Building the future black faculty pipeline

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Abstract

This paper introduces the Traveling Academic Forum, a series of workshops about becoming a faculty member for underrepresented minority students. The need to build and fill a viable pipeline of prospective black faculty is well documented. The workshops will help participants better understand and navigate the faculty education, hiring, promotion, and tenure process.

The lack of African Americans in computer related fields has been repeatedly observed at the undergraduate level [1], the graduate level [2], and throughout society in what is referred to as the Digital Divide [3]. In some cases, there has even been regression in the number of students and faculty of color [4]. It should thus come as no surprise that African Americans are severely underrepresented in the faculty of computer science departments. The positive effects of a diverse faculty would be numerous including: better mentoring, potentially broader interests, and the higher quality work that inevitably results from a larger pool of candidates.

The Coalition to Diversify Computing (CDC) is a joint organization of the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM), Computing Research Association (CRA), and Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' Computer Society (IEEE-CS). The CDC's goal is to address the lack of computing professionals by developing a diverse collection of students, researchers, and practitioners in computer- related fields. The Traveling Academic Forum is a CDC project that seeks to address the lack of underrepresented minority faculty by disseminating information and building connections at various conferences. These workshops will encourage undergraduate students to become graduate students, try to support and inspire graduate students as they work towards their doctorate and eventual employment as a faculty member, and sustain junior faculty members in their careers.

The goal of the workshops is to build a community of prospective and current African American faculty. Among the reasons often given for attrition of minority graduate students are isolation and lack of mentoring [5]. These workshops will seek to reduce isolation by introducing students to others at the workshop and encouraging continued interaction in the context of an established program. Mentoring can be improved by bringing students into contact with more senior faculty. The workshops will discuss the following questions:

- Why become a professor?

- What is the path to becoming a professor?

- What are the types of positions available?

- How do I obtain a good faculty position?

- How do I succeed as junior faculty member?

Workshops have been given at the National Society of Black Engineers Convention in 2003 and are scheduled for the ACM SIGCSE Conference and National Black Data Processing Association Conference in 2004. Other workshops will be scheduled in conjunction with the CRA Committee on the Status of Women in Computing research. Contacts from the workshops will be used to help further develop and populate the CDC database of future and current black faculty. Beyond compiling information on interested participants, the workshop will develop an online repository of information for individuals at various stages in the process. The online repository will also have a discussion forum for posting questions and receiving answers from others in the community.

The Traveling Academic Forum is appropriate for both minority-focused and mainstream conferences. This project will help the computer community learn more about the size and characteristics of the current faculty pipeline and support its growth.

References

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