

Desirable Qualities in Psychology Faculty at Tuskegee University

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Tuskegee University (TU) is a private, state-related historically black university founded in 1881 as a land-grant institution through the efforts of Booker T. Washington. TU is located in Tuskegee, Alabama in rural Macon County. TU's student population is approximately 3,000. Although 90% of the students are black or African American, they represent many states across the nation. The Psychology and Sociology Department currently has four full-time faculty members in psychology and approximately 120 majors, graduating 26 majors in 2003-2004 with the Bachelor of Arts degree.

Mission of Tuskegee University

TU was founded at a time in our nation's history when education for black citizens was either denied or severely limited. TU is one of a number of historically black universities whose mission is to provide higher education to all people but especially to black students and to those that have been traditionally denied access to higher education in America's mainstream institutions. Due to a variety of circumstances, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have sought to fulfill their mission with relatively limited financial, material, and personnel resources as compared to mainstream institutions. However, premier HBCUs educate significant numbers of black students in the U.S. population.

Faculty Duties

The unique history and mission of TU and the particular discipline determines the unique mix of duties required by faculty as well as the emphasis placed on particular duties. The primary faculty duties at TU include (a) teaching, (b) advising, (c) professional development, and (d) service to the Psychology Department, TU, and the community. Each of these will be discussed separately, although in many cases duties overlap categories.

Teaching

With the rich academic history and mission of TU instruction has always been a primary concern. Because TU has a flexible admission policy, some students come to the campus unprepared academically for higher-level college work. At the same time, many students come from college-preparatory backgrounds and are valedictorians or possess outstanding academic skills. Thus, the student body exhibits a wide range of abilities and learning styles. Successful faculty recognize that being able to reach and challenge students of different abilities and learning styles effectively requires a willingness to adjust their teaching styles to accommodate those differences. In some cases, extra effort is needed to help students learn effective study strategies, and in other cases, faculty members employ different teaching strategies to address different learning styles.

In all cases, we expect faculty to challenge students to think critically through various teaching methods. For instance, one faculty member primarily lectures, but often employs small-group problem-solving sessions or discussions. Another faculty member stresses developing good study skills through requiring students to outline their chapters as homework assignments. This same teacher also requires active participation in class as well as requiring teams of students to present material in creative ways. Another teacher incorporates a wide range of techniques in almost all classes, including participatory lectures, small group exercises and problem-solving, discussion sessions, student presentations and demonstrations. Through a recognition that different students have different strengths and learn best through different strategies, successful faculty attempt to adjust their instructional style to meet the needs of our students.

The current teaching load for TU psychology faculty is four courses per semester during the academic year, with three preparations. Faculty members generally teach one or two courses in their area of expertise and one or two service courses.

Advising

Because one of TU's missions is to provide higher education to all students, including those who may have suffered added obstacles to higher education, TU faculty give extra care

and time in the realm of academic advising, personal counseling, and mentoring. Black students in particular may find role models at Tuskegee who are willing to provide academic engagement, career direction, and personal advice. Traditionally unprepared students may find TU faculty who are more willing to provide tutoring outside of class and the extra care that these students require to complete registration schedules and survive their first year.

Professional Development

Like most institutions of higher learning, TU encourages its faculty to continue their professional development beyond the terminal degree and tenure. However, as in teaching and advising, the meaning of professional development at Tuskegee has a unique interpretation depending on the college and discipline. TU administrators encourage faculty to conduct research and to communicate their findings through publications, conferences, and networking. However, rank and tenure at Tuskegee are not a simple matter of “publish or perish.” Because faculty development is theoretically linked to TU’s mission, rewards for TU faculty for engaging in professional activities are defined more broadly. For some faculty, professional development may mean developing an innovative teaching program to include technology in the classroom, directing a summer program to give high school students a head start, or supervising students in hosting a mini-conference. Because of the relatively small faculty, many opportunities for interdisciplinary research exist; thus a willingness to be flexible in faculty approaches to research is desirable.

Service to the Department, University and Larger Community

TU places significant demand on its faculty to contribute to administrative duties in the Psychology Department, to serve on TU committees, and to become involved actively in the surrounding community. It is likely that available resources and its unique HBCU history combine to place this greater service demand on its faculty than on those at many mainstream institutions. Psychology faculty participate in all aspects of departmental business including recruitment, admissions, registration, advising, curriculum development, assessment, and preparation for graduation and beyond. TU faculty serve on a variety of university level

committees such as Admissions, Faculty Senate, Curriculum, Athletic, and Personnel committees. TU administrators strongly encourage faculty to become involved in community activities and invite community members to campus activities. Perhaps due to its status in a rural community, TU provides many service and learning opportunities to the surrounding community.

Conclusion

TU has not only contributed tremendously to the professional and educational development of America at large but has provided education to countless citizens that may have never achieved the same quality of education in the mainstream. TU faculty perform many duties expected of faculty at many institutions of higher learning, but TU's available resources and unique history and mission have evolved to provide a creative definition of professional development and to emphasize the priority of duties different from those at many other institutions. Relative to many institutions of higher education, TU places tremendous emphasis on innovative teaching, advising, and all aspects of service.