

White professors still dominate Bay Area colleges as student bodies grow more diverse

By Katy Murphy kmurphy@bayareanewsgroup.com San Jose Mercury News

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SAN JOSE -- The high-profile bullying case of a black student has thrust San Jose State under an intense spotlight to improve the college experience for its minority students and diversify its predominately white faculty.

But an analysis of demographic figures by this newspaper shows that a lack of racial diversity in academia runs wide and deep: The South Bay campus' faculty is more diverse than other major Bay Area universities and the state's two university systems.

At San Jose State, 59 percent of the faculty are listed as white, although 10 percent of the professors didn't specify a race. The faculty at UC Berkeley, a campus that prides itself on its progressive identity, is 77 percent white. At Stanford, it's 74 percent. Across the state, 76 percent of the University of California's faculty and 68 percent of Cal State's are white.

"That's shocking and definitely concerning," said Diana Crumedy, a San Jose State graduate student and campus activist who is African-American. "This is America. It's supposed to be a melting pot."

Colleges nationwide are admitting an increasingly diverse set of students, but their faculties have been slower to catch up -- a dynamic that critics say both reflects and perpetuates racial inequality. Cal's famed political science department, an authority on matters of economic power and racial inequality, has yet to tenure an African-American professor in its 110-year history. That's not for a lack of trying, said department Chairman Eric Schickler, who said it has lost out to other universities on offers to African-American candidates but is trying again to recruit a prominent black scholar.

Difficulties diversifying

In one of her first moves as president of the UC system, Janet Napolitano allocated \$5 million to support minority graduate students and increase their numbers; only about 3 percent of UC's doctoral students are black and 8 percent are Latino.

"You have to look at diversifying faculty on a longer time term," she said. "There's a pipeline for faculty."

Although public universities say tight budgets make it tough to compete for highly prized minority candidates, money does not explain everything.

Stanford, with an \$18.7 billion endowment, has proportionately nearly twice as many white professors as it has white undergraduates. Harvard's faculty is 80 percent white.

"It's really a sad state of things when you have these really bright people who come to an institution, looking to educate and develop themselves, and they can't see themselves represented in the faculty," said Professor Na'ilah Nasir, who attended both UC Berkeley and Stanford and now heads Cal's African American Studies program.

The hiring process contributes to the disparities: It is difficult to set a campuswide policy when departmental committees, not central administrations, hire faculty candidates. Affirmative action bans -- in place for California's public colleges -- and the relatively small pool of minority candidates also slow progress, experts say.

Some gains at SJSU

San Jose State for years has worked to diversify its faculty, and is showing some gains. In 2009, the school laid out a strategy that included diversity training for faculty recruiters, recruitment booths at minority conferences and advertisements in diversity publications.

"It's clearly a critical need and a challenge anywhere, in all educational institutions," said Bill Nance, the school's vice president for student affairs. "Students need, want and deserve a diversified faculty to help them through the kinds of unique circumstances that vary from one particular student group to another."

Minority students make up the majority of San Jose State's student body -- about two thirds. But less than a third of its faculty come from minority backgrounds, and only 9 percent are black or Latino; another 10 percent declined to specify their race. Neighboring San Francisco State has a similar faculty profile: 61 percent white.

A San Jose State study in 2011 found that some groups, particularly African-Americans, experienced discrimination in their classes, and a sense that they were intellectually inferior. The report was never publicized but came to light in November as tensions rose with the hate-crime arrests of four white students charged with tormenting their black roommate for weeks in campus housing.

After a week of intense criticism, the administration called in two well-known black leaders to oversee an independent review of the alleged hate crime and the broader issues students have raised.

Seeking acceptance

As the nation's demographics shift and a broader cross-section of Americans goes to college, the student-faculty divide could become even more of a sticking point for minority students.

"It is very hard, especially for students in the science department," said Alba Lopez, a Cal transfer student and aspiring academic. "I know it's even worse there."

Lopez said she liked all of her classes -- but that a Latina education professor she sought out this term "validated my whole experience as a Latina at Cal" and "made me love Cal so much more."

Ethnic studies departments, a hard-fought victory of student activism in the civil rights era, have long been a refuge for students who feel alienated in their other classes. There, they "find a place of home, of acceptance, where their intelligence isn't questioned when they walk in the door," Nasir said.

At San Jose State last spring, a proposal to close the tiny African-American Studies department and turn it into a sociology program triggered student protests. The department is still open, but students are fuming; they say the mere suggestion showed a lack of historical context and concern for racial equality.

Similar ethnic studies controversies have erupted at Cal State's Long Beach and Bakersfield campuses,

according to a California Faculty Association letter sent in late August to campus presidents.

"Now is not the time to be shrinking or burying academic curriculum that takes on these critical issues," the letter read. "Instead we must commit ourselves to helping all of our students wrestle with the reality of race in America and aspire to create a better society for all of us."

Unless a campus administration makes faculty diversity a priority, little will change, said Albert Camarillo, a Stanford history professor who has studied the issue for decades and says "very modest progress" would be a generous characterization.

Students across the Bay Area feel that their schools should be doing more. "This is way bigger than us," said Crumedy, a member of San Jose State's Black Unity Group. Students have raised these issues many times before, she said. "The only difference is that the media and the world are watching."

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