

ELEVATING THE IMPORTANCE OF BLACK SCHOLARSHIP IN A WHITE ACADEMY

By Alonzo M. Flowers, Katrina Struloeff, Nicole Johnson, & Robert T. Palmer

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There are two critical goals of scholars who are in tenure-track, faculty positions. One is to conduct and publish meaningful research that will be widely accessible to a range of individuals, including scholars, practitioners, policymakers, administrators, and community leaders. The second goal is to achieve a semblance of job security by earning tenure and promotion. For many faculty of color, institutional racism in higher education prevents them from achieving tenure and promotion. For example, Black faculty are often forced to engage in more service-related activities related to diversity, which constrains time for research and writing. Furthermore, they are more likely to lack access to mentors and others at their institutions to help navigate the policies related to the tenure process.

In addition, Black faculty tend to be community-conscious scholars, who are dedicated to research that will uplift their communities. In this regard, [research](#) has shown that Black faculty are likely to be scrutinized in the tenure and promotion process when their research is focused on Black and Brown issues. When Black faculty center their research on issues germane to their communities, the legitimacy of their scholarship is questioned. As we have seen this summer when faculty of color coalesced around [Paul Harris's](#) effort to have his initial tenure decision overturned at the University of Virginia, the systematic degradation of Black scholarship is a significant barrier to tenure and promotion for Black scholars. This is deeply problematic and warrants attention for several reasons.

First, according to the [2019 Race and Ethnicity Report in Higher Education](#) by the American Council on Education, faculty and administrators remain predominantly White. However, the student populations enrolled in these institutions are more diverse than ever. Obviously, with the projection by the [U.S Census Bureau](#) that the minoritized population will increasingly outnumber the White population by 2045, the diversity among college students will only continue to increase. Given this fact, institutions of higher education must act earnestly to diversify the faculty and administration of colleges and universities. A [diverse faculty](#) not only benefits minoritized students, but White students as well.

The second reason that addressing the devaluation of Black scholarship is important is that it is indicative of a large trend in American society. This trend, which emanates from White supremacy, condemns Blackness or anything associated with it such, such as the Black Lives Matter movement. This disregard for Blackness is one reason that Historically Black Colleges and Universities are frequently touted as subpar or relics of the past by those in positions of power who can influence societal views of these institutions.

As the editorial team for the [Journal of African American Males in Education](#) (JAAME), we have proposed several events to help elevate the conversation about the impact that the degradation of Black scholarship has on tenure and promotion for Black faculty. During this year's Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference, our editorial team hosted two networking events centered on supporting researchers of color in their approach to publication, making critical manuscript decisions, and gaining acknowledgment for their research contributions. Additionally, efforts were made to provide a safe space for conversation surrounding strategies for amplifying research centered on the experiences of people of color within higher education.

To engage in this dialogue with a broader audience, the editorial team will be hosting a virtual symposium to critically examine how Black scholarship has been viewed unequally in tenure and promotion cases for Black faculty in a White academy. Distinguished Black scholars will discuss reasons for the relegation of scholarship focused on Black and Brown communities and offer recommendations to help the advancement of Black faculty. Sosanya Jones from Howard University will facilitate this panel, and panelists will include, James Earl Davis, Temple University; Donna Y. Ford, The Ohio State University; Fred A. Bonner II, Prairie View A&M University;

Jennifer Johnson, Temple University; and T. Elon Dancy, University of Pittsburgh. [To register to join this webinar on December 17th at 1pm EST, please click here.](#)

In addition, the editorial team is working on a co-edited book entitled, *Critical Conversations: Black Scholarship in a White Academy*. The aim of this book is to highlight the critical voices of Black faculty members as they provide a compelling counternarrative of their unique experiences within the academy. Additionally, our hope is to provide faculty of color with helpful strategies on how to navigate the complexities of the various systems within the academy. As such, the information provided in this book will be valuable to faculty members who are in the tenure and promotion process or serving on such committees. The editorial team hopes that this book will serve as a roadmap for helping to increase the number of Black faculty who successfully earn tenure in a White academy.

As institutions continue to serve more minoritized students, they must ensure that faculty diversity is one of the core strategic values of institutions of higher education. Indeed, while Black scholars greatly contribute to the overall success of students of color, their efforts are often misaligned with traditional tenure-track measures. As we continue to work to alleviate this issue, the editorial team of JAAME aims to provide a space for Black scholarship. By adding value to Black scholarship, we can begin the process of ensuring equity in the tenure-track process.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Are you interested in submitting an essay or op-ed for the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Leadership, Equity, and Justice? [Read the submission guidelines here](#) and reach out to Director for Programs and Communications, Brandy Jones at brandy.jones@gse.rutgers.edu.

