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Advocating for the Newly Hired Adapted Physical Education Faculty of Color

Seo Hee Lee¹, Samuel R. Hodge², Lisa Silliman-French³

¹ University of Wisconsin Superior, ² The Ohio State University, ³ Texas Woman's University

Corresponding author: Seo Hee Lee, slee75@uwsuper.edu

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to highlight the challenges facing adapted physical education (APE) assistant professors of color, who were newly hired at predominantly White institutions of higher education. A secondary purpose is to offer recommendations to such faculty to advocate for themselves at such institutions. As the number of newly hired APE assistant professors of color increases across the United States (U.S.), so has the reporting of challenges they face in the academy. The importance of diversity and inclusion has been emphasized in higher education, and faculty and students should be able to exchange their perspectives within different cultural frameworks. We therefore present the following recommendations for new faculty of color: (a) collaborate with APE faculty at other comparable institutions; (b) promote APE programs within one's department and university; (c) educate oneself about ethical and procedural guidelines; (d) promote cultural competence and fluency; and (e) challenge oneself.

Keywords: higher education, diversity, inclusion, cultural competence, physical education

A Case Example

In autumn 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Kim (pseudonym), an Asian woman, had just been hired as an adapted physical education (APE) assistant professor at a rural predominantly White institution of higher education (PW-IHE). Two weeks prior to the start of the fall semester, she was assigned to teach two courses each in APE and general physical education (GPE). Despite having no experience teaching at a Midwestern or suburban university, Dr. Kim was enthusiastic about her new position, in which she would teach university students who aspire to become teachers in physical education.

Upon arriving in the new town, she only had two weeks to design her two GPE and two APE courses for the rapidly approaching fall semester. During this short planning phase, she experienced some major difficulties, as well as others later while teaching students, at this rural PW-IHE. Preservice physical education teachers at the university were required to complete fieldwork with individuals with disabilities to complete the program. However, Dr. Kim did not have any prior knowledge of the local community, so she had difficulty locating community programs that provide services for individuals with disabilities. Even though faculty members in her department had lived in the community for some time, they were unable to help her because they had little or no awareness of local programs that provide APE or adapted physical activity services to individuals with disabilities. While searching, Dr. Kim realized that most community programs did not allow visitors to interact with individuals with disabilities at that time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, many of the programs that she contacted had already been closed for an extended period due to the pandemic.

Similar to other newly hired faculty members, regardless of their racial and ethnic status, Dr. Kim also encountered difficulties in promoting the APE program at the university, where preservice physical education teachers typically did not choose APE as their minor. Most students majoring in kinesiology selected coaching or health education as their minor, perhaps because most of the faculty members were experts in those areas. Dr. Kim was also aware that it would take time for preservice physical

education teachers to select APE as their minor due to their lack of knowledge and experience in teaching individuals with disabilities. Dr. Kim hoped that her new APE elective course would fill that gap at the university.

Additionally, when she started teaching, Dr. Kim faced the difficulty of bridging cultural differences between herself and the students and faculty members in her department. Although she had been informed previously about the majority white backgrounds of students, staff, and faculty at PW-IHEs before accepting her new position, she immediately noticed cultural differences that she felt needed to be addressed so she could thrive in her new role, department, and town.

Introduction

Just like Dr. Kim, whenever newly hired APE assistant professors of color in kinesiology start working at a PW-IHE, their cultural norms and interpretations may differ from those of the mostly White faculty and student population (Hodge & Corbett, 2013; Lowrie & Robinson, 2013). Nevertheless, and albeit still small statistically, the number of newly hired faculty members of color at PW-IHEs has been growing across the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023). Faculty of color have still reported experiencing differences, disadvantages, and limited power stemming from institutional racism (Benitez et al., 2017; Privette, 2023; Wright-Mair & Pulido, 2021).

According to the NCES (2023), in the fall of 2021, 73% of full-time faculty at U.S. postsecondary institutions were White, 12% were Asian, 6% were Black, 6% were Hispanic, and the remaining 3% comprised faculty who identified as two or more races, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Pacific Islander. Between 2013 and 2020, the number of newly hired assistant professors of color has increased at a rate of just 0.23 percent each year (NCES, 2023). Whereas the dominant culture in U.S. higher education remains mostly white (Ghosh & Barber, 2021; Hodge & Corbett, 2013; Kayes, 2006; Lawless & Chen, 2017). Newly hired assistant professors, coming from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, may encounter obstacles when they acclimate to the dominant culture of the department and university (Ghosh & Barber, 2021; Nachman et al., 2022). For example, these new faculty may not have welcoming experiences, may feel compelled to acclimate to the department or university's dominant culture, and may experience cultural and linguistic challenges (Lin & Scherz, 2014).

The diversity of cultural ideas, approaches to challenges, attitudes, cultural beliefs, and unique behaviors among the faculty with minoritized cultural and ethnic backgrounds manifests primarily during interactions with White students, administrators, and faculty (Hodge & Corbett, 2013; Lowrie & Robinson, 2013). Further, for faculty whose native language is not English, challenges may arise in their attempts to develop relationships with some faculty colleagues, administrators, and/or students at PW-IHEs (Lin & Scherz, 2014; Sato & Hodge, 2009). However, unless they establish trusted relationships, newly hired faculty may struggle to engage in open dialogue with their colleagues and raise voices about their concerns (Park et al., 2023; Sato & Hodge, 2009).

According to Zhang and Bartol (2010), many faculty of color have described feeling invisible and alienated from the White-dominated culture at their PW-IHE. Additionally, according to Park et al. (2023) and Sato and Hodge (2009), many faculty members from diverse minoritized cultural and ethnic backgrounds have experienced feeling excluded, alone, powerless, helpless, and overwhelmed because of their inability (or intentional resistance) to assimilate with the dominant culture of the department or university. Faculty of color have consistently reported having difficulties in forming relationships with some White faculty members at a whole higher education institution, including PW-IHEs, because of disparities between the new faculty member's culture and the mainstream culture, as well as, language differences (Espinosa et al., 2019; Hodge & Corbett, 2013; Lawless & Chen, 2017). Nonetheless, there is a need for even more evidence-based research about the experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of faculty of color working in PW-IHEs (Lowrie & Robinson, 2013).

Furthermore, in these programs, many students of color, including those seeking their master's degree or doctorate, may have difficulty finding a faculty mentor and/or advisor of color. Many new faculty members of color at PW-IHEs have reported trouble navigating instruction and finding a role model or mentor from a similar cultural background as their own (Hodge & Corbett, 2013; Sato & Hodge, 2009). Students in higher education should have opportunities to connect with, understand, and value faculty

members from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds to become multicultural citizens (Lowrie & Robinson, 2013). Moreover, many international Asian students, who come from an array of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, have difficulty adjusting to U.S. kinesiology programs because of the many differences between the Asian and U.S. cultures (Park et al., 2023). Relationships with other faculty and advisors have a significant impact on the ability of most faculty of color to be successful scholars within U.S. higher education contexts, because other faculty and advisors can provide guidelines for being good ethical scholars within U.S. higher education contexts (Hodge et al., 2004; Lowrie & Robinson, 2013). Furthermore, due to the foundation of educational and ethical values or standards from their home countries, many faculty of color may struggle to find static standards that define good scholars within U.S. higher education contexts (Park et al., 2023). Likewise, international Asian faculty who completed their postsecondary kinesiology program in their home country face challenges while adjusting to the domestic culture of their new department and university in the U.S. (Park et al., 2023; Sato & Hodge, 2009).

In 2016, of all full-time faculty in U.S. higher education, 20% were faculty of color, approximately 3% were international faculty, and the faculty of color were most often in assistant professor positions, which shows that there is still a lack of diversity among faculty in higher education (Espinosa et al., 2019; Hodge & Corbett, 2013; Lowrie & Robinson, 2013).

This situation has resulted in many faculty of color feeling less valued than White faculty, isolated, and different, and questioning their own qualifications to serve as faculty in the U.S. (Burden et al., 2005; Hodge & Corbett, 2013).

Faculty of color may encounter different treatment from students (Hodge et al., 2004). Perhaps, this is partly because some White students in higher education have not previously been taught by educators of color or postsecondary faculty of color in comparison with White faculty. Women faculty of color, for example, may encounter stereotypic beliefs about how they should look or behave (Lawless & Chen, 2017; Turner, 2002). According to Lawless and Chen (2017), many PW-IHEs still maintain misconceptions about international women faculty that result in these women being subjected to racism, sexism, and immigrant bias at PW-IHEs in the U.S. Many women faculty members, including those who were immigrants, have reported feeling marginalized because of being stereotyped and have received unfavorable feedback from students on their course evaluations, and many students have viewed faculty of color as less competent than White faculty (Lee & Janda, 2006; Louis et al., 2016; Pittman, 2010). Despite the growing number of female faculty members in higher education, reports of their challenges persist (e.g., Lee & Janda, 2006). Students in all educational contexts should be prepared by educators to work in an increasingly diverse society, which requires cultural competencies (i.e., the ability to function and interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds) and fluency that encompass productivity, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal skills (Ameny-Dixon, 2004; Hodge et al., 2021; Lee & Janda, 2006). Some White students, particularly those from rural towns and affluent suburbs, have not had meaningful experiences with other cultures, so these students are more likely to judge faculty of color based on their own culture, view such faculty as tokens, and evaluate faculty of color against hegemonic standards (Ghosh & Barber, 2021). Cultural tokenism at a PW-IHE can be a major barrier to the full inclusion of students and faculty from cultural and ethnic backgrounds that differ from those of the campus's White majority.

Cultural tokenism can cause faculty of color to be isolated, feel insecure about their position, and doubt their own qualifications (Ghosh & Barber, 2021), they may even feel like imposters—that is, experience imposter syndrome (Liskey, 2023). For example, since a lack of diversity is highly visible in U.S. kinesiology departments, cultural tokenism has caused women, immigrants, and Black faculty to feel stereotyped, unwelcome in their department, unable to meet and develop relationships with hegemonic ethnic figures on campus, invisible or surveilled, and isolated from the culture of their department and the university (Burden et al., 2005; Nachman et al., 2022). Yet, minoritized faculty should feel free to represent their own culture through their scholarship, research agendas, and pedagogical approaches. Further, preservice physical education teachers should be safeguarded from witnessing cultural tokenism in the faculty and be educated about working with students with and without disabilities, staff, and parents, from a multiplicity of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, even though they may live, work, and study in a rural, predominantly White community.

The United States is one of the most diverse countries in the world. However, many faculty of color in U.S. kinesiology programs experience challenges while adjusting to the mainstream culture of their department, university, and community, which in turn impacts students pedagogically and academically (Lowrie & Robinson, 2013). Culturally responsive teaching and advising play unique roles in cultivating APE students' multicultural perspectives (Park et al., 2023). For instance, a newly hired APE faculty member from a different cultural and/or ethnic background than the mainstream at a rural PW-IHE might encounter similar challenges during the development of an APE curriculum, just as other faculty of color have in the past. Therefore, the university should provide the new faculty member with access to a faculty mentoring program, where veteran faculty of color can assist in overcoming these challenges.

APE faculty also might need support to navigate the teaching placements for their preservice teachers (Park, 2023). Finding appropriate placements for them is important because teaching competence comes from working with students with various levels and types of disabilities. Moreover, the experiences of teaching in different practical settings can vary based on each school's location, physical environment, and culture; students' level and type of disabilities; and the amount and quality of interaction the preservice teachers have with their site supervisors and university instructors (Kwon, 2018; Park, 2023; Perlman & Piletic, 2012). Oftentimes, an APE faculty member is the only one on staff; therefore, there may not be resources available from the department. Therefore, it is critical for APE faculty of color to have support or make connections with other faculty and teacher preparation programs on campus and/or K-12 schools, as well as in community settings, when initially developing a program (Curtner-Smith, 1999; Park, 2023).

If APE faculty of color are not provided with ample support by their department and do not have connections with community settings, difficulties are inevitable when developing the APE program and navigating preservice teachers' practicum placements. Furthermore, at PW-IHEs, newly hired APE assistant professors of color need mentors and culturally relevant professional support in order to provide postsecondary students with a high-quality education.

Recommendations for Newly Hired APE Assistant Professors of Color

In this section and in Table 1, we offer the following recommendations for newly hired APE assistant professors of color developing an APE curriculum within a kinesiology program at a PW-IHE: (a) collaborate with APE faculty at other, comparable institutions; (b) promote APE programs within one's department and university; (c) educate oneself about ethical and procedural guidelines; (d) promote cultural competence and fluency (Hodge et al., 2021); and (e) challenge oneself (Hodge et al., 2004). APE assistant professors of color should be encouraged to use these recommendations concurrently. Moreover, APE assistant professors of color should discuss these and other recommendations with colleagues in their department and at other institutions to create a more inclusive higher education culture and to provide high-quality educational programs for students.

Collaborate with APE Faculty at Other Comparable Institutions

A newly hired APE assistant professor, regardless of racial or ethnic background, in a kinesiology program in which the APE program was nonexistent or not initially well developed should be encouraged to review the APE curriculum (e.g., course syllabus, structure of practicum) at other institutions while developing their own APE program, curriculum, and courses. Further, not every APE program has undeveloped courses, so even if a newly hired APE assistant professor is reaching out to other institutions, keep in mind that modifying or updating an existing APE program, curriculum, or course can be vastly different from developing a new program, curriculum, and/or courses.

Even though each APE program may vary based on state requirements, the history of the APE program, and the experiences of APE faculty and students, a newly hired APE assistant professor should review APE courses at other institutions to ensure that they include all the pedagogical content areas required for students and review the Adapted Physical Education National Standards (APENS) developed by the National Consortium of Physical Education for Individuals with Disabilities. Further, a newly hired APE assistant professor of color should consult with senior APE faculty members of color and allies in and outside of the state to receive professional guidance to enhance the program's rigor *and*

multiculturalism. Because senior APE faculty likely faced challenges in developing programs and worked with other APE faculty, senior APE faculty could provide valuable advice and serve as professional mentors for the new faculty member. Moreover, a newly hired APE assistant professor should establish relationships with APE faculty members at other institutions to work on their research together and to support one another's programs. Developing collegial relationships with other APE faculty should be encouraged to foster collaborative systems and promote more inclusive higher education cultures at the state, national, and international levels.

Table 1. Recommendations for Newly Hired APE Assistant Professors of Color

Collaborate with APE faculty at other, comparable institutions

- 1. Review the APE curriculum at other institutions.
- 2. Consult with senior APE faculty members in and outside of the state.
- 3. Work with APE faculty members at other institutions.

Promote APE programs within one's department and university

- 1. Educate department faculty members about the APE program.
- 2. Educate kinesiology students about the APE profession.
- 3. Promote the APE program to faculty members in other departments.

Educate oneself about ethical and procedural guidelines and promote cultural competence and fluency (Hodge et al., 2021)

- 1. Educate oneself about ethical and procedural guidelines.
- 2. Develop relationships with other faculty of color.
- 3. Maintain and develop one's own cultural competence.

Challenge oneself (Hodge et al., 2004)

- 1. Raise questions about one's responsibilities in service, teaching, and scholarship.
- 2. Develop connections with personnel in community and school settings.
- 3. Be confident in one's profession as an instructor and a scholar.
- 4. Challenge oneself to attain professional goals as a scholar.

Promote APE Programs within One's Department and University

It is vital to promote and educate faculty members in the kinesiology department and across the university about the APE program as an educational discipline. For instance, even if many kinesiology faculty members are already familiar with the format of APE courses, they may not know the specific educational depths of the APE discipline, such as the importance of the practicum to preservice teachers' future careers and the differences between teaching APE and GPE (Curtner-Smith, 1999; Kwon, 2018; Yang & Elliott, 1999). Therefore, educating faculty colleagues about APE is crucial to receiving support from the department, which is part of advocating an APE program. For example, a newly hired APE assistant professor of color developed APE conferences where instructors from community disability sports (e.g., Special Olympic) or APE teachers can educate other faculty members and students in the kinesiology program.

Further, a newly hired APE assistant professor of color should promote the APE program to students enrolled in other kinesiology programs. For instance, we should encourage students majoring in exercise science and biomechanics to enroll in APE courses to enhance their understanding of training and teaching individuals with diverse disabilities. Those students would then be able to work in

different therapeutic and educational settings that require prerequisite knowledge and experience in working with students with disabilities.

Likewise, a newly hired APE assistant professor should promote the APE program to faculty members in other departments, such as special education. This is beneficial for the new and veteran faculty, not only to receive collegial support from faculty across disciplines, but also to expand these faculty members' pedagogy, praxis, and research with experts in different areas. Moreover, a newly hired APE assistant professor of color might find ways to connect with other minority faculty on campus who can be advocates and/or supporters of creating a more inclusive university culture.

Educate Oneself about Ethical and Procedural Guidelines and Promote Cultural Competence and Fluency

It is important to educate oneself about ethical and procedural guidelines when making decisions associated with one's work and experiences with colleagues and students. A newly hired APE assistant professor of color might face challenges in resolving conflicts stemming from a clash of cultures, or encounter racism, xenophobia, and/or sexism. Educating oneself about ethical standards is essential for maintaining one's positionality as a scholar-educator. A newly hired APE assistant professor of color should reach out to the diversity center at the university to develop relationships with other faculty of color and allies. For example, veteran faculty of color may have faced similar challenges, so they could help the new faculty members navigate the academy, and perhaps become mentors. Universities and colleges, or departments should encourage all young faculty to participate in mentorship programs.

Important also, maintaining and increasing one's cultural competence should be encouraged in the newly hired APE assistant professor of color. All faculty of color with different cultural competences and outlets should be highly valued because each educator substantially impacts students' development of multicultural competences. For example, preservice physical education teachers need to learn how to work with students, staff, and parents of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds than their own. Therefore, a newly hired APE assistant professor of color should endeavor to improve their own cultural competence throughout their career, particularly while working at a PW-IHE.

Challenge Oneself

A newly hired APE assistant professor should not be reluctant to ask questions and should be resourceful while developing APE courses. In some cases, new faculty might hesitate to ask questions to avoid discomfort for either party or because of unfamiliarity with colleagues and the dominant culture of the department. Therefore, the newly hired APE assistant professor should be encouraged by the kinesiology department and the university to raise questions regarding their responsibilities in service, teaching, and scholarship/research. Further, the new APE educator should be proactive in developing connections with personnel in community and school settings to be able to locate quality programs for their preservice physical education teachers to work with individuals with disabilities.

Most of all, a newly hired APE assistant professor of color should be confident in their profession as a teacher-educator and a scholar. While adopting the new cultures and systems of the department and university, the new faculty member may easily lose confidence—feel like an imposter—especially when working at a PW-IHE, so they should embrace self-care and confidence in order to attain their professional goals as scholars and provide a high-quality education for their students.

Conclusion

The number of newly hired assistant professors of color has been increasing (NCES, 2023). At the same time, the emphasis on diversity and inclusion in higher education has also been highlighted, so faculty and students should be encouraged to share their perspectives obtained from their different cultural frameworks (Lee & Janda, 2006; Lowrie & Robinson, 2013). However, the challenges faced by a newly hired APE assistant professor of color remain, even when the cultural backgrounds of the university were shared before or during the hiring process (Kwon, 2018; Yang & Elliott, 1999). Therefore, potential faculty members, including doctoral students, should diligently research and pose questions to the hiring committee if the university is located in an area unfamiliar to the candidates before accepting a job offer. Moreover, the newly hired faculty should advocate for themselves to make

a smooth transition into the new culture and community. Likewise, university administrators, particularly at PW-IHEs, should value diversity in the faculty, acknowledge the contributions of faculty of color, and provide professional support to faculty of color, newcomers, and veterans alike (Lee & Janda, 2006).

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