On April 26, 2012, The Women’s Faculty Cabinet (WFC) of the University of Minnesota, in partnership with the Office of Equity and Diversity, The Women’s Center, and the Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost held the “Diversity Retreat for Women Faculty of Color.” The retreat was facilitated by Judge Pamela Alexander. The goal of the retreat was to discuss issues of equity and diversity on the Twin Cities campus and to discuss the results of the Culture and Climate Survey that was conducted by the WFC Diversity Committee earlier in the Spring 2012 semester. This study was informed by the PULSE Survey and its findings on mentoring, climate, and discrimination. The findings of the study have been desegregated by topic and issue. Overall, the survey and retreat respondents revealed a general dissatisfaction with their experience as women faculty members of color at the University of Minnesota. The retreat results are below.

I. ISSUES IDENTIFIED

A. Informal and Formal Mentoring

There was general dissatisfaction with the mentoring received by women faculty of color. Not all departments have mentoring systems in place and among those with programs, many are relatively inactive or unorganized. Survey respondents recognized the importance of having a mentor but often felt that if they wanted a mentor, they would have to find one on their own with no help by the University.

B. Hiring, Promotion, and Tenure

Survey respondents feel there is a higher level of scrutiny for people of color when hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions are made. Some have experienced inconsistent reviews of their work—the feedback would be positive one year and negative the next, with no apparent reason for these inconsistencies. A lack of advocates for faculty members of color on promotion and tenure committees is one reason survey respondents believe it is harder for faculty members of color to receive a promotion or tenure.

C. Stereotypes and Dealing with Multiple Systems of Oppression

Respondents felt the effects of multiple systems of oppression, particularly gender-based and race-based prejudice. Women faculty members in general appear to receive less respect than their male counterparts, but women of color are affected the most. In fact, most women of color felt they had to “work harder” with their female colleagues compared to their male colleagues; one respondent described white, female colleagues as “aggressive, nasty.” Beyond race and gender, other respondents felt that
their body shape, height, clothing, and manner of speech all affected how much respect they received from their colleagues. Respondents also indicated a tendency for their colleagues to treat them as if they were spokespersons for their entire race.

D. Knowing Written and Unwritten Rules

Women faculty of color often felt that they were hired as “tokens,” and some of their colleagues actually made such statements to them. Some feel there is a system of rules that one must follow, but that these rules are constantly changing and controlled by their white colleagues.

E. University Value Systems – Research, Teaching, Service

There was a general lack of clarity among respondents about their roles in teaching and mentoring grad students: are they supposed to mentor the students? Are they supposed to “weed out” the bad students? Are they supposed to help all graduate students equally, despite different levels of potential? There was a feeling that research was the most important part of a faculty’s work and that without a large number of publications, one would not receive tenure, regardless of her other accomplishments and important contributions as a faculty member.

F. White (Often Male) Dominated Culture

Survey respondents feel that white male cultural norms dominate their departments and that being ideologically or racially different make it less likely that one will be supported by her colleagues. Respondents feel their male colleagues are allowed to “get away with a lot more,” such as leaving work early, coming in late, not paying attention during meetings, and so on. If a woman were to act this way, she may be reprimanded for it during her annual review.

G. Complaint Resolution Processes

Formal processes such as those available through the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) office are generally inadequate. The EEO office generally sends faculty back to their departments to resolve complaints, which can result in the department retaliation against the complainant.

II. HOW WOMAN HAVE NAVIGATED THE ISSUES

Women faculty of color often have to develop their own solutions to the above discussed issues, such as finding a mentor on their own, even if the mentor is outside their academic apartment. Essentially, women faculty of color often have to take matters into their own hands when dealing with a problem, seeking their own mentors, their own advocates, and their own source of affirmation for their work.

III. SUGGESTIONS

Participants suggested ways to address the issues faced by women faculty of color include improving mentorship programs, encouraging department chairs to recognize and increase awareness of these issues so that others can be more aware of their conduct; giving credit for mentoring as a factor in

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3 Id. at 3.
4 Id. at 4.
tenure decisions rather than solely focusing on research; make clear and objective criteria for promotion and tenure decisions; improve diversity training for all chairs and department heads; clarifying where faculty members can go in the university when they have a complaint or need a particular issue addressed; and applying standards consistently to all faculty members.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the results of this survey and retreat suggest that many women faculty of color have had a significant number of negative experiences on the Twin Cities Campus. Women of color perceive that they experience discrimination in various aspects of their professional lives at the University of Minnesota. To address these issues, the University must first recognize and acknowledge the problem and then develop solutions, in conjunction with women faculty of color, to ensure that these issues are adequately addressed and that faculty members are fairly and consistently treated and given equal opportunities for success.

V. JUDGE PAMELA ALEXANDER

Judge Pamela Alexander facilitated the retreat. A brief biography is below:

Judge Alexander grew up in South Minneapolis and graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1977. She started her legal career as a criminal defense attorney with the Legal Rights Center. She later moved to Hennepin County Attorney's office where she worked as a prosecutor in the Criminal Division. In 1983, she became a Hennepin County District Court Judge, presiding over the Juvenile Division and serving as Assistant Chief Judge for the Court as a whole. She served as a judge for more than 25 years. She was the youngest person and first African American woman to hold a judicial position in Minnesota. Judge Alexander sits on many community boards and committees including The Minneapolis Foundation Board of Trustees, the Children's Defense Fund, the Juvenile Judges Leadership Council, and the Children’s Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota. Judge Alexander is the president of the Council on Crime and Justice, a non-profit organization that works on issues related to criminal justice reform and runs programs to address the causes of crime and violence in the community. She has been awarded a number of community service awards including the University of St. Thomas School of Law Dean's Award for Outstanding Teaching and the NAACP Profiles in Courage Award.