DO I HAVE TO INFLATE MY GRADES IN ORDER TO GET TENURE?

"I am a first year Assistant Professor at my university, where I and two colleagues at my level have discovered that in order to get good student evaluations you can't come on strict and "give" them grades below a 3.7. The trouble is, these student evaluations must be high in order for us to get tenure. To make it worse, our students - who are mostly women, many of them older than standard college age - do not respect us the way they do male professors, from whom they accept lower grades from without giving them bad evaluations."

Readers may recall that in a Spring 2000 article, "Help! My Evaluations Are Lower than I Think They Should Be," I printed Susan Basow's list of "factors that contribute to negative ratings of women faculty" and how to get around them.*
Believe it or not, students are slower to respect women professors for the same qualifications they admire men for earning. Women students in particular project their sense of hopelessness and low self-worth onto female professors: “if she is one of us, she can’t be qualified to teach us.” So, let’s do some serious role modeling.

“Women faculty must signal that they are competent and knowledgeable,” writes Basow: “For example, you might talk about your qualifications on the first day of class.” Boast a bit: tell them about your Ph.D., publications and present research. Basow also thinks that “Dressing in a professional way appears more important for women faculty than for men. A woman professor who dresses informally (e.g. jeans) may seem more approachable, but she does not get high ratings for respect or knowledge.”

So you’ve told them about your hard earned degrees and got yourself up in serious clothing, how are you going to deal with their idea that you should “make nice” with your grades (like a mother) rather than come on more severely (like a father)?

The trick is to be just as strict as you want to be while, given the students’ attitude to low grades and the value the department (in my opinion, extremely dubiously) places on their evaluations, you make them earn those 3.7s and 4.0s by writing better papers.

How can you improve their critical thinking and writing without giving low grades that deflate your evaluations? What you do is treat their writing as process by letting them resubmit over and over until they get it right.

On each paper below that magic 3.7 indicate what they need to do in order to get the grade up, letting them keep resubmitting until just before the end of the semester or quarter.

How to do this without adding a big burden to your grading process?

- Refuse to accept a completely new rewrite.
- Insist that all grammatical or factual errors in words, phrases, and sentences be corrected right on the page, above the line they occur in.
- Concepts in paragraphs can be corrected on the facing page, but the originals must be there for you to compare them to.
- If entire pages have to be rewritten, they must also submit the originals or fail to have their grade elevated.

These techniques make it possible for you to quickly check off the changes you have asked for without having to reread whole papers.

Your professorial authority, or, at least the part that can make the students do something, resides in your ability to grade them. If you use that authority to help them improve their writing and critical thinking to the extent that, through their own efforts, their grades at the end of the course are higher than at the beginning, they will be grateful and show it on the evaluation.

* “Susan A. Basow,” Student Evaluations: The Role of Gender Bias and Teaching Styles,” in Collins, Chrisler, Quina, Eds., Arming Athena: Career Strategies for Women in Academe. For our short version see the back page of this newsletter. To order the book go to Order@sacepub.com.
SUCCESS IN THE IVORY TOWER:
LESSONS FROM BLACK TENURED FEMALE FACULTY AT A
MAJOR RESEARCH INSTITUTION

By Mary V. Alfred

This good advice is excerpted from Mary V. Alfred’s chapter in Sisters of the Academy: Emergent Black Women Scholars in Higher Education, Ed Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela and Anna L. Green.

Sister to Sister: Listening to the Voices of Our Tenured Sisters

In this study, the women did not define themselves as victims but as survivors. They creatively manage White academic culture by employing a variety of strategies that enable them to survive and acquire tenure, thus securing their places in the academy. Because these women have survived, they have chosen to bequeath to academic aspirants their gift of survival. To end this chapter, I have allowed each participant to deliver her message in her own voice. Each participant offers her own mode of survival and offers additional advice to make our journey to tenure more manageable.

Sara’s Message

I think in terms of the tenure process, the expectation is to publish in the mainstream kind of journals in your field, to get some recognition, and most importantly, to have a research agenda and to follow that to get some research funding.

Do what is expected of you. You need to start working with other people to get joint co-authorship of publications, thus maximizing the number of your writings (see p. 6). Begin to become more visible. Become a good department citizen, in a sense of being able to work well with others, so you can have the support of your peers when you go up for tenure. Don’t be isolated.

Interact but don’t spend a lot of time socializing. While you are interacting, find a few that you can work with and make those productive relationships. Know the politics, and most of all, let your work speak for itself. Do the work so when you turn in your materials, you don’t have to say, well if they only look at this or if they only look at that.

I think the most important thing is to be at a school where you think you can work with the faculty, and especially to have someone who will support you because if you go to a major research university like this, your publications are going to be the most important thing.

In many ways, you have to be OK with yourself. You have to build networks. You will have to reach out and do those kinds of things, or its not going to happen. If you are a Black female at a university like this, you are not going to come across many more Black males. They are not here; the ones that are here are probably married. So you might as well forget it and build a network outside the university.

If you can’t be comfortable in the college or school environment where you are and you don’t feel comfortable within the community, you can be a very unhappy person. A lot of times you may feel that you do not necessarily fit in. I think you almost have to force yourself to stop being self-conscious about that and view it really as their problem and not allow yourself to be marginalized by this other group.
Elizabeth's Message

You need to identify an organization or a person who is going to support you, whom you have a good rapport with and you can work with and someone with whom you have similar interests. Sometimes you have to initiate that and sometimes others will initiate it, but more than likely, you would have to initiate it.

You need to be active and visible in the national organization. I was visible in the national organization, and I think that is important. You need to be as professional as you can be and also be willing to speak up and to challenge things in a professional way.

I think you really have to have somebody to work with, somebody who has that area of expertise, and then you may be the second author for a while, but still you are doing publication.

You need to create your own opportunities for your career development. Don't expect the university to have something in place for developing you.

The race baggage that we carry, don't let it affect your professional life; don't let it affect your relationships with other members of the culture.

Jean's Message

Know the rules of the game that you have chosen to enter and play the game by the rules. If you want to succeed in this system, you have to abide by the rules whether you agree with them or not. Don't enter the game and then try to change the rules, unless there is enough support behind you to do so. Know the rules and play the game by the rules. That's the way the system is, rightly or wrongly.

Know yourself and be comfortable with yourself as a Black woman. You must feel secure about yourself and your work in order to survive in this environment.

When it comes time to challenge the system, you have to know your stuff; you just have to be rational. You have to know exactly what you want; you have to give them help on how they can get there, but don't just protest on foolish stuff. I think there are ways to challenge, and I don't think a loud voice or accusations are the way to do it.

I don't think you have to emulate anyone to perform your role successfully. But it doesn't hurt, however, to know how other people might play the game. I think awareness is important, but you don't have to emulate anybody's behavior.

Myra's Message

As a new assistant faculty member, try to make friends; do have coffee with those folks to be accepted if you can, and do find out what interests them. Talk to them; make them know you. Do the social stuff, but also do the academic stuff. Write the articles, get the articles published, turn them out so that if they criticize you, you can ask, about what? You cannot half sleep your way and then say well, they are just racist. That will not work.

There are rules, follow the rules. Even if you write critical pieces, publish them in the right journals. Make sure it is refereed. Try to find friendly publications. Try to know somebody who is doing something, and try to get your stuff in through the back door if you can. That's the real system; that's the old boys' network; so we need an old girls' network.
Try to find somebody who will help you. They may not look like you expect them to look. It may not be the sister; it may not be the brother; it may be a White person; it may be a White man.

You really have to do what you are supposed to do, and you have to do a lot of it, because being an African American woman, people are gunning for you. Practically everybody is gunning at you. African American men, although they are saying they are on your side, may resent you, especially if you have power over them.

Try to have a parallel life. Do not make the university your only life. It should not be your only reality. Develop social relationships outside of the university.

Kendra's Message

You need to be visible in the community that you say you are an expert in. You need to be visible at your national conferences and in your publications. They ask other people who are experts in the field, "What do you know about this person?"

Find out from the people who are on the faculty in your school or department what is required. It varies from department to department. You need to be clear on what they are looking for. What are the criteria that are going to be used to make a judgment about you, whenever that judgment is made?

You want to look good to the people who are evaluating your work. They ask you for your research and publications, your community service, your teaching, and committees that you have served on. They check everything, so your facts had better be straight.

You are given about five years to pull this together, and coming in from the life of a graduate student, this is very different. You must remain focused at all times.

Conclusion

The five women featured in this chapter have found success (measured by tenure and promotion) in the academy through their successful management of the academic culture as well as their personal lives.

They continue on their journey through the ivory tower armed with their powers of self-definition, knowledge, voice, and visibility, and a fluid life structure. Their power of self-definition allows them to create positive images of themselves and reject stereotypical images that characterize them as subordinate. Their knowledge of the culture and its expectations continues to play significantly in their ability to competently perform roles necessary for continued growth and development.

Visibility within the academic community increases opportunities for career development, career advancement, and career mobility. The dimension of voice to demonstrate competence, to articulate constructed knowledge of the self, and to resist oppression was found to be an important strategy that contributes to academic success. Having a fluid life structure makes it possible for members to gain the competence necessary to float in and out of their various sociocultural worlds and to capitalize on the opportunities of both worlds. These five dimensions form an interconnecting framework for promoting Black women's professional development in the White academy.

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Some Tips on Co-Authorship

By Faith Hopp

The first thing to note is that there are very different co-authoring conventions in medical settings vs. liberal arts. The bottom line is that it is a political process! In medical settings, the last author role is sometimes considered a “place of honor” (often the person who got the grant). In other settings, like liberal arts and the social sciences, not being the “first author” means a lower place on the totem pole.

Sometimes people get put on a paper purely for administrative reasons—they were the director of XYZ program, which was critical to getting the study off the ground, but had no role in the paper. A lot of people see this as necessary, but unfair.

One solution that is talked about a lot is deciding the ordering of authorship ahead of time. The problem is that this establishes a “line up” before the work is actually done; it does not really eliminate the possibility of one person doing most of the writing and work but then getting a sub-author position. But it is a step in the right direction.

Sometimes authorship is decided in part or in whole on who most needs first authorship at the moment—e.g., who is up for tenure soon? First author is supposed to be the person who takes the lead on the paper—but there are numerous instances in which this does not occur. The question is, how come some people are routinely getting first author regardless of who actually writes. Are they disproportionately male?

A controversial issue is the role of research assistants. Some people think that they are paid to collect data, not to be authors, and should not be authors. Other people routinely put RAs on papers.

Bottom Line Advice on Co-Authorship:
Be aware of institutional norms, but use your own source of ethics and integrity to establish a fair and just authorship.

Webs for Sisterhood

Gender Watch: A Comprehensive Full-Text Database.

This is a database of publications that focus on how gender impacts on a broad spectrum of subject areas. www.slinfo.com or e-mail to slsales@slinfo.com.

Higher Education Resources for Junior Women Faculty.

Carol Hollenshead, Director of the Center for the Education of Women at the University of Michigan, has compiled a useful bibliography on women in academe. Visit http://www.umich.edu/~cew/bibs/jrwacbib.pdf for the information. You need Adobe Acrobat to open this link.

Non-Academic Careers

Go to http://www.woodrow.org/phd/WRK4US/ to find an award winning email discussion list on non-academic careers for people with graduate education in Humanities, Education, and Social Science Disciplines.
Panel Planned for NWSA Conference, June 19-22 in New Orleans

Sisterhood is Powerful - But to Keep it That Way, We Need Your Help!

We of your Academic Discrimination Advisory Board are mostly second wave feminists, a generation that needs help right away if the good work of both preventing academic discrimination and making donations to women who experience it is going to continue.

We are looking for volunteers to work with us on the annual conference.

We need you

- to help plan panels and contact panelists to present
- to correspond with NWSA about conference plans and panels.
- to send material about these plans to NWSA Action and The Strategist
- to arrange for a table at the conference to exhibit our materials.

Can you help?
Contact Ines Shaw at orchidea3S@netscape.net

Each of us, no matter how successful we have become professionally, must always reach back to help other women advance as far as we have.

Annis Pratt
Use this form to join us and receive The Strategist plus any tips you may have missed:
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- Negotiating your salary
- Got an Interview?
- Faculty moms
- As an African American Faculty Member I Can't Find Time to Get my Job Done!
- Help! My Evaluations are Lower than I Think They Should Be
- Why Can't My Colleagues Be My Close Friends?

- How Can I Stop Sabotaging My Writing When I must Publish or be Denied Tenure?
- The Perils of Probationary Status
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