



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



21 Ways to Welcome BIPOC Faculty

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It is well substantiated that the retention rate in predominantly white institutions (PWI) for BIPOC faculty is abysmally low. Newly hired BIPOC faculty in PWIs report feeling ignored, unwelcomed, even shunned by colleagues and students. They are treated as if, though hired for the job, that they do not belong. Yes, there are some PWIs for which providing hospitality to BIPOC faculty is done well. However, the majority of BIPOC colleagues who leave employment after less than three years report that their reason for leaving hinges upon experiences of being treated inhospitably. With this assertion, I am not focused on overt acts of racism or discrimination. I am, instead for this blog, focused upon acts of cultural insensitivity, lack of basic social skills, and the inability of an institution to be caring, compassionate, and friendly to newcomers who are BIPOC.

What goes wrong? Simply put, the new people are not on-boarded, not offered kindness and warmth.

Climates of care, hospitality and belonging do not just happen. An ethos of welcoming new people must be attended to by many, many persons. The habits and practices of care, compassion, and belonging when BIPOC persons enter the PWI must be painstakingly exercised and attended to conscientiously.

Regrettably, so many schools do NOT have systems for on-boarding, orienting, and providing

for the arrival of new persons in the first six to nine months of employment. People feel unwelcomed because no one, in a robust and institutionalized way, is welcoming them.

I would like to offer this list of activities, rituals, and happenings for your context so that, from the very beginning, BICOP colleagues feel a strengthen of ties and a genuine forming of connections. All these possibilities will not be for every context and every hire. Find what works for you and the person who is newly hired. Consider this list, and given your context, create new ideas of care for newly hired BIPOC colleagues:

1. Invite the colleague to meals hosted in their honor. These are not meant as informal committee meetings, but gatherings to get acquainted with one another. Decide if the meals are better in an area restaurant or hosted in a private home. In either case, ask about the person's dietary preference and restrictions. Who on your faculty gives the best parties? Soon after arrival, ask the best host to throw a party for the new BIPOC faculty and have fun.
2. If you are a well-established member of the community, do not be stand-offish. Do not hold-up waiting for the new faculty to ask you to coffee. Take the initiative - invite the new person to coffee or a meal - with no other agenda than getting acquainted. During the conversation listen more than you talk.
3. Develop a ritual of welcoming professors by having the president, provost, dean, or department head introduce the new colleague to their first class, then applaud wildly in front of students. Send the message to students that this new person is not on probation, not still being interviewed, is not less significant as a faculty colleague due to race. Send the message that there is an expectation that all respect will be given to this colleague.
4. Invite the new person to participate in campus rites, rituals, religious services in a role of their own choosing.
5. Assist the person with finding a religious community for themselves and their family should they desire it.
6. Invite the person to the trustee meeting, alum gathering, student event. Plan to introduce and celebrate the arrival of the colleague at the event.
7. Invite the person to attend the campus sports event and sit in the location of honor.
8. Invite the person to the faculty retreat and make sure they have transportation to the location. If the venue is in a rural location where the BIPOC colleague would be unwelcomed, or in danger, change the venue.
9. Make sure the person has club or institutional memberships that are common and available in that context. For example, membership to the local country club, membership to the local gym, membership to the local library, etc.
10. Connect the person to known childcare networks, if desired.
11. Inform the person of access to certain "insider" goodies, e.g., campus guest housing, coupons for travel, use of vacation properties, meals in the refectory, bookstore discounts, etc.
12. Connect the person with one or two colleagues (one from faculty and one from staff) who will take responsibility for on-boarding.
13. Assign an elder faculty colleague to mentor the person on issues of tenure, promotion,

and institutional culture.

14. Make sure the person has necessary keys, identifications, computer accesses.
15. Help the person with office set-up.
16. Make sure all available institutional documents are provided, e.g., Employee Handbook, campus calendar, trustee meeting minutes, faculty meeting minutes, organizational chart, phone and email directory, etc.
17. Connect the person with persons who have a similar family structure (persons caring for children, elderly, pets, etc.).
18. Help the person locate doctors, groceries, barber shops, hair and nail salons which are culturally woke.
19. Consider what is unique about the town, city, or area and invite the new person to participate in that regionally cultural event.
20. Create an “ambassadors” list, i.e. a profile of families who would welcome getting calls from new persons about issues as they arise.
21. Ask the new person what they need, or what their family might need, to secure a good quality of life in the new location, then work to provide for that need.

In the most hospitable schools, it is understood that all persons in the community have a role and responsibility in welcoming the new colleague - ALL PEOPLE - EVERYBODY! The key is for the new BIPOC faculty person not to feel alone, isolated, abandoned, unwanted, or suspect. In the words of my mother, Nancy B. Westfield, “You do not have to become friends with all the new people, but you do have to be friendly.”

<https://wabash.center/2023/01/21-ways-to-welcome-bipoc-faculty/>