

Report on the UD-ADVANCE Conference, “Women of Color in the Academy: What’s Next?”
April 29-May 1, 2016, Clayton Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716

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with contributions from Anne Boylan, Conference Program Co-Chair

Report Synopsis

Conference keynote addresses, presentations and related materials are posted at
<http://sites.udel.edu/advance/conference/>.

“Women of Color in the Academy: What’s Next?” convened 175 faculty of all ranks, administrators, graduate students and post-doctoral fellows from more than 30 academic institutions across the US at the University of Delaware (UD) for 2 days of keynote speeches, presentations, panels, roundtables, posters and networking activities describing research, programs and practices focused on advancing the careers of women of color faculty. In order to contextualize the discussion with an emphasis on **the perspectives and lived experiences** of women of color faculty, the film “Living Thinkers: An Autobiography of Black Women in the Ivory Tower,” by Roxana Walker-Canton was screened on the first night. The openness engendered by the frank discussion of the isolation and marginalization women of color faculty commonly experience energized the remainder of the conference program. Conference presentations considered a number of themes including updating administrative policies, addressing campus climates, promotion and tenure and improving career-life balance, but a theme emerged around the various forms of mentoring, e.g., self, peer, and institutional mentoring, that benefit all faculty, but marginalized faculty in particular. The Conference engagement at both the policy/program and support network level made the conference a powerful experience for the attendees. As UD administrators and faculty consider “What’s Next?” for women of color on this campus, the experience of the conference attendees suggests that promoting engagement networks for isolated faculty must accompany ongoing efforts to remove structural impediments to gender and ethnic equity from University policies and practices and reduce the challenges presented by the implicit biases of faculty and administrators.

Introduction

The University of Delaware (UD) ADVANCE Institute organized and convened a conference “focusing on faculty women of color, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, [to bring] together faculty, administrators, students, and industry and government representatives to discuss cutting edge research on the recruitment, retention, advancement and leadership of faculty women of color, highlighting their lived experiences.”¹ The conference program featured a combination of traditional conference venues, such as keynote addresses, panels and posters, and deliberative sessions, such as roundtables and open fora covering a range of topics impacting women of color faculty: research findings, recommended institutional practices, mentoring, peer networks, career-life balance and survival and success strategies. The conference organizers hoped the conference would 1) provide a unique venue for researchers engaged in studies that include women of color academics to network with each other and potential research subjects; 2) encourage incorporation of the lived experience and insight of women of color academics into the predominantly quantitative scholarship on the participation of women of color in academia; 3) incentivize formation of interdisciplinary research and personal support networks among women of color academics in attendance; 4) expose administrators from UD and other campuses to research and evidence-based practices that can reduce the persistent underrepresentation of faculty women of color in academia. This report summarizes the co-chairs’ observations about conference planning and execution processes and outlines their individual conclusions from the event. Prof. Neal offers suggestions future programming in a section entitled Beyond ADVANCE.

Background and Planning

The UD-ADVANCE team began planning the conference in September 2014 by meeting with the University’s Vice-Provost for Diversity, Professor Carol Henderson, and the Director of the Study for the Center of Diversity, Professor James M. Jones, securing co-chairs for the conference program, and choosing the conference dates and venue. The ADVANCE team and co-chairs invited faculty from a wide range of departments and disciplines to serve on the program committee. (See Table 1 for a list of the program committee and their University affiliations. Table 1 also lists University faculty who were not full-time committee members, but supported the committee’s efforts.) Once the program committee was in place, it began meeting regularly, both in person and virtually (via an online group site (Sakai)); one or more members of the ADVANCE team routinely attended meetings in an advisory capacity. The committee identified several potential themes for the

conference and keynote speakers, and began drafting the conference call for proposals, describing the conference themes and differentiating it from other comparable conferences. Those potential themes included: disseminating existing research and stimulating new research on the persistent underrepresentation of faculty women of color in academia; asking “what’s next?” in order to identify necessary next steps to transform institutions and create positive opportunities and changes for women of color, particularly in STEM fields; fostering collaborative research networks; and sharing lived experiences among women of color scientists.

Table 1. Conference Program Committee Members & Supporters

Co-Chairs: Assoc. Prof. Sharon Neal, Chemistry and Biochemistry & Prof. Anne Boylan, History		
Pascha Bueno-Hansen	Asst. Prof.	Women’s Studies
Rachel Davidson	Prof.	Civil and Environmental Engineering
Patricia DeLeon	Trustee’s Prof.	Biological Sciences
Erica Armstrong Dunbar	Blue & Gold Prof.	Black American Studies & History
Myae Han	Assoc. Prof.	Human Development & Family Studies
Elizabeth Higginbotham	Prof.	Sociology
John Koh	Prof.	Chemistry & Biochemistry
John Pelesko	Assoc. Dean & Prof.	Arts & Sciences & Mathematical Sciences
Lori Pollock	Prof.	Computer & Information Sciences
Carol Rudisell	Librarian	Univ. Libraries
Elaine Salo	Assoc. Prof.	Political Science & International Relations

The committee was expertly and generously assisted by Dr. Emily Bonistall Postel, Director, and Lynn McDowell, Administrative Assistant, from the UD-ADVANCE Institute.

By the summer of 2015, the keynote speakers were in place and the ADVANCE staff and program committee members disseminated the call for submissions, circulating it widely through academic and professional networks. Summer, 2015, also brought pledge of generous financial support from the offices of President Nancy Targett and Provost Domenico Grasso. In addition, support from the Chair of the Philosophy Department, Dr. Kai Draper, using that Department’s Class of 1955 Fund, and Vice-Provost for Diversity and Inclusion, Dr. Carol Henderson, provided travel scholarships for more than thirty conferees who needed financial assistance. The scholarships proved vital to many scholars in attendance. Throughout the planning process, the program co-chairs met regularly with Professors Henderson and Jones. The ADVANCE team held regularly

scheduled meetings with Provost Grasso, at which they discussed conference planning among other ADVANCE matters.

The initial submissions deadline of September 15 was extended to September 30, 2015. During the remaining fall months, the program committee, along with the ADVANCE team, drafted the conference program, organizing sessions around conference themes and filling in perceived gaps in program coverage. In early 2016, the ADVANCE office sent out a call for posters. Conference registration also commenced early in 2016; a Facebook page and Twitter handle (#colortheacademy) accompanied the registration process and remain live.

In publicizing the conference and designing publicity materials, the Office of Public Affairs provided invaluable assistance. For use on the conference program cover, the University Museums staff secured permission from artist Robin Holder to use her striking print, *Map of Nubia III*, held in the Paul Jones Collection of African American Art. Program committee member, Librarian Carol Rudisell, put together a conference tie-in exhibit at the University Library entitled “Two Steps Forward, One Step Back? Women of Color and the Dance of Academia.” The program committee also made arrangements with the University Bookstore to have a table staffed at the conference to make copies of attendees’ books available for purchase, along with other works relevant to conference themes.

Conference Activities

Friday, April 29, 2015

At the opening session, attendees gathered as a group to hear a welcome from Vice-Provost Carol Henderson and a keynote address from Gilda Barabino, Dean of Engineering at City College of New York, stressing the key role of mentoring in career success. Speaking in personal terms, Dean Barabino shared stories from her own journey as a mentee, and her experience as a mentor, and noted the necessity for women of color to share their own stories in their own words, so that their perspectives contribute to scholarly descriptions of underrepresentation and solutions for its amelioration. She pointed out that sharing these stories requires women of color faculty to be brave

and bold if they are to counter research that purports to speak for women of color, but reinforces limiting stereotypes. She concluded by asking “what’s next?”; she issued a call to action for institutional accountability through altered policies and practices in the mentoring and retention of women of color in academia.

Following Dean Barabino’s keynote, attendees mingled at a “red carpet” welcome reception, and then viewed the film “Living Thinkers: An Autobiography of Black Women in the Ivory Tower,” by filmmaker Roxana Walker-Canton. The film featured interviews with eight African American women scholars from a variety of institutions and disciplines. At dinner, Dr. Sharon Neal facilitated a lively question and answer session with Ms. Walker-Canton in which the filmmaker emphasized and clarified many of the themes of the film, particularly the value of understanding the role of performance in coping with the stresses of working in academia and the strength derived from “finding the work [our souls] must have.” The after dinner discussion included many comments and questions from the audience, followed by a dessert reception. The experience of viewing the film and discussing it with the filmmaker, on the heels of Dean Barabino’s keynote, proved essential to setting a tone that lowered barriers to participants finding their voices and sharing their own experiences in academia. By the conclusion of the evening, there was a palpable energy at the conference venue.

Saturday, April 30, 2015

Saturday’s program featured four concurrent sessions loosely organized around i) recruiting and retention, ii) administration and mentoring, iii) survival and success strategies and iv) lived experiences in academia. The sessions were interspersed by keynote speakers at breakfast and lunch and a poster session and book signing featuring authors among the conference participants in the afternoon. At breakfast, Provost Karan L. Watson of Texas A & M University stressed how vitally necessary it is for administrators to make deans and department chairs accountable for equitable hiring practices that result in excellent, diverse faculties. At lunch, Dr. Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Assistant Director for Education and Human Resources at the National Science Foundation (NSF) provided practical information on NSF funding policies and initiatives, and answered questions about how scholars can fund their projects. At dinner, Dr. Sandra Yancy McGuire, Director

Emerita of the Center for Academic Success and Retired Assistant Vice Chancellor and Professor of Chemistry at Louisiana State University, introduced the audience to current research on metacognition and using humor and specific examples, encouraged participants to use metacognitive methods to mentor themselves in addition to seeking guidance from others.

During the sessions, presentations, panels and roundtables, topics such as institutional best practices for recruitment and retention, mentoring, career-life balance strategies, and success strategies for women of color in STEM fields and at predominantly white institutions were considered. With three or four sessions to choose from during each time slot, attendees had opportunities to hear from scholars doing research on women of color in academia and developing strategies for institutional change. More than one speaker noted the uneven distribution of faculty workloads and the heavy demands made on women of color for mentoring undergraduates and serving on university committees. In their presentations, Dr. Valerie Hardcastle of University of Cincinnati and Dr. Ala Qubbaj of the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley provided concrete suggestions, such as using specific rubrics to measure faculty time, including mentoring as part of faculty teaching workloads, and creating special “service sabbaticals” or other released time for overburdened faculty. In another session, Dr. Robbin Chapman of Wellesley College described her “Mosaic” tool for mentoring, including a method of disaggregating one’s mentors into specific roles in order to clarify strategies for navigating obstacles and accomplishing one’s goals. Two sessions addressed the concerns specific to undergraduate and graduate students of color.

John W. Curtis, Director of Research for the American Sociological Association described project that is compiling disaggregated national figures on the progression of women through faculty ranks in sociology and other STEM fields. Using disaggregated data, Dr. Curtis documented the challenge women, particularly underrepresented minority women (URM), faculty face as they advance through the academic ranks. The evolution of representation indices of women in disciplinary clusters, e.g., social sciences, biological sciences, etc., shows the decrease in the number of URM women progressing through the academic ranks to full professor is substantially larger than that of women of color and women of all backgrounds. Prof. Stacie Furst-Holloway, from the University of Cincinnati, reviewed productivity of women and URM women hired at her institution between 2005 and 2015. She presented data that showed that URM women had fewer publications and

citations than URM men at hire and at Year 6 and that all URM faculty cite burnout, departmental politics, lack of collaborators and heavy service burdens as critical factors in their decisions to leave UC. She suggested that since women enter the professoriate with fewer publications and citations (assuming UC is normative), development of post-doc pathways and collaborative research networks that enable women, particularly URM women, an opportunity to catch up numerically would reduce attrition rates among women and URM women faculty. Dr. April Hodari of Eureka Scientific, described narrative analysis of extended interviews of three women covering a range of profession-related topics, highlighting elements of the narratives that document the participants' experiences with isolation and chilly to hostile working environments.

Sunday, May 1, 2015

On Sunday, breakfast featured a research presentation by Dr. Denise Sekaquaptewa of the University of Michigan, reviewed the literature on topics relevant to the professional advancement of women of color academics, including her own work on the cognitive impact of solo status in academic settings. Other topics covered during her talk were stereotypes, schemas about gender and race, stereotype threat, the “chilly climate” for women in STEM settings, the “prove it again tightrope,” and the accumulation of advantage and disadvantage that can boost or threaten a career. A recent study identified specific features of the STEM environment that can actually promote stereotypes and implicit bias: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014001rev.pdf>. Her talk ended with suggestions about small changes and micro-inclusions that can accumulate to produce positive gains over time. Specific examples environmental cues that can contribute to stereotype threat and implicit bias included pictures showing marginalized women and underrepresented minorities in unit websites, gender specific literature (how to tie a necktie) distributed in common rooms, such as student lounges and historical walls of fame that reinforce ethnic and gender stereotypes.

After breakfast, a panel on the lived experiences of women of color as STEM researchers moderated by Dr. Pamela Cook-Ionnidis, UD ADVANCE Principal Investigator, featured the lived experiences of three women of color STEM researchers: Dr. Cherise Winston and Dr. Dawn Lott of Delaware State University with Dr. Andrea Lobo of Rowan University. The panelists' presentations led to a thoughtful and lively exchange with the audience about the challenges of dealing with co-workers

and work-life balance. It was followed by a series of breakout sessions in which attendees participated in an “Every Other Thursday” activity. *Every Other Thursday* is the title of a book by Ellen Daniell that describes the value of structured support group work, in which participants not only discuss their difficulties, but take a focused approach to finding solutions. The conference ended with two final keynote addresses: one by UD President Nancy Targett encouraging participants with lessons she learned as a pioneering woman in marine biology and a provocative assessment of the institutional impediments to change in academia by UD sociologist Dr. Margaret Andersen.

The conference met or exceeded the program committee’s expectations: the 175 attendees came from across the country, from the UD campus, from historically minority-serving institutions, and from other ADVANCE grant universities. Administrators attending, in addition to the University of Delaware’s President, Provost, Dean of Engineering, Vice-President for University Development and Alumni Relations, and some department chairs, came from other ADVANCE institutions, such as North Carolina State University, the University of Cincinnati, Texas A & M University, and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. A substantial number of faculty members in attendance were mid-career women faculty to young women starting out in academic careers. As noted above, the availability of travel scholarships was critical to the attendance of more than 30 participants.

Beyond ADVANCE

From its earliest deliberations, the program committee considered encouraging the UD administration to continue the work of the conference an important objective. The committee discussed the value of having the presentations of the speakers and summaries of the notes describing the sessions available via the website. There was considerable discussion about finding other mechanisms to follow up on conference themes. One idea, that will require cooperation with institutional partners such as the Office of the Vice-Provost for Diversity, is a yearly day of activities to highlight the work of women of color in the academy, especially in STEM fields. Many conference attendees made commitments to organizing similar events on their own campuses. A possible date for this yearly event is October 17, the birthdate of Dr. Mae Jemison, physician and pioneering astronaut. Correspondence with Dr. Jemison to investigate the possibility of using her

name for such an initiative has not born fruit as yet. An ad-hoc committee of conference attendees from the UD campus chaired by Prof. Boylan, has organized a second screening of *Living Thinkers* in the Morris Library that will be followed by a panel discussion moderated by Prof. Neal. The screening location links the event to the Library exhibit.

Some Lessons Learned - SLN

The conference title, “Women of Color in the Academy: What’s Next?” is a subtle allusion to Virginia Valian’s 1998 classic, “Why So Slow?”² That monograph distilled research from a range of fields into a cogent, comprehensive explanation of the obstacles to women’s professional advancement. The thoroughness of this work and its near coincidence with the widely cited study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT³ established the validity of its description of the impediments to the professional advancement of women, particularly in academic STEM fields: broadly held gender schemas lead to small differences in perceptions and evaluations, producing an ‘accumulation of disadvantage’ over time. Unfortunately, no analogous work describing the professional landscape for underrepresented minority scholars, let alone URM women scholars, has been produced. However, a number of conferences focusing on the professional advancement of women of color, particularly in STEM fields, have been convened in recent years. One of the most important was held in June 2012 after the National Academies charged an ad hoc Committee on Advancing Institutional Transformation for Minority Women in Academia (AITMWA) to convene a conference entitled “Seeking Solutions: Maximizing American Talent by Advancing Women of Color in Academia.” One of the several important issues identified by that conference suggests that a lack of scholarly research about the experience of underrepresented faculty contributes to the slow pace of advancement by women of color in academia. The Conference Summary reports that “[a] good deal of quantitative data is available (although they are not complete), but several participants cited a lack of certain types of qualitative data that would elucidate key information about individuals’ choices. ... The need for [disaggregated and] longitudinal data, in particular, was highlighted by numerous participants ...”⁴ In an effort to generate programming beyond that provided by other conferences, the “What’s Next” Conference was originally envisioned as a venue to connect researchers studying the experiences of women of color in academia with women of color faculty in order to promote the type of research networks that can generate the kinds of data identified by the “Seeking Solutions” conference. In the clarity of hindsight, it is evident that

organizing a conference that connects groups of scholars from disparate disciplines requires seating an eminent advisory board and scheduling the conference around the availability of a core of well-known scholars. That original vision also ignored the important role university administrators, faculty groups and professional societies can and do play in collecting the kind of qualitative, longitudinal data that “Seeking Solutions” endorsed. Consequently, it is not a surprise that the “What’s Next?” conference attracted a substantial number of conferees, many mobilized by the imprimatur of the ADVANCE program, who are involved in the recruitment and retention of women of color in academic STEM. As outlined above, several of the conference submissions described qualitative descriptions of the experiences of women of color academics. Dr. Curtis’ presentation featuring disaggregated, longitudinal data was also responsive to the “Seeking Solutions” mandate.

As stated above, the number and energy of the conferees exceeded the expectations of everyone on the program committee. That energy also suggests that conferences, like “What’s Next?” that enable women of color to meet and connect with peers are absolutely critical. Perhaps they compensate a little for the isolation most women of color report in their home departments. (This is statement does not contradict the encouragement of Dr. Christine Grant of NCSU to go beyond workshops to programs that will change the academy rather than encourage women of color scholars to persevere in the face of daunting obstacles.) Dr. Anne Boylan’s suggestion to open the conference by showing Roxanna Walker-Canton’s “Living Thinkers: An Autobiography of Black Women in the Ivory Tower,” was a stroke of genius. The film’s frank presentation of the marginalization even prominent African American women academics face lowered barriers to discussion that enabled participants to have open discussions on difficult topics. Not only were participants moved to tears several times, specific challenges to participants’ well-being and safety were openly discussed in the question and answer periods and every other Thursday activity.

As for the goal of identifying programs and policies that make meaningful steps forward, the experience of the conference recommends activities that engage marginalized faculty in various types of professional networks in addition to the established focus on reducing structural impediments to gender and ethnic equity in University policies and human impediments presented by faculty and

administrator implicit biases. Often women of color are “solos,” the only representative of their demographic group in their department. As Prof. Sekaquaptewa’s presentation referenced, there is a growing body of research describing the detrimental impact solo status can have on performance and evaluation. This work suggests that encouraging and supporting women of color faculty as they struggle against intellectual isolation will not only increase the well-being of marginalized faculty, it will enhance performance and increase retention as well.

The conference also revealed that there is a need for activities designed to engage majority faculty who desire to serve as sponsors and allies to marginalized faculty. Often majority faculty do not know how to help. Supporting the development of their skills to respond to resistance from those who see increasing diversity as inherently unfair or lowering academic standards would impact the climate for all faculty.

Some Lessons Learned - AB

The question “what’s next”? for women of color in the academy was crucial for framing conference discussions, and remains crucial for following up on those conversations. During the weekend, participants deeply valued having opportunities to share their past personal experiences and think about what might be next for them individually, as scholars and professionals. The conference generated a lot of energy and discussion of strategies, necessary because so many women of color in academia are in the “solo” position and feel isolated. Conference presenters were generous in sharing ideas, offering a variety of resources to promote the goal that Dr. Christine Stanley and her colleagues from Texas A&M University framed as “Surviving AND Thriving” in academic settings. Among those resources, mentoring emerged as a key focus of the weekend, whether the type of “self-mentoring” that Dr. Sandra Yancy McGuire of Louisiana State University outlined, mentoring mosaics as developed by Dr. Robbin Chapman and Dr. Yvette Huet of Wellesley College and University of North Carolina, Charlotte, respectively, or peer mentoring and networking and the creation of institutional “safe spaces,” as the team from University of Maryland, College Park, led by Dr. Kerry Ann O’Meara, described.

Conference discussions addressing the more general question “what’s next?” produced useful suggestions for UD-Advance to consider. A few sessions provided new data on women of color in STEM disciplines; there is a constant need for such up-to-date information (data available on PowerPoint slides linked to the conference web site). Other sessions, such as that chaired by Dr. Jameta Barlow, revealed the possibilities of using social media to “disrupt” and even “dismantle” the harmful stereotypes and microaggressions against which women of color struggle daily. Still other sessions provided concrete, workable strategies that individuals and institutions can use in order to produce the institutional transformation that ADVANCE seeks to achieve. Accountability at all institutional levels emerged as a crucial aspect of the process, in order to create inclusive policies and practices for recruiting, mentoring, retaining, and nurturing women of color in academia. Dr. Valerie Hardcastle of the University of Cincinnati’s LEAF program provided sample language for annual evaluation rubrics and for use in Promotion & Tenure documents, language that can measure and reward the uneven service and mentoring burdens that women of color faculty experience. Similarly, Dr. Denise Sekaquaptewa suggested various “micro-inclusions” and “small changes” that can lead to “big gains” (such as removing the all-male, all-white “Walls of Fame” that too often greet visitors to campus buildings). Why not?

From the start, the program committee was clear that the conference should not be an end in itself. Continuing the work through follow-up activities, including planning programming for October 17, is crucial to that goal.

References Cited

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2. Valian, Virginia. *Why so Slow?: The Advancement of Women*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998.
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4. National Research Council. *Seeking Solutions: Maximizing American Talent by Advancing Women of Color in Academia: Summary of a Conference*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2013. doi:10.17226/18556.