

The “cultural taxation” of faculty of color in the Academy

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Article 20, the Workload Article of the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Board of Trustees of the CSU and the California Faculty Association speaks to the professional responsibility of instructional faculty:

“The primary professional responsibilities of instructional faculty members are: teaching, research, creative activity and service to the University and to the community.” (Workload, Article 20, Section 20.1)

This definition of faculty responsibility is generally accepted in almost any higher education venue across the United States. One must admit to a certain simple elegance with this definition.

The phrase “and service to the University and to the community” is so muted and subtle, that it is accepted without question or much discussion. It lulls us into a kind of intellectual somnambulism as we toil to make manifest its meaning in our professional lives.

Yet hidden behind that seemingly innocuous phrase is an epic struggle for recognition, equality and justice that is transformative of the Academy and the faculty within it.

Every tenure-track faculty member in the Academy, neophyte or seasoned veteran, is responsible for teaching courses, building a record of scholarship, and providing service to the institution to meet the standards of the retention, promotion and tenure process.

However, these processes take on increased and amplified weight for underrepresented faculty and faculty of color in predominantly white institutions, such as on our CSU campuses.

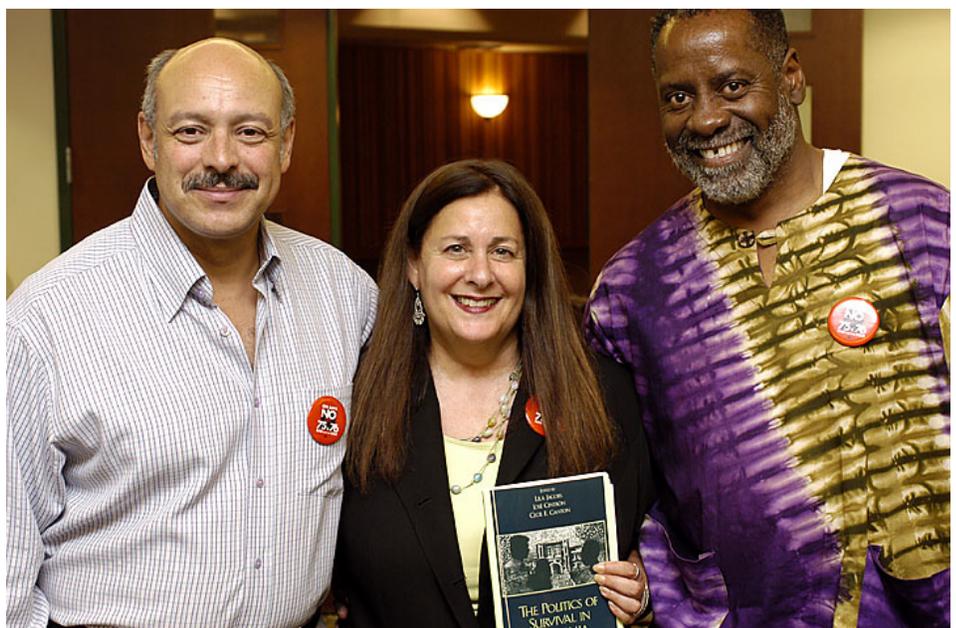
In our book, *The Politics of Survival in Academia: Narratives of Inequity, Resilience*

and Success” (Bowman & Littlefield, 2002), Lila Jacobs, Jose Cintrón and I make plain the unique burden that faculty of color have to bear in order to fit into and survive within the unique political and cultural paradigm of American higher education.

This occurs often at the expense of their own cultural identity, even though in many cases it was that identity that made them attractive to the institution in the first place.

The Academy endeavors to provide a rich, diverse and intellectually vibrant environment in the classroom and on campus. *The*

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Jose Cintrón, Lila Jacobs and Cecil Canton collaborated at Sacramento State to author the 2002 book, *The Politics of Survival in Academia: Narratives of Inequity, Resilience and Success*.

Politics of Survival in Academia does not capture all the issues of surrounding the political culture in the Academy. It does, however, raise several key concerns about identity and knowledge, teaching and learning, equality and affirmative action, and fairness and justice which remain troublesome and controversial issues, especially on predominately white campuses where the battle for racial justice is most complex.

Perhaps most significantly, *The Politics of Survival in Academia* makes visible the onerous “cultural taxation” that is levied on underrepresented faculty, especially, faculty of color.

The Costs Imposed

“Cultural taxation” is a term coined by Amado Padilla in 1994 as a way of describing the unique burden placed on ethnic minority faculty in carrying out their responsibility to service the university.

He defined “cultural taxation” as the obligation to show good citizenship towards the institution by serving its needs for ethnic representation on committees, or to demonstrate knowledge and commitment to a cultural group, which, though it may bring accolades to the institution, is not usually rewarded by the institution on whose behalf the service was performed.¹

This “cultural taxation” phenomenon, as stated earlier, is the price that most faculty of color must pay for admission to and retention in the Academy.

“Cultural taxation” is a stealth workload escalator for faculty of color. And like stress, it can be a silent killer of professional careers and aspirations.

Everyone knows and accepts the notion that minority faculty are expected to serve as role models and mentors for minority students. Yet, this expectation is never actually stated during the recruitment or hiring process.

Even when institutions advertise in trade journals or magazines directed at underrepresented communities for faculty positions, there is usually never any mention of that viewpoint or responsibility.

Clearly, serving on university and department committees as the “minority” representative is taxing in itself. But being expected to “speak for your people” as well, is a form of “taxation without representation” at whose mere consideration, would make most faculty shudder.

Service To Students

It is also not uncommon for faculty to be asked to serve as advisors to or sponsors of student organizations and clubs. Often this request serves to indicate a recognition or acceptance of the faculty member into the student culture and environment as a “cool” faculty member. (Someone these students can rely on or go to for advice and support.)

During my time at CSU, Sacramento, I have served as a faculty advisor for many student organizations. In fact, one year early in my tenure process, I was the faculty advisor of record for about 15 different student organizations. Needless to say, I was both overwhelmed by the responsibility and grateful for the students’ recognition. The institution has since changed the rules limiting the number of student organizations that a faculty member can advise at any one time. A change with which I concur!

Students of color often come into the Academy from unique social milieus. These environments often create unique and special social needs, which make these students’ transition into and through the university more challenging. It is not uncommon for them to have to address the aftermath of violence and dislocation in their families or communities while at the same time trying to learn how to survive in the Academy.

It is also not uncommon for them to have to

cope with experiences of discrimination on campus or similar problems in their classes and to try to figure out how to handle them.

Faculty of color, more often than not, have to play the role of advocate, counselor and therapist for these students; a role most other faculty don’t have to assume.

Scholarship

Finally, “cultural taxation” manifests itself in the research and scholarship realm for instructional faculty of color. In many situations, they are expected to focus their research and professional development towards those exotic communities that make them attractive to the university.

Yet, this same research and scholarship is often not viewed as important or relevant for retention or promotion purposes. These faculty are often forced (without it being said) to identify other additional and more acceptable (to their colleagues) areas in which to exhibit their research and scholarship. This bias, sometimes unconscious and sometimes not, increases workload for them in ways that would not be tolerated by their mainstream peers.

One thing is clear from all of this. If we want our faculty of color and other underrepresented faculty to become involved in their union, we must be mindful of the fact that for them “workload” is different than it is for other faculty.

Perhaps we should conduct a survey of underrepresented faculty to determine the impact of “service” on their workload and their ability to become involved in the work of the union. Clearly for them, an increase in workload doesn’t just mean an increase in classroom size. For them it may mean survival in the Academy. ■

1. Padilla, A.M. 1994. “Ethnic Minority Scholars, Research, and Mentoring: Current and Future Issues.” *Educational Researcher*, 23(4), p.24-27