutions."

SPOTLIGHT

ELEVATE MENTOR

Cheron Davis

Cheron H. Davis is an assistant professor in the Elementary Education Department at Florida A&M University's College of Education. She is a former elementary teacher. Cheron's research interests include multicultural literature, professional development of pre-service and practicing teachers, and multicultural pedagogy in the reading curriculum. Cheron was a fellow in ELEVATE's first cohort in 2015, and later became an ELEVATE mentor. According to Cheron: "As a proud member of the very first ELEVATE cohort, I had few expectations. The friendships, professional and emotional support, camaraderie, and transparency I experienced were as authentic and genuine as they are today. This program has changed the trajectory of my career, expanded my professional network, and brought me closer to many co-authors, cheerleaders, and friends who have emerged from this experience." As an ELEVATE mentor, Cheron's session focuses on the importance of work-life balance. According to Cheron: "Your health and well-being are paramount. 'No' is a complete sentence. Although the demands of professorship often discourage this option, we must avoid overcommitting ourselves to the point where our relationships and responsibilities to family, friends, and our own health suffer. Balancing these demands is especially challenging for junior faculty members. Therefore, I always remind them that their lives exist outside of their careers and that maintaining a delicate, yet crucial, balance between professional and personal life is essential." Cheron has stayed in contact and collaborated with many ELEVATE fellows over the years, including someone from her own university that, before ELEVATE, she had never met before. According to Cheron: "I discovered that Novell Tani, Associate Professor of Psychology at Florida A&M University (2016 cohort), was my office neighbor shortly after his ELEVATE experience. Upon his return, I quickly visited his office to reflect, make his acquaintance, and share ideas. I had not met him before his ELEVATE experience, but little did I know that we would share a collective passion for student mentorship. Since then, we have served on thesis committees together, accompanied students on conference presentations and research projects, and co-authored publications." Cheron is thankful for her experience as an ELEVATE fellow and mentor, sharing that: "There is both gratefulness and peace in knowing that I have a successful, passionate network of brilliant, kind professionals who support my work and understand the demands of professorship at a Minority Serving Institution."

Challenges of Early Career Faculty at MSIs

While they cherished their work at MSIs, ELEVATE fellows identified several common core challenges they faced in their role as junior, untenured faculty members at MSIs. The most mentioned challenges included:

- Unrealistic expectations for research, writing, and publishing while juggling high teaching loads and service.

- Limited skills and experience with grant writing, research, and publishing, along with insufficient opportunities for professional development and institutional support.

- A shortage of formal mentors within their department or field, who are invested in their long-term success.

- Lack of clarity around expectations for the tenure and the tenure process.

- Achieving work-life balance, particularly given that many were just starting families of their own or are supporting their families of origin.

Woven throughout all of these themes were issues of time management, imposter syndrome and low self-confidence, difficulty navigating identity-based challenges, constant turnover in institutional leadership, and lack of opportunities for networking within and across institutions.

Unrealistic Expectations for Research, Writing, and Publishing, While Juggling High Teaching Loads and Service

While individual expectations for research, writing, and publishing varied by type of institution, almost all ELEVATE fellows felt some tension around how to do this work without taking time and attention away from teaching and community service, both of which they felt were integral parts of their commitments to being in higher education and working at an MSI. As one fellow noted when it comes to getting tenure, it was "frustrating to do the work fundamental to the mission [of the college] and then not be rewarded because it's not a peer-reviewed article." Other fellows felt that even though most MSIs are teaching institutions, "sometimes your value is measured on how much money you get or bring to the institution." Those fellows who specifically did want to engage in research felt that there was not enough support for the time involved, such as the fellow who told us: "Some institutions I know provide a lesser teaching load in exchange for having an active research agenda. We don't really have that."

Likewise, another fellow shared that even though they were at a small institution: "We still have to be held accountable for everything a large institution must be accountable for, too. So, it's more challenging because we have less faculty and staff to do the work, but we still do the work." Some ELEVATE fellows noted that despite being counseled to reduce their responsibilities to do research and publish in preparation for tenure, they were also expected to be on every service committee.

Limited Experience and Skills in Grant Writing, Research, and Publishing, Along with Insufficient Opportunities for Professional Development and Institutional Support

While many fellows felt that the biggest barrier to doing research was simply "time," most fellows also felt that they lacked many of the skills they needed to engage in grant writing and funding their research, and that their institutions provided them with limited support. As one fellow reflected upon their institution: "It's just a poor state school and we have very little support for research and so we are constantly trying to get access to databases with very little luck, and pooling resources together." In this respect, many fellows expressed frustration that their institutions lacked resources for professional development. Many fellows had to pay for professional development with their own funds and/or simply did not have the funds available to participate. Moreover, fellows felt that many of the opportunities they did have were not what they were hoping for, such as the fellow who told us: "If I'm going to be honest, I went to a lot of professional developments this year, like 20 something sessions, but I don't know that I really took away that much from them."

"The advantage [of a mentor] is you get a lot of information that you don't know. There's a lot of stuff you do not know when you walk into a brand-new institution. I don't have that here and I have no clue where to begin." –ELEVATE fellow

ELEVATE FELLOW

Leslie Epke

Leslie Ekpe is an assistant professor in the Higher Education and Learning Technologies department at Texas A&M University-Commerce. Her primary research focuses on anti-racism, diversity, equity, inclusion, MSIs, and racial equity. Leslie is also a Visiting Scholar at the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Institute for Leadership, Equity, and Justice. According to Leslie: "As a Black woman in a tenure-track role, it is important that I identify resources that will provide me with the tools that I need to be successful. I applied to ELEVATE to learn more about the process of service, teaching, and scholarship within the tenure-track role. The professoriate was new to me as I entered my first year on the tenure-track. While I set out with an agenda to gain more knowledge in the areas of service, teaching, and scholarship, I left with so much more." Leslie felt that "ELEVATE gave me a chance to collaborate, breathe, mentor, and be mentored. From the start, fellows were offered a chance to work with one another, which allowed us to build an intentional community by sharing our personal experiences within the field in a safe space." Participating in ELEVATE also prompted Leslie to reflect on her own experiences as a new faculty member at an MSI: "I know the importance of being a Black woman professor in a field where there are few of me. My academic career started at an HBCU as an undergraduate student, and I felt the importance of having connections with my professors and being around individuals who cared for my well-being and academic progress. To know that I now have a community of faculty outside of my university, who share similar interests in serving at MSIs, that will support me in my academic endeavors and personal life is truly something that I do not take for granted." Leslie hopes to come back one day to ELEVATE as mentor, highlighting the fact that there are few programs that invest in faculty at MSIs and further that, because ELEVATE was free, it "relieved any financial burden that sometimes comes with professional development opportunities for faculty."

Additionally, fellows wanted more access to academic journals and collaborative networks within their institution to share research and findings. One fellow, for example, suggested that "Being able to connect with a network of peers who were engaged in research on my campus would be helpful," while another fellow shared that they needed "more structure and support for carrying out research projects and presenting the work at their institution." Along the same lines, fellows lamented the lack of opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues on research, and that they lacked a peer support network for feedback. Many felt that they were doing this work in isolation, such as the fellow who shared: "I'm feeling that I am on my own and I don't have access to resources and help… I've had to learn a lot of things on my own." Fellows expressed a desire for more research funding and internal grants, which they believed would eventually allow them to share preliminary data with external funders and increase their long-term funding needs. Fellows also underscored that even when there were grants available to do research, there was little institutional support after they received the funding.

SPOTLIGHT

ELEVATE MENTOR

Bryan "Kent" Wallace

Kent Wallace is the Dean of Graduate Studies at Fisk University, a tenured faculty member in Fisk's Physics Department, Director of Fisk's Physics Laboratories, and Primary Investigator for Fisk's Rocket Science Program. As a mentor who has been part of ELEVATE from the very first cohort, Kent's session focuses on innovative teaching methods and skills. According to Kent: "I want to make sure they are aware as faculty that they are helping to develop students' sense of identity with respect to their discipline. That way faculty can engage students intentionally by helping them see themselves as future scholars, scientists, and historians. You learn more about how to teach your students by getting to know them and their experiences." When designing his session, Kent also wants to "highlight best practices and strategies firmly rooted in the literature," while at the same time he "wants to be sure to present information from the practitioner's perspective rather than a theoretical construct." Some of Kent's favorite memories of ELEVATE are seeing how, each year, the cohort participants bond: "I love to see how they share their respective experiences and realize they are not alone. I love how they write to me sometimes years later and let me know how my teaching skills session really informed their practice and let me know of their successes. I mean, if I am not having an impact, I shouldn't be there." He added: "I remember one faculty member who wrote to me a few months into their semester and said they experienced a moment that we discussed in our teaching skills session. A student in their class did not think that they were good enough. This instructor was very intentional about getting to know their students on a personal level. Well, he was able to identify the student's poor performance had more to do with fear of failure than anything else. He was able to address that specific aspect of the student's development. The student eventually became a high performer. The student later thanked the professor for his intentional engagement and attributed his own success to the professor helping to develop their identity and conveying that they belonged." When it comes to getting tenure, Kent believes that a large part of the value of ELEVATE is that it "gives junior faculty an opportunity to hear real-world examples of how senior faculty have navigated the tenure process. It highlights the explicit expectation and the sometimes more important 'implicit' expectations to achieving tenure."

A Shortage of Formal Mentors, Especially Mentors of Color within their Department or Field, Who Were Invested in their Long-Term Success

While many fellows could identify informal mentors–either at their institution or at another institution–few felt that they had access to formal mentors, and even fewer were satisfied with the quality of those mentoring relationships. One fellow, for example, shared that she had "little to no contact with her assigned mentor." While another fellow felt similarly that their assigned mentor "does the bare minimum." Fellows lamented that many of the formal mentorships available to them at their institutions lacked structure and follow-though. Several fellows shared that deans and department chairs were simply too busy to engage in formal mentoring, and that their departments were too small to have formal mentorships with senior faculty. Many were also disappointed that there was no one working in their discipline who was willing to mentor them, as one fellow who shared: "To be honest with you, it's more of a headache than anything else. The mentors at my institution they're not content mentors. It's like everybody's research interests are very much siloed."

"As an inaugural ELEVATE fellow, the experience changed the trajectory of my entire career. I now have a network of scholars with whom I do research, service, and, most importantly, LIFE. Being asked to return to ELEVATE as a mentor for the past several years has been the highest honor, and it is my commitment to reach back to serve in the spaces where I was welcomed when I needed guidance and encouragement as a junior faculty member navigating the politics of the tenure and promotion process. It is like coming home each year, and I am grateful for the ELEVATE family."

—Cheron Davis, ELEVATE fellow, 2015

ELEVATE MENTOR

Taryn Allen

Taryn Ozuna Allen is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at the University of Texas at Arlington. She was also a fellow in the first ELEVATE cohort. Taryn's research interests focus on the educational experiences of under-represented students, particularly Latino students, as they access and pursue education at MSIs, such as HSIs and HBCUs. Her research also focuses on the academic and social experiences of transfer students who enroll in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. Taryn has research affiliations with the Center for Mexican American Studies and the Learning Innovation and Networked Knowledge Research Lab at UT Arlington, and Project MALES at the University of Texas at Austin. Taryn's session focuses on obtaining tenure. As she shared: "The main point of my session is to encourage participants in the tenure process. I want them to see that tenure is possible and that they have the power and expertise already within them." Taryn also feels strongly about work-life balance: "As scholars, we are tasked with a multitude of responsibilities. We also have our personal and familial responsibilities. By building a semester plan and doing the best we can to intentionally schedule our time, we can accomplish our goals while also doing things we enjoy. Life doesn't stop on the tenure track, and it is important to include our passions and honor our needs." Taryn fondly remembers serving on ELEVATE's life/work balance panel where she recalls: "We were open and honest (too honest?) about our journeys, struggles, and accomplishments. Demonstrating vulnerability helps the participants know that we are just people, too!" Indeed, Taryn believes that the most important part of ELEVATE is "the people!" According to Taryn: "We can build community and support one another as we navigate academia. Even though we have a short time together, the activities, meals, and break times allow us to authentically get to know one another very quickly."

In general, fellows looked for "informal" mentors, and sought out long-term relationships with faculty that would provide them with ongoing strategic advice throughout the many stages of their career. They also wanted mentors who could serve as advocates for them in places where they were underrepresented or did not feel comfortable advocating for themselves. As one fellow shared about her mentor who she found through an organic process where another woman faculty of color volunteered to help her: "She's a full professor. She's been able to advocate for me in ways that I could never be in those kinds of spaces because she's part of the big committees, like the senate and all that, and she's very intentional in bringing up my name for certain opportunities." Fellows were particularly candid about their fear of speaking up on controversial issues before receiving tenure, such as the fellow who asked: "How do you engage in conversations in a group setting like a department meeting as an early career non-tenured faculty member? How do you navigate when there is tension in the room? When do you say something and when do you not say something?" Another fellow similarly shared an experience in which there was a situation that they found problematic but as the only Latino in the department they were scared to speak up, noting that "the labor of being the one to speak up was hard." In this respect, fellows intentionally sought out mentors who would guide them through internal politics and power structures that they were unfamiliar with. Lastly, fellows sought out mentors who would guide them through the tenure process by helping them to better understand their (sometimes poorly articulated) expectations, most especially when it came to getting tenure.

"I thoroughly enjoyed my experience at ELEVATE. It was a pleasure to meet colleagues who also understand the joys and challenges of working at an MSI. I appreciated the candidness of the mentors and their guidance in helping us to navigate the pathway to tenure." —Elena Venegas, ELEVATE fellow, 2021

Lack of Clarity Around Expectations for Tenure and the Tenure Process

Many fellows expressed frustration, anxiety, and fear regarding the lack of clarity around expectations for receiving tenure. While this is not uncommon at any institution of higher education, the ELEVATE fellows were particularly transparent about the stress this caused them, including the fact that they felt the route to tenure was very subjective. As one fellow shared candidly: "I think that many times the person being evaluated is largely being judged on the merits of their name rather than their work." Fellows were concerned that speaking up about controversial issues or seeking to change institutional practices could jeopardize their careers and chances of obtaining tenure, as illustrated by the fellow who told us: "I would love to see change, but right now the people that are in charge are all tenured, and we don't really say anything to them because they are part of the deciding board as to whether you get to or not."

In general, fellows wanted clearer tenure guidelines, and they wanted these expectations to be made public to them at the earliest possible stage in their career. As one fellow lamented: "They teach you a lot at graduate school [about being a professor] but they don't teach you the whole workings behind it. Just knowing the institution, how it works, knowing the procedures, all the proper paperwork, who to get what kind of approvals for what and then the faculty Senate too. How do you navigate that?" Many fellows also felt that in preparing for or applying for tenure, they had poor work-life balance and were trying to do too many things at once without knowing what to prioritize. This was especially the case with fellows who had young families or family obligations. According to one fellow: "I totally think family obligations play an important role, and I do know colleagues of mine who are struggling with tenure expectations because of their family and their limited time."

Achieving Work-Life Balance

When asked about their work-life balance, one fellow answered bluntly: "It's nonexistent." According to the fellow: "Honestly, especially with COVID, my approach to work is just getting through the day. Like I'm not even gonna lie or try to sugar coat it." Another fellow felt similarly, sharing that "Obviously I prioritize things, but some things I have to ignore. And then I try to deal with the most important deadlines, and I just wait for the breaks. Yeah, the work-life balance needs some work, for sure." Fellows described their daily lives as "still one emergency after another," that they were focused on "moving the ball forward," and that, in the words of one fellow: "I've tried to make time blocks, but the effective time management and the work-life balance is something that's almost like a myth." Another fellow felt similarly: "For me, I'm delaying everything until after tenure and I recognize why people do that and it sucks that people have to do that in order to get through." Fellows also felt that they were being asked to work far beyond "what's on paper," or 40 hours a week, noting that just the teaching aspect of their responsibilities, along with mentoring students, could easily be viewed as a full-time job.

"The ELEVATE facilitators were an inspiration to me. It's one thing to hear about the successes and good opportunities that lined a role model's road, but it's quite another to hear about the mistakes, the challenges, and the self-doubt on the road to tenure. Hearing about their experiences made me feel less isolated and more empowered to overcome my own struggles."
—Jenny Link, ELEVATE fellow, 2022

Some fellows also called attention to the fact that more was expected of them being faculty of color, especially when it came to institutional service, such as the fellow who told us: "There's an underrepresentation of faculty of color, of Latinx faculty. There's only a few. So just trying to be mindful of how to navigate, how to use my time, how to protect my time, is something that I have to do. I'm not good at it. I'm still learning." Another fellow shared similarly that she felt she was being overworked as a woman of color at her institution: "Latina women tend to be one of the largest sub-student populations at my institution. So, what ends up happening is that they speak to us who are among the very few Latina tenure-track faculty on our campus to actually mentor them." While the fellow cherished this part of her job, she also noted that: "This means extra hours for office hours or coming in on days where we don't teach just to meet these students, mentor them through graduate school applications, job applications, or just life," all of which she felt had an outsized impact on her own free time.

This last point is important because many people assume that because ELEVATE fellows worked at MSIs, they did not have any issues around being people of color on campus. This was not the case, particularly because many MSIs were initially PWIs that got an MSI classification due to the many students of color enrolled in their institution. Professors of color at many MSIs—particularly HSIs and AANAPISIs—are often still in the minority, and many felt that their institutions still do not fully value what they bring to the table. ELEVATE fellows thus shared challenges that they felt were specific to their racial and cultural backgrounds. One fellow, for example, felt that the combination of being a person of color and a woman "shapes the way I speak in meetings." Some fellows also talked candidly about the fact that even though they were a person of color, that the particular MSI they worked at was not necessarily welcoming to them. A Latina who worked at an HBCU, for example shared that: "I think a lot of students pick [this institution] because they want to have professors that look like them, and I'm never going to be that professor. So, somehow being a resource for them and an ally without being a professor that looks like them is something that I really want to get better at and I'm trying to be very aware of."

What MSI Faculty Gained from ELEVATE?

After participating in ELEVATE, fellows were able to identify a number of areas in which they felt increased knowledge, self-confidence, and support. These included:

- Networking with other MSI faculty to build a sense of community and opportunities for collaboration, along with access to a wider pool of mentors.

- Increased time management skills and ability to prioritize tasks and find work-life balance, especially as junior faculty of color without tenure.

- Expanded knowledge of grant writing, writing for publication, and research, including greater clarity around the tenure process, and how to leverage more institutional support and opportunities constructive feedback.

ELEVATE fellows found that the opportunity to attend a professional development program that was specifically created and tailored for junior tenure-track faculty at MSIs to be one of the most positive and meaningful takeaways. Many fellows had never had the opportunity to be in a space with so many other faculty of color and were surprised at how much they had in common, even though they were at different institutions and in varying disciplines. They were particularly grateful that they were in a space where they felt they could be fully themselves and honest about their challenges, finding support rather than judgment. For example, according to one fellow: "Sometimes I feel like I'm a little too transparent in things that I share, but at the same time I was glad that I was transparent because I found that other people are very supportive, so that was nice." Another fellow added: "We're facing a lot of the same issues and struggling to find what the answers are."

Fellows also appreciated the opportunity to hear different perspectives. As one fellow put it: "Hearing the perspectives of people of color, especially when I teach folks of color, it was an eye-opening, and I think really important, experience for me." Other fellows echoed this, sharing that ELEVATE gave them a different perspective on their own experience: "For me, whenever I think about ELEVATE, I think about the opportunity to just connect with people. A lot of people that are, in many ways, doing similar work or even in different disciplines, navigating similar contexts, obviously mostly faculty of color navigating these higher academic spaces. I just really appreciated getting a sense of the different experiences, which also gave me a good amount of perspective of my own situation." The bond that was created across the cohort was life-changing for many fellows, even for those that came from the same university.

> "It was really one of the best workshops, seminars, professional development, fun things I've done for several years. It was just great to meet everybody and realize that we're all pretty much in the same boat that nobody told us we were getting into." —ELEVATE fellow

When it came to learning more practical skills, fellows appreciated advice on how to increase their number of publications, and how to write opinion pieces and grant proposals. These were things that fellows knew they needed help with but many did not know how to begin. As one fellow shared: "I gained insight on what it is that I need to be doing." They were especially grateful for ELEVATE's focus on helping them create dedicated time to do this work, including setting goals, being organized and proactive. In addition, while fellows appreciated the variety of ELEVATE sessions, they also found many connections among what they were learning from different mentors. As one fellow put it: "We covered a breadth of different aspects of being a faculty member and I find a lot of the discussions and the connections that I made to be very useful in my career."

"ELEVATE was an opportunity to gather with colleagues across the country who have similar, yet different experiences. MSIs are unique, in terms of student body and much more, so it is great to bond with others who understand the beautiful struggle." —Omari Jackson, ELEVATE fellow, 2021

SPOTLIGHT

ELEVATE FELLOW

Victoria Kim

Victoria Kim is an assistant professor of Higher Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) at The University of Texas at San Antonio. Her research interests include understanding racially/ethnically minoritized student populations, particularly Asian American student experiences, and the institutions that serve them, including Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs). One of the reasons that Victoria was motivated to apply for ELEVATE was because "I was interested in learning the skills and resources to become a better instructor, researcher, and scholar at an R1 Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), including how I can better support our diverse student population from various backgrounds." Her experience at ELEVATE provided her with "numerous opportunities to learn, discuss, collaborate, and network amongst each other, including ELEVATE fellows (those that are walking with me together) and mentors (those who have walked the path ahead of me)." Although Victoria found that participants' experiences may vary depending on their disciplines, she believes that "we learned from each other's experiences—both successes and failures, and I appreciated that we were able to create a community in which we could share both." When reflecting on a particularly powerful moment during ELEVATE, Victoria recalled how: "As a community, we're sharing our challenges, but most importantly, validating our experiences—both the good ones and the not so good ones. Rather than being quick to discuss how to resolve issues, we were first coming together as a community to lift each other up. This to me was immensely powerful because as an early-career faculty, I've been so focused on not making mistakes as opposed to appreciating the work I am doing now and acknowledging myself. With self-respect as the baseline, I can continue to appreciate others around me, including our students, and colleagues." Victoria also remembers: "During one lunch, I had an opportunity to sit with one of our ELEVATE mentors, Timothy Fong...Instead of us simply talking about our research agendas, he took the time to provide me with a more holistic mentoring. We discussed my teaching experiences and how I can continue to develop my research interests that are aligned with my teaching and service." Victoria looks forward to sharing and applying the many great skills and resources she has gained through ELEVATE across her network and "anywhere that I can contribute."

"ELEVATE exceeded all my expectations. The diverse range of speakers and topics provided valuable insights, and the networking opportunities were exceptional, allowing us to connect with experts and fellow professionals. The well-organized sessions and interactive workshops made for an engaging and enriching experience. The culture is positive and comfortable. I left ELEVATE feeling inspired, informed, and motivated to implement new strategies in my work. I strongly recommend it!" —
Manpreet Kaur, ELEVATE fellow, 2023

SPOTLIGHT

ELEVATE FELLOW

Kerri Malloy

Kerri J. Malloy is an assistant professor of Global Humanities in the Department of Humanities at San José State University. His research focuses on Indigenous genocide, healing, and reconciliation in North America and the necessity of systemic change within social structures to advance transitional justice. He received his doctorate in Holocaust and Genocide Studies from Gratz College and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. Kerri served as an adjunct professor for seven years before making the transition to a tenure-track position. While he found this shift exciting, he reflected that it also came with "new challenges." According to Kerri: "Before I set foot on campus, it became apparent that I was hired based on my identity rather than my experience, research, and attributes that I could bring to the department. Throughout the year, it was my identity as an American Indian that consumed my colleague's interest in me rather than my teaching ability and research accomplishments." He applied to the ELEVATE program "because of its emphasis on helping faculty of color navigate the higher education landscape by reinforcing and developing the skillsets necessary to succeed on the tenure track." According to Kerri: "When I arrived at ELEVATE, my expectations were for the standard professional development seminar, where I would walk away with a new bag and folder of handouts - what I left with was far from that. ELEVATE reinforced my confidence that I was more than my identity and that my work had value. The sessions and mentors reminded me why I decided to pursue a career in higher education and that I had the skillset necessary to succeed." When Kerri returned to his campus after the program, he charted a new path for himself: "Aware that the university wanted to start a Native American Studies program, I met with the provost and negotiated a course release for a year to conduct the foundational work for the program. At the same time, I met with chairs in other departments to discuss the possibility of joining their departments. I joined a small group of other junior faculty in a research group that looked at the experiences of Native American students at the university, parlaying that research into campus and conference presentations, a white paper, a case study, and a peer-reviewed journal article. At the end of my second year, I moved into a new department that valued my research and teaching abilities." Kerri believes that "ELEVATE helped me find the confidence to chart my path on the tenure track and find my place within the university. The experience of meeting and working alongside other junior faculty, many in the same position as myself, was invaluable. ELEVATE restored my confidence that I could succeed in higher education and encouraged other junior faculty to apply each year."

Fellows were inspired by the ELEVATE mentors, who not only shared candid and insider knowledge of navigating higher education and the tenure process, but also offered themselves as resources beyond the ELEVATE convening itself. As one fellow noted: "To hear from so many people who have actually been through this early part of being an educator in their college industry and to hear their advice was amazing." Another fellow shared that they most appreciated the "authenticity of it all," further noting that: "I think that's one of the things that I really walked away with that the mentors were all very genuine. I had mentors who reached out to me after giving me suggestions on, for example, my op-ed saying that hey, you should really push to get this out, reaching out to say hey, remember when we were talking about this. So, I think that's very genuine and authentic to have folks invested in the lives of these young scholars, these junior scholars."

Fellows were extremely grateful that they had the opportunity to be heard and seen, which many fellows felt they did not experience enough on their own campuses, even being at MSIs. As one fellow shared: "I called my husband, I think after the first or second day, and I said, 'I'm so glad I came. I'm so glad I got into it because I feel so much more supported and seen than on campus.'" As another fellow put it: "It was really one of the best workshops, seminars, professional development, fun things I've done for several years. It was great to meet everybody and realize that we're all in the same boat that nobody told us we were getting into."

"I just really appreciated getting a sense of the different experiences, which also gave me a good amount of perspective of my own situation."

—ELEVATE fellow

SPOTLIGHT

ELEVATE MENTOR

Timothy Fong

Timothy P. Fong is a professor of Ethnic Studies at California State University, Sacramento. He is also the Project Director and Principal Investigator for the Full Circle Project (FCP) a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education to support incoming Asian-Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA). Tim has written and edited several books including *The Contemporary Asian American Experience: Beyond the Model Minority* (1998, 2002, 2008, and forthcoming). His research specialty areas include comparative race and ethnic relations, immigration history, politics and public policy, community studies, higher education equity and student engagement, and qualitative methodology. Tim believes that "Faculty success at colleges and universities is often very unclear, arbitrary, capricious, and anxiety-provoking. This is especially the case for first-generation educators, women, and faculty of color," and therefore he believes that "ELEVATE provides valuable practical information that many junior faculty have to learn on their own, if at all, at their home campuses." He notes that his ELEVATE session on developing a research agenda is: "specifically intended to provide advice and best practices for how to manage a research agenda at a teaching institution. Faculty at comprehensive and teaching institutions have large teaching and service loads, and do not have as much time or resources for research." Regarding his favorite memories of ELEVATE, Tim reflects: "The comradery that develops among ELEVATE participants stands out the most. The young faculty come away with a solid network of supporters from the facilitators and peers that they would not have without the ELEVATE experience."

Recommendations

We offer these recommendations for institutions and individual faculty members based on our interviews, surveys, and conversations with ELEVATE fellows and our understanding of research related to early career faculty at MSIs and faculty of color overall.

Recommendations for Institutions

1. **Foster a Community-Centric Environment –** Colleges and universities should prioritize creating a supportive, community-centric environment. This includes organizing events and activities that foster strong relationships among faculty, students, and their families.

2. **Enhance Support for Professional Development –** Institutions should allocate funds and resources to support faculty research and publishing efforts. This includes offering grants, reducing teaching loads for those with active research agendas, and providing access to necessary databases and research tools. Partnering with other institutions or organizations to provide these resources can be beneficial. In addition, foundations should prioritize support for faculty development in their support of MSIs.

3. **Develop a Strong Mentorship Program –** Colleges and universities should develop comprehensive, structured mentorship programs that pair junior faculty with senior mentors based on mutual research interests and career goals. They should ensure that these programs include regular check-ins, clear objectives, and accountability measures to maintain engagement and effectiveness. This type of approach can provide guidance on career development, research, and navigating institutional challenges. Moreover, institutions should provide training for senior faculty on how to be effective mentors. Training can cover best practices in mentorship, including providing constructive feedback, supporting mentees' professional development, and navigating institutional politics.

4. **Address Work-Life Balance Challenges –** Institutions can actively promote work-life balance by offering accommodations that help faculty manage their professional and personal responsibilities. Institutions should also provide resources and support for achieving a healthy work-life balance, especially for faculty starting families or those with significant caregiving responsibilities. Flexible scheduling, parental leave, and access to childcare can be crucial supports to faculty success. Colleges and universities should also offer training sessions on effective time management, prioritization, and setting boundaries. They can monitor and balance service responsibilities to ensure that no faculty member, particularly those from underrepresented groups, is overburdened.

5. **Strengthen Institutional Leadership and Stability –** Institutions can work towards reducing turnover in institutional leadership to provide a stable and supportive environment for faculty. This can help maintain continuity in institutional policies and support systems. Moreover, institutions should work to foster open and transparent communication between faculty and administration.

6 **Enhance Clarity and Transparency in Tenure Processes –** Institutions should publish detailed, transparent tenure guidelines and criteria. These guidelines should be made available to faculty as early as possible, ideally upon hiring, to set clear expectations and reduce anxiety. Institutions can organize regular workshops and informational sessions on the tenure process, including what is expected at each stage, how to document achievements, and how to address shared challenges. These workshops should include participation from tenured faculty and administrators to provide diverse perspectives and advice. Lastly, administrators should encourage senior faculty and academic staff to act as allies and advocates for underrepresented faculty. This includes speaking up on their behalf in meetings, supporting their professional development, and ensuring they are fairly represented in institutional decisions.

7 **Enhance Networking and Collaborative Opportunities –** It is essential that institutions organize regular networking events, both within the institution and with other institutions, to allow faculty to connect, share research, and collaborate on projects. These events can help build a supportive community and open new opportunities for professional growth. Faculty will benefit from the establishment of research collaboratives or working groups focused on specific disciplines or interdisciplinary themes. These groups can provide a platform for faculty to share resources, discuss research ideas, and work together on grant applications and publications.

8 . **Enhance Practical Skill-Building Workshops –** Colleges and universities should offer intensive workshops focused on grant writing. These sessions can provide hands-on training in developing proposals, finding funding opportunities, and understanding the review process. In addition, institutions can offer workshops on how to increase publication output, including writing techniques, choosing the right journals, and navigating the peer review process. Faculty would also benefit from training in advanced research methodologies and data analysis techniques. This can help faculty enhance the quality and impact of their research.

9 **Promote Mental Health and Well-Being –** Institutions should provide access to mental health resources and counseling services tailored to the unique stressors faced by faculty of color, offering workshops on stress management, resilience building, and self-care.

10 **Encourage Interdisciplinary Collaboration –** Colleges and universities should form interdisciplinary research groups that bring together faculty from different fields to work on common themes. This approach can promote innovation and provide new perspectives on research problems.

Recommendations for Early Career MSI Faculty Members

1. **Time Management and Productivity –** Clearly distinguish between urgent and important tasks. Use project management tools to keep track of deadlines and priorities.

2. **Establish Clear Work Hours and Stick to Them –** Use time management techniques to create a balance between work and personal life.

3. **Negotiate Reduced Teaching Loads –** Where possible, and if necessary, at your institution, negotiate for reduced teaching loads to dedicate more time to research and publishing.

4. **Professional Development and Networking –** Look for workshops, webinars, and online courses that focus on grant writing, research methodologies, and publishing strategies.

5. **Participate in Networking Events –** Participate in networking events, both within and outside your institution, to build professional relationships and collaborations.

6. **Seek Out Mentorship –** Actively seek mentors within your institution and in broader academic circles. Don't limit yourself to formal mentorship programs; informal mentors can be just as valuable.

7. **Use Internal Grant Programs –** Make full use of any internal grant programs and funding opportunities offered by your institution.

8. **Ask for Written Guidelines –** Ask for written guidelines on tenure and promotion processes from your department or institution.

9. **Be Aware of Institutional Changes –** Keep yourself informed about institutional changes and new leadership. Attend institution-wide gatherings to understand the direction and policies of new leaders.

10. **Adapt to New Leadership –** Adapt your strategies and plans to align with new leadership and institutional priorities.

11. **Peer Support and Recognition –** Create or join peer support groups to share experiences, feedback, and advice on navigating early career challenges.

12. **Apply for Awards and Recognition –** Apply for awards and recognition programs that value diverse contributions to the institution's mission and community.

13. **Work-Life Balance and Well-Being –** Prioritize self-care and ensure you take regular breaks and time off to recharge. Do not compromise on personal time and self-care.

14. **Access Mental Health Resources –** Make use of any available mental health and wellness resources to manage stress and isolation.

15. **Keep Detailed Records –** Keep detailed records of your teaching, research, and service activities to make your tenure portfolio comprehensive and compelling.

References

Blake, D. (2018). Motivations and paths to becoming faculty at Minority Serving Institutions. *Education Sciences*, *8*(30), 1-16.

Brooks, L. & Al-Asfour, A. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and materialism: A correlational and experimental investigation on faculty employed at Minority Serving Institutions. *Journal of Faculty Development*, *34*(3), 9-18.

Conrad, C. & Gasman, M. (2015). *Educating a diverse nation: Lessons from Minority Serving Institutions*. Harvard University Press.

Esmieu, P. (2023). *What's it like for them? A phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of pre-tenure, racially/ethnically underrepresented faculty at Minority Serving Institutions*. University of Pennsylvania dissertation, https://repository.upenn.edu/entities/publication/c03a86e0-1925-4872-ac78-7aeb36fe04f8.

Esmieu, P. (2019). Faculty diversity. In Andrés Castro Samayoa & Marybeth Gasman (Eds.) *A primer on Minority Serving Institutions*. Routledge Press.

Gasman, M. (2022). *Doing the right thing: How colleges and universities can undo systemic racism in faculty hiring*. Princeton University Press.

Rajasekar, J. Al-Asfour, A.; & Boomer, H. (2023). Talent development for faculty: The case of higher education Minority-Serving Institutions. *Journal of Faculty Development*, *37*(1), 41-50.

Schmidt, A. (2022). *The representation of women and racial/ethnic minorities in the workforce of minority-serving higher education institutions*. College and University Professional Association for Human Resources.

Smith, D.G. (2024). *Diversity's promise for higher education: Making it work*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

NCES (2022). Race/ethnicity of college faculty, Fast Facts, https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=61#:~:text=7%20percent%20of%20faculty%20were,American%20Indian%2FAlaska%20Native%3B%20and.

RUTGERS–NEW BRUNSWICK
Graduate School of Education

Center for
MSIs