

American Sociological Association
Research Program on the Discipline and Profession

Data·Brief

The Pipeline for Faculty of Color in Sociology

One of the most frequently asked questions directed to ASA's Research Program on the Discipline and Profession concerns the size of the minority pool and whether it is growing. Increasing the size of the pool and recruiting, retaining, and promoting men and women of color all along the pipeline is thought to have at least two major positive effects. First, increasing the pool at all academic levels prevents the isolation or "token" status of students and faculty of color (for a strong argument describing the need to move beyond tokens, see Bonilla-Silva and Herring in February 1999 issue of *Footnotes*). Second, the entire discipline can benefit from potential new specialties and topics introduced by new networks of scholars (see also Levine 1993). As Smith-Lovin observed in her recent Presidential address to the Southern Sociological Society (1999), broadening the core of sociological knowledge prevents the absorption of sociology and its taken for granted knowledge.

In this data brief, we address whether sociology as a profession has made progress, stayed in place, or fallen behind in terms of efforts to produce, hire, and promote faculty of color in sociology. There are three critical points in the pipeline, according to Mikelson and Oliver (1991): the production of PhDs, the search and hiring process for new PhDs, and the tenure and promotion process. This article presents the most recent data showing these transitions for whites and persons of color. ¹

The Production of PhDs

In 1976 (the high point of PhD production), sociology was a more homogeneous profession: 87 percent of the degrees were earned by Whites and 13 percent by members of minority groups (see Table 1). Over the next two decades, the share of PhDs earned by U.S. citizens or permanent residents who were members of minority groups increased from 13 percent to 23 percent. During this period, however, the percent of African Americans earning PhDs in sociology remained relatively stable at between five and six percent. In 1996, only 25 African Americans earned a PhD. The percent of Hispanics increased slightly over this period (only two percent), and their numbers remained quite small (13 PhD recipients in 1996). In contrast, strong

Table 1. Racial/Ethnic Identity of Recent PhD Recipients in Selected Social Science Disciplines (U.S. Citizens and Permanent Residents) – 1976, 1986, 1996

	White	Black	Racial/Ethnic Identity Asian	Hispanic	Native American	Other
1976						
Sociology	87.2% (566)	5.1% (33)	1.8% (12)	0.9% (6)	NA	4.9% (32)
Psychology	91.8 (2541)	3.1 (86)	0.8 (22)	1.0 (27)	0.1 (4)	3.2 (88)
Economics	87.8 (567)	1.5 (10)	3.7 (24)	0.3 (2)	0.2 (1)	6.5 (42)
Political Science	87.8 (504)	2.8 (16)	1.9 (11)	1.4 (8)	0.2 (1)	5.9 (34)
1986						
Sociology	83.3 (329)	6.3 (25)	2.8 (11)	3.5 (14)	1.0 (4)	3.0 (12)
Psychology	90.0 (2547)	3.9 (109)	1.4 (41)	3.1 (89)	0.3 (9)	1.3 (36)
Economics	87.8 (449)	1.5 (15)	3.7 (28)	0.3 (6)	0.2 (2)	6.5 (18)
Political Science	83.4 (247)	5.7 (17)	3.7 (11)	3.7 (11)	NA	3.4 (10)
1996						
Sociology	77.1 (324)	6.0 (25)	10.5 (44)	3.1 (13)	1.7 (7)	1.7 (7)
Psychology	84.9 (2636)	4.7 (146)	3.8 (119)	5.5 (171)	0.6 (18)	0.5 (15)
Economics	74.1 (384)	3.7 (19)	17.0 (88)	3.5 (18)	NA	1.7 (9)
Political Science	80.4 (407)	6.9 (35)	6.1 (31)	4.3 (22)	0.6 (3)	1.6 (8)

Source: (1976 and 1986) National Science Foundation, Survey of Earned Doctorates. (1996) National Research Council, Survey of Earned Doctorates.

gains were made in the number and proportion of PhDs awarded to Asians/Pacific Islanders (who are citizens or permanent residents). Their share increased by about nine percent, with 44 PhDs in 1996. While the number of Native Americans who earned PhDs during this period increased by a few, it still remained very small (with only seven PhD recipients in 1996).

Comparison with Other Social Science Disciplines

In 1976, the four social science disciplines shown in Table 1 were all more homogeneous, with about nine out of 10 PhDs awarded to whites. Compared to the other disciplines, sociology awarded a larger proportion of PhDs to African-Americans. Since then, the other social science disciplines increased their share of African American PhDs, while sociology has maintained, but not increased, its proportion. By 1996, economics had a smaller share of recent PhDs that were white than did sociology (74 percent as compared to 77 percent). This can be explained by the relatively large proportion of Asians/Pacific Islanders (17 percent) receiving PhDs in economics. In contrast to economics, sociology had a somewhat higher percentage of African Americans, the second highest percentage of Asians/Pacific Islanders, and about the same share of Hispanics.²

The Hiring Process for New PhDs

After PhD production, the next step in the academic pipeline is the recruitment and hiring of new PhDs as assistant professors. Among others, Mikelson and Oliver (1991) are concerned that new PhDs of color are disadvantaged in the selection process because hiring is based not only on merit but on a system of “sponsored mobility” by eminent professors in prestigious departments. To the extent that minorities have less “sponsored mobility” and thus less competitive hiring, we would expect (given the dominant status norms in the discipline) new PhDs of color to be underrepresented as assistant professors in graduate rather than undergraduate departments of sociology.

Table 2 does not suggest this is the case. Compared to their share of PhDs awarded in 1996, African Americans, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics did not seem to be under-represented in graduate departments in 1998. In fact, African Americans were somewhat over-represented at 10.4 percent of all assistant professors in PhD-granting departments in 1998 compared to six percent of all new PhDs in 1996, suggesting a high take-up rate for new PhDs. Native Americans appeared to be slightly under-represented, although the numbers are extremely small.

Another indicator of a lack of “sponsored mobility” (again according to dominant status norms) would be lower employment of PhDs of color in PhD-granting than in MA/MS-only departments. Again Figure 1 does not suggest this is the case. This figure presents the share of minority assistant professors in MA/MS-only graduate departments in comparison to their share in PhD-granting departments in 1998 (data on BA/BS-only departments are not available). Minority assistant professors have about

the same representation in PhD programs (about 26 percent of all assistant professors) as they do in MA/MS-only programs (about 23 percent of all assistant professors). Figure 1 does show that Asian-Pacific Islanders and Hispanics are slightly more likely to be hired by PhD-granting rather than MA/MS-only departments. For African Americans, there is essentially no difference (African Americans are 10 percent of assistant professors in PhD-granting departments and 11 percent of MA/MS-only departments). While the numbers are small, Native Americans are more present in MA/MS-only compared to PhD-granting departments.

Table 2. Full-time Sociology Faculty in Graduate Departments by Racial/Ethnic Identity and Faculty Rank, 1997-98

	Racial/Ethnic Identity					
	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Native American	Other
Full Professor	90.5% (1074)	3.8% (45)	3.1% (37)	2.4% (28)	0.3% (3)	NA
Associate Professor	85.8 (636)	5.9 (44)	4.0 (30)	3.4 (25)	0.7 (5)	0.1 (1)
Assistant Professor	74.7 (387)	10.4 (54)	9.1 (47)	4.2 (22)	1.0 (5)	0.6 (3)
Instructor/ Lecturer	75.0 (24)	12.5 (4)	6.3 (2)	3.1 (1)	3.1 (1)	NA
Other Rank	100.0 (1)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total	85.6 (2122)	5.9 (147)	4.7 (116)	3.1 (76)	0.6 (14)	0.2 (4)

Valid N = 2,479.

Source: American Sociological Association, 1998 Survey of Graduate Departments of Sociology

Promotion at Senior Levels

The third step in the pipeline is promotion at the senior levels of the profession. In contrast to their representation at the lower rungs of the academic ladder, the over-representation of Whites and the under representation of African Americans is noticeable at the higher rungs, especially at the rank of full professor (see Table 2). Whites who constituted 87.2 percent of the new PhDs in 1976 and 83.3 percent in 1986 were 90.5 percent of the full professors in academic year 1997-98 (compare Tables 1 and 2). For African Americans, the percent of new PhDs was about five percent in 1976 and about six percent in 1986, so that one would have expected a somewhat higher percent of African-American full professors by academic year 1997-98 than 3.8 percent. Although the numbers are small, Hispanics similarly accounted for 3.5 percent of the PhDs in 1986 but only 2.4 percent of those holding the rank of full professor in graduate departments in academic year 1997-98. There are also few Asians at the top rung of the academic ladder, but this circumstance can be explained by cohort effects, i.e.,

there were substantially fewer Asians in the pipeline in 1976 and 1986 who could be expected to be full professors now.

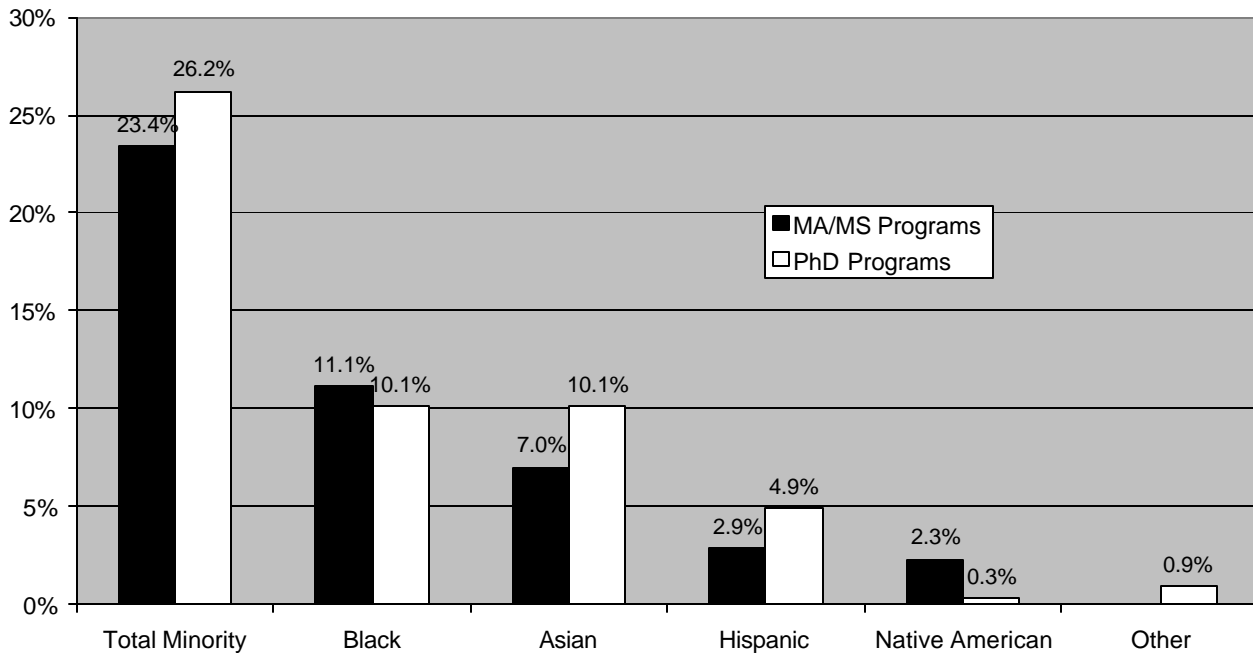


Figure 1. Percentage of Racial/Ethnic Minority Assistant Professors in Graduate Departments of Sociology, 1997-98

Valid N = 518

Source: American Sociological Association, 1998 Survey of Graduate Departments of Sociology

The fact that nine out of 10 full professors are white and that they are the largest group of academics in sociology may be attributed to either one or both of two processes: First, white over-representation at the senior rank might be due to the disproportionate rates of promotion of whites, compared to other groups, during the decades for which we have data. Second, there may be hold-over effects due to a substantial cohort of white professors being hired in the 1960s and 1970s and making it through the ranks before affirmative action altered “business as usual” hiring practices.³ If the first explanation is true, then we would expect the continued under-representation of faculty of color to the top rung of the ladder to be due to discriminatory promotion practices and/or inadequate mentoring throughout the pipeline. If the second explanation is true, then we would expect that promotion of minorities to the top rung of the academic ladder would increase as the cohort of older white PhDs retire.

Conclusions

These data portend, but hardly guarantee, modest positive changes in the hiring and promotion of faculty of color over the next 10 years. The increase in Asian-Pacific Islander PhDs and the take-up rate of new African-American PhDs in initial positions are promising trends. There is also evidence of improvement for Hispanics, although the numbers in the pipeline are very small. There appears, however, to be virtually no improvement in the pipeline for Native Americans. And, the analysis of promotion to the senior rank indicates the need for further monitoring and study.

Although sociology has remained competitive among social science disciplines in the production of minority PhDs, the proportions for all disciplines remain quite small. A substantial increase in the size of the pool is needed to prevent token status as faculty members and to keep vital and expand the core of sociology. The potential pool to draw on is there: Between 1985 and 1995, the number of Black, Hispanic, and Native Americans who earned their Bachelor's degrees in the social sciences doubled, growing from about 15,000 to 30,000 (National Science Foundation 1995 and 1999).

Altering the pipeline at all career points requires intentional change and rethinking "business as usual" (Levine 1998). Many colleges and universities and many sociology departments are engaged in that process. ASA, too, has been among the institutions leading such efforts. The Association's Minority Fellowship Program (MFP),⁴ now in its 25th year, has effectively moved students through the PhD degree and into their first jobs, emphasizing (in addition to financial support) research training, professional development, and quality mentoring. Since the 1990s, the ASA has also worked to reach further down the pipeline to undergraduate students of color. After four successful years of summer institutes, in 1994 ASA launched the MOST Program (Minority Opportunities through School Transformation)—a multi-year project engaging 18 departments in reexamining and changing curriculum, climate, research training, mentoring, and outreach.⁵ Thus, while expansion of the pipeline remains a key challenge, there is available accumulating experience about how this might best be done.

Endnotes

¹We do not examine the interaction of race/ethnicity and gender because we do not have data at all three points in the pipeline. Other of our analyses will consider gender as well. Other researchers are also engaged in studying these intersections (see, e.g., Kulis and Miller, 1989; Misra et al. 1999).

²Note that over time there is less use of the “other” category for social science PhDs across all fields. In sociology, for example, those taking the label of “other” declined from five percent to less than two percent, suggesting more not less identification with the race/ethnic categories provided.

³The term “business as usual” hiring practices is used in Barbara Reskin’s book on affirmative action (1998). The term comes from President Richard Nixon, who argued that equitable hiring and promotion of minorities would not occur if business as usual hiring practices were maintained.

⁴Since 1974, the ASA Minority Fellowship program provides support for approximately 30 predoctoral students each year. Funded primarily through the National Institute of Mental Health, MFP Fellows receive a package of assistance that includes financial support, mentoring, direct research training, access to professional networks, and continuous guidance. Approximately 20 percent of the PhDs of color receiving degrees in sociology between 1978 and 1996 were MFP Fellows.

⁵The Ford Foundation began funding the ASA MOST Program in 1989. Initially funding was directed to enhancing the pipeline through summer institutes (MOST as Minority Opportunities through Summer Training). The current MOST Program focuses on altering “business as usual” in academic institutions. MOST works with departments on long-term, sustainable change and on the development of “transportable” models that can be used by other departments and disciplines (Levine 1998).

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