

Workshop: "Coalition Building to Advance Diverse Leadership and Address Discrimination in Political Science"

Panel: Sustaining Diversity Coalitions

Diversity coalitions in an era of cutbacks

Terri E. Givens

Menlo College

When I became a vice-provost at the University of Texas at Austin in September 2006, I became one of 9 African-American women in leadership positions across the university. They included a dean of social work, a dean of students, a director of journalism, a vice provost for admissions and several others. When I left UT in July of 2015 there was only one African-American woman left, the dean of students. One of the factors in the precipitous decline was clearly the fiscal crisis that led to major budget cuts, although these mainly impacted staff positions. However, it was clear that deans were under pressure to be more stringent in their tenure and promotion processes – in one year 7 out of 14 promotion candidates were turned down for tenure, and 6 of the 7 were women or minorities. Another factor was the shift in focus of the administration, although the president at the time had a strong commitment to diversity, once political attacks from the governor and board of regents kicked in, the administration shifted to survival mode.

How can diversity coalitions survive in the face of both financial and political pressure? Unfortunately UT is an example of the limits of diversity coalitions. I had been a leader in recruiting women and minority faculty to UT during my first 6 years, working mainly with our Women's Center and the leaders of our Center for African and African-American Studies. However, my last 6 years were more focused on helping minority and women faculty navigate what was becoming a more difficult and demanding promotion process. Some of our best faculty were "poached" by other institutions with better resources and funding, while some faculty were retained with retention offers and others without outside offers watched their salaries stagnate with raises few and far between.

However, as UT's diversity initiatives have stagnated, particularly those related to faculty recruitment, others have managed to grow their diversity initiatives. One program that comes to mind is UC Riverside. With a strong program in race, ethnicity and immigration politics, they use their networks and social media to connect a broad group of scholars with similar interests. Faculty at Michigan, Duke University and University of North Carolina have also worked with a broad coalition to recruit candidates from diverse backgrounds.

It is clear that more work needs to be done in developing coalitions, but it seems clear that national level networks will become even more important in the era of social media. Faculty and graduate students no longer need to feel isolated if they are the only minority or woman in their department. They can reach out to APSA groups and their own social networks to find allies and support, as well as potential research collaborations. I have always believed in the power of networking, and the networks I have developed over the years have played an important role in my development as a professor and now administrator. It will also be important for those of us in administrative positions to use our roles and connect to these growing networks to create virtual coalitions that can help us overcome the institutional hurdles that make it difficult for women and minorities to advance.