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12 Strategies for Minority Faculty Teaching Race at Predominantly White Institutions

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1. Minority faculty at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) should be keenly aware of the controversial nature of teaching about race. Black faculty who teach about race must simultaneously manage contentious conversations about racism against Black people, while also being confronted with the stereotyped biases of racially-primed white students toward them.
2. Addressing common objections white students may bring into the classroom requires creating space for dialogue and critical engagement. Common issues range from ambivalence, racial colorblindness, white fragility, to white supremacist ideologies.
3. Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other minority students in PWI classrooms may be reluctant to speak up or participate for any number of reasons. Research has shown that students in a majority white environments tend to downplay ethnic and cultural differences. Research has also shown that minority status in PWIs often comes with additional stress due to racism, discrimination, interracial conflict, lack of support and representation, sense of alienation, or an unwelcoming campus environment.

4. Appealing to the institutional identity, history, and demographics of your institution helps to frame the classroom conversation. PWIs do not exist in a vacuum or on an even playing field. They have particular cultures and histories based on the community in which they are embedded. Framing conversations about race within local systems facilitates a historical understanding of racial disparities. If students can see the inequities of race in the immediate context of their own school, neighborhood, and city, the chances of creating a sympathetic learning environment are much greater.
5. Since the Bible has been used to promote the ideology and practices of racism, an important pedagogical move is to identify the biblical and theological roots of the problem. This history is important to tell, expose, and dismantle, particularly in a Christian PWi and perhaps especially in a biblical studies classroom.
6. Minority faculty should be mindful of striking a balance between a persuasive teaching style and difficult conversations, especially when addressing the hard truths about systemic racism.
7. Faculty and administrators at PWIs must seek to understand the nature of negative assessments made by students of Black faculty. Tenure and promotion for Black faculty are often threatened by negative evaluations by white students who perceive them as anti-white especially when discussing Blackness or anti-Black racism.
8. Some Black faculty may experience psychological discomfort when teaching at PWIs. By virtue of the limited numbers of other Black faculty on campus, you may be more visible to other colleagues and students. Some find this hyper-visibility uncomfortable. These dynamics might make you feel compelled to constantly monitor yourself or avoid social situations altogether.
9. Building a strong inter-minority coalition with colleagues inside and outside of the walls of your institution is highly recommended for all faculty of color.
10. Working in your institution requires working on your institution. This is especially true for minority faculty who are committed to creating a culture of diversity and inclusivity at PWIs.
11. Minority faculty should be aware of the impact of racial battle fatigue. In addition to managing course loads, committee meetings, research agendas, and student issues, Black faculty use additional energy to fight microaggressions, overt racism, and institutionalized racism. The effort that it takes becomes emotionally, physiologically, and psychologically distressing. This is racial battle fatigue, and it can lead to a reduced sense of well-being for Black faculty.
12. It is imperative that Black and other minority faculty practice good self-care to mitigate the negative impact of racism and racial battle fatigue. According to Quaye et al. (2019),

self-care strategies for Black faculty to consider include “unplugging from people and places that cause them harm, building community with other Black educators, caring for their bodies, finding safe spaces, and using counseling.”

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