



Richard Reddick advocates that people carefully weigh up the pros and cons of serving on committees before committing to roles.

## THE TIME TAX PUT ON SCIENTISTS OF COLOUR

The pressure on researchers from minority ethnic groups to participate in campus diversity issues comes at a cost.

**A**s universities examine faculty diversity amid global protests against institutional racism, they might want to consider that many Black and minority-ethnic academics are routinely asked to undertake extra, uncompensated work to address the issue at their institutions.

The phenomenon is known as ‘cultural taxation’, a term coined in 1994 by Amado Padilla<sup>1</sup>, a psychology researcher at Stanford University in California. Academics from minority ethnic groups are targeted to serve on diversity, equity and inclusivity committees, as mentors to junior colleagues from minority ethnic groups and to participate in other schemes

that take time away from their research<sup>2</sup>.

This burden falls disproportionately on their shoulders because there are so few of them on campus. According to 2020 data from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency, just 140 (0.7%) of 21,000 UK academics with the rank of professor are Black, yet Black people comprise 3% of the population.

In the United States, Black academics account for 6% of all faculty members, yet Black people represent 13% of the population. Cultural taxation could be a reason why African American scientists are 10% less likely than their white colleagues to receive funding from the US National Institutes of Health.

According to a 2018 study<sup>3</sup>, the most important reasons for this disparity were the number of publications to their name and the impact factors of the journals in which they publish.

Study author Donna Ginther, director of the Center for Science, Technology & Economic Policy at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, found that publication gaps widen over the course of researchers’ careers, and says that this could be due to the cultural tax. “African Americans may be called on to do more service,” she says. “Institutions need to be aware of the service burdens they place on faculty members,” she adds.

*Nature* spoke to five researchers from

minority ethnic groups about the career consequences of cultural taxation and asked what advice they have for overcoming it.

### **RICHARD REDDICK** **USE HYPERSVISIBILITY TO SECURE PROMINENT ROLES**

People of colour, who are marginalized in academia, are asked by institutions, colleagues and peers to do work that is uncompensated, unacknowledged and unrewarded. It's been called the Black tax or brown tax. Put simply, they are asked to do things that white peers are not asked to do. For example, if you are a Spanish speaker, you might be asked to translate documents or serve as a cultural ambassador when recruiting students or hosting visitors from Spanish-speaking countries.

But the most common request is to serve on university or department committees – often those established to address diversity, curriculum or recruitment. And when an institution lacks diversity, the same people get asked to serve over and over again. And they get burnt out. Often people from sexual, racial or gender minorities are expected to be the voice for the marginalized group, and it can be a frustrating experience. Even more frustrating is that progress is often extraordinarily slow.

The thing about cultural taxation is that the services requested are not in lieu of a current workload. They're in addition to that workload. People are willing to do this work, however, because they recognize that it is important and they want to give back to their communities. The frustration comes because they are not recognized for that work. At the same time, it's everybody's job – not just that of faculty members of colour – to increase diversity, equity and inclusivity. Everybody has a role in it.

I advise faculty members from minority ethnic groups to never respond immediately when they are asked to join a committee or initiative. Ask for time to think about it, or to talk to your department chair. I also encourage people to negotiate. Ask what you could give up from your current responsibilities to allow for the time and space to do this extra work. Other forms of compensation could be time out from teaching a course, an extra office or a graduate assistant. Determine whether your department chair will support this work.

You also have to ask yourself whether the work is worth it. Not all service is the same. People of colour are highly visible, and you must leverage that profile in some way. For example, you can use your visibility to provide a service that is particularly meaningful or prominent. If the university president or provost asks you to be on a task force that will receive a lot of recognition, that's a no-brainer. Serving on promotion and tenure committees

allows you, as someone who understands cultural taxation, to advocate for people who might not have advocates in those spaces.

In February, the University of Texas at Austin launched a Distinguished Service Academy, with honorary appointments from the provost that recognize and financially compensate those of us who do this work (four of the initial five were people of colour). But it's also crucial to develop catalysts – usually white, male, senior faculty members – to be vocal about these issues. It's an extension of 'allyship', having someone who holds privilege and can speak up when implicit bias threatens to creep into hiring or promotion discussions.

**Richard Reddick** is associate dean for equity, community engagement and outreach in the college of education at the University of Texas at Austin.

### **CARLA FIGUEIRA DE MORISSON FARIA** **DON'T BE ASHAMED TO SAY NO**

Inequality exists everywhere. As long as it does, we will have this type of taxation. Unfortunately, if we don't do this work, no one will. People who are not from a minority ethnic or gender group might not even be aware of the situation because they haven't experienced it themselves, and therefore might not address it properly. That said, it can be relentless being on so many subcommittees – often university-wide initiatives to increase equality and diversity. It is sometimes really exhausting.

I have said no a lot, particularly to requests from outside my university before I became a full professor. When I receive a request to work on diversity issues, I ask myself: will this help me? Could it harm me? How many people can I help? How much time will it cost me?

My choices become a trade-off between power and time: how much power I will have versus how much time I have to invest. Committee work can involve hours spent discussing something of practical value, but that will change little.

For example, committee members can provide advice that might never materialize into significant change, or even be considered. I talk to people who have done the work and investigate pros and cons before I accept.

I try to do diversity, equity and inclusivity activities on my terms. I always negotiate. If I say I will do something, I ask for a concession elsewhere – such as reduced teaching or time to go to a conference. Another approach is to set time boundaries. In the United Kingdom, every university department has someone responsible for student admissions. In my department, this person was me until last October. When I was asked to take this on for

five years, on top of my existing workload to help increase student diversity, I said I would do it for three, and if I liked it, I would continue for two more. If I didn't like it, I would let them know at the end of my second year so they would have time to find someone else. And that's how it played out. Apart from being a lot of extra work, there were more layers of stress, such as microaggressions as part of outreach. Some are used to thinking that a physicist has to look a certain way.

Most of my outreach effort has been on increasing the number of female faculty members and on looking at intersectional issues of race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. At University College London, around 20% of full-time physics professors are women; in the United Kingdom as a whole, it's 11%.

It is important to engage in ways that give you more visibility and amplify your voice. If you give a talk in a school, it can influence a few dozen people at most, whereas some TED talks can reach a lot of people. Likewise, will your role on a committee be in an advisory role or on the executive team? Which has more weight? You can spend an afternoon in a meeting that will have no palpable impact, but if you can help to enact a policy that will be adopted by a university, it can encourage significant change.

**Carla Figueira de Morisson Faria** is a theoretical laser physicist at University College London, UK.

### **ALISON CEREZO** **DICTATE YOUR OWN NARRATIVE**

In 2009, in my first faculty position at Alliant International University in San Francisco, California, I was asked to lead on developing the coursework and practical requirements for an entire doctoral training programme in clinical psychology. It was exciting, but I didn't consider how it would affect my writing. I realized I needed to be protective of my time. My being the point person led to some inequity in professional duties between colleagues.

As a person of colour and a gay woman, I get multiple requests for support from committees. I'm also constantly being asked to join dissertation committees for students of colour or who are LGBT+ (from sexual and gender minorities). It can be overwhelming. It's my second year at my present institution, and I'm on about eight student-dissertation committees – not all in my department or even my institution – which means that I will read their qualifying examinations and dissertations. I'm unsure how to fairly judge which dissertation committees I can join going forwards. If I take on the kinds of service that most interest me,

I'm less available for other responsibilities.

I've tried to pay attention to boundaries, and not to do anything to reinforce any kind of inequity in professional responsibilities arising from gender or race. I don't want to set any precedent in which certain people do more than others. I seek clear demarcations for when I am and am not working. For example, I try hard not to work at the weekend. When I was in more teaching-oriented faculty positions, I paid attention to union-agreed contractual details and stuck to not working during the summer months. If I had not, I would have been indirectly putting pressure on colleagues in similar roles who are often women of colour or from marginalized backgrounds.

I take steps not to pigeonhole myself as the 'diversity' person; it's important that I'm not thought of as 'the queer one' or 'the Latina'. I promote my research skill set. For example, I teach courses that focus on research methods as opposed to courses specific to diversity.

**Alison Cerezo** is a behavioural researcher studying health disparities in diverse LGBT+ and minority communities at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

## CHRISTOPHER JACKSON MAKE SURE CONTRIBUTIONS ARE RECOGNIZED

Pursuing an academic career in geosciences was a happy accident. My parents emigrated from the West Indies to the United Kingdom. I was the first in my family and neighbourhood to attend university. I got my PhD at the University of Manchester, UK, then worked in industry for three years and came to an academic position at Imperial College London, where I've been since 2004.

To be honest, I wasn't very aware of my ethnicity growing up in the 1980s and 1990s in a very white area. I've always just got on with it. Diversity, equity and inclusion concerns weren't discussed as widely back then as now. Now universities, including Imperial, are actively trying to increase diversity. Although there have been ongoing discussions and programmes around diversity for the past few years, there is currently an effort to gather ethnic and racial data on faculty members and other staff to prepare an application for the Race Equality Charter. This is a UK programme overseen by Advance HE – a UK non-profit body driving change in higher education – to accredit universities that take steps to improve minority-ethnic representation. We want to put in place practices and training that will attract and retain members of minority ethnic groups.

In 2018, I was asked to take part in this initiative. At one point, I heard it described by



**Geoscientist Christopher Jackson says it's important to recognize extra contributions.**

a member of the university's senior leadership as pro bono work. So some people don't see this as important, yet it makes demands on my time because I can help in a unique way. And the provost made it clear to me that it was to be considered core university business, not fringe pro bono work.

When you take on this type of burden, your contribution must be recognized. It's not writing a paper, raising a million pounds in funding or winning a prize – but it should reflect how much value is placed on diversity.

Recently, I was asked to sit on the interview panels for faculty positions. I said no after sifting through to find six white candidates – four were women, so it was thought to be quite a win. In terms of race, it was nothing.

**Christopher Jackson** is a geoscientist at Imperial College London, UK.

## ROCHELLE WIJESINGHA WHITE ALLIES NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE PRIVILEGE

In 2013, I collected data to look at perceptions of disparities in tenure and promotion between faculty members. A colleague and I found that faculty members of colour outperform white faculty members, yet they do not get tenure or promotions at the same rate<sup>1</sup>. Our findings offer evidence of discrimination in the academic system. I hope that future studies will quantify cultural taxation by documenting how many courses a minority-ethnic academic taught, how many students they mentored and how many committees they were members of. Although some might feel obliged to sit on diversity committees and mentor more students, that can lower their productivity and

hinder their career progression.

In my experience, diversity and inclusion work is not rewarded, but I am motivated to do it in ways that white faculty members might not be. I'm in sociology, studying social justice, equity and diversity. For me to not practise what I preach is inauthentic. I don't want students to be discouraged by not seeing or being mentored by a faculty member who is from an under-represented group. At the same time, I preach that it is OK to say no to the cultural tax.

In my academic roles, I have helped undergraduates who are members of under-represented groups with applications to graduate courses, and held workshops to help students work on personal statements and inform them about opportunities. I understand why people don't want to do this work, because time is so precious and the work is unrewarded.

We need to collect more data. We also need to create a dialogue around cultural taxation, and need white allies to acknowledge their privilege, and that the cultural tax exists (as well as the 'identity tax', the broader term for the 'tax' paid by people of any marginalized identity who experience the same kinds of demand). And we need that service to be recognized in tenure and promotion guidelines.

**Rochelle Wijesingha** is a PhD candidate studying racial and ethnic relations in higher education at McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada.

Interviews by **Virginia Gewin**. These interviews have been edited for clarity and length.

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