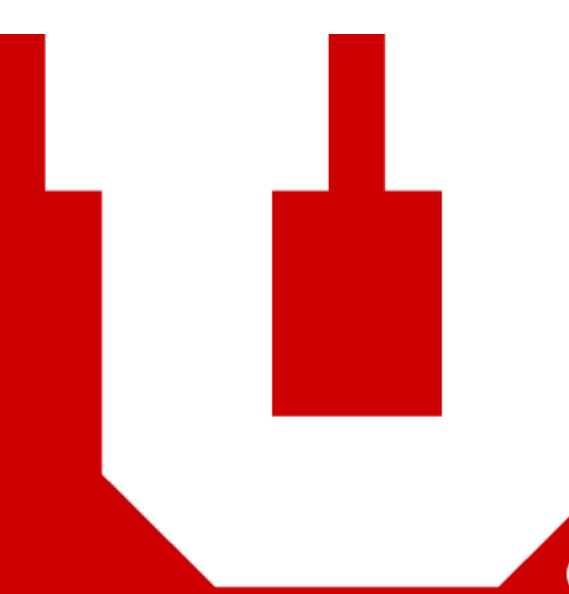


Fostering Retention, Growth, and Belonging: A case for underrepresented and first-generation faculty.

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Abstract

Attrition is common amongst under-represented minority (URM) and first-generation faculty (FGF). While multiple factors can contribute to attrition, there are three areas of work-life that can positively impact faculty experiences: (1) sense of belonging, (2) sense of growth, and (3) sense of success. The aim of this research study is to understand the work-life experience amongst URM and FGF. To gain insight, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and twelve 60-minute professional coaching sessions were offered to nine participants over the course of nine months. Our study indicates a minimal presence of mentorship, challenges with follow-through, and faculty contemplation to depart the University of Utah. While we argue that faculty mentorship can contribute to improvements in the areas of belonging, growth, and success, we make the following recommendations: (1) conduct an audit to ensure appropriate administrated resources, (2) establish a mentorship structure within a given academic unit, and (3) assign compatible mentorship duties.

Materials

Semi-structured Interview Guide. (a) background and family support; (b) growth section - professional development, growth, and support; (c) belonging section - department and University comradery and feeling valued; and (d) success section – meaning of success and associated experiences.

Survey. Chronic Work Discrimination and Harassment measure (harassment sub-scale, 3-items, $\alpha = 0.84$; discrimination subscale, 3-items, $\alpha = 0.73$), Heightened Vigilance Scale (4-items, $\alpha = 0.72$), Coping with Discrimination (Internalization subscale, 3-items, $\alpha = 0.84$; Active, 7-items, $\alpha = 0.82$).

Professional coaching. 12 virtual sessions with a trauma-informed professional coach

Journals. Monthly journal entries reflecting on lessons or growth experienced through coaching.

Blood pressure bracelet cuffs. Measurements were taken immediately before and after professional coaching sessions. Measurements were documented in the participant's journal.

Methodology

Recruitment. Occurred between February 2024-April 2024
Inclusion criteria:

- Faculty at Assistant or early Associate Professor rank, either tenure-track or career line, whose primary appointment is in either the College of Humanities or College of Health.
- Identify as:
 - underrepresented in their discipline based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and other demographics.
 - First in family to graduate from a US institution of higher education (first generation).

Recruitment survey: College of Humanities and College of Health Department Chairs were emailed requesting to share study information with faculty. A Qualtrics link was provided for those interested.

A total of 34 faculty completed the eligibility survey, most were from the College of Health (67%), 56% were career-line faculty, 36% were Assistant Professors, and 39% were Associate Professors. Eleven faculty were invited to participate in the study; two declined to participate as they were leaving the University of Utah.

Average years at the University of Utah in a faculty position	7 years
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Participant demographics and position profile	N (%)
Currently have an academic mentor	5 (56)
Identifies as a person with a disability or other chronic condition	1(11)
Heterosexual	5 (56)
LGBTQIA+	4 (44)
Male	2 (22)
Female	7 (78)
Assistant Professor	7 (78)
Associate Professor	2 (22)
Non-white	3 (33)
White	6 (67)

Individual interviews: Nine faculty consented to participate in the full study, and after the consenting process, all completed an individual interview through Zoom. On average, interviews lasted 60 minutes. After the interview, a Qualtrics link was provided for the second survey.

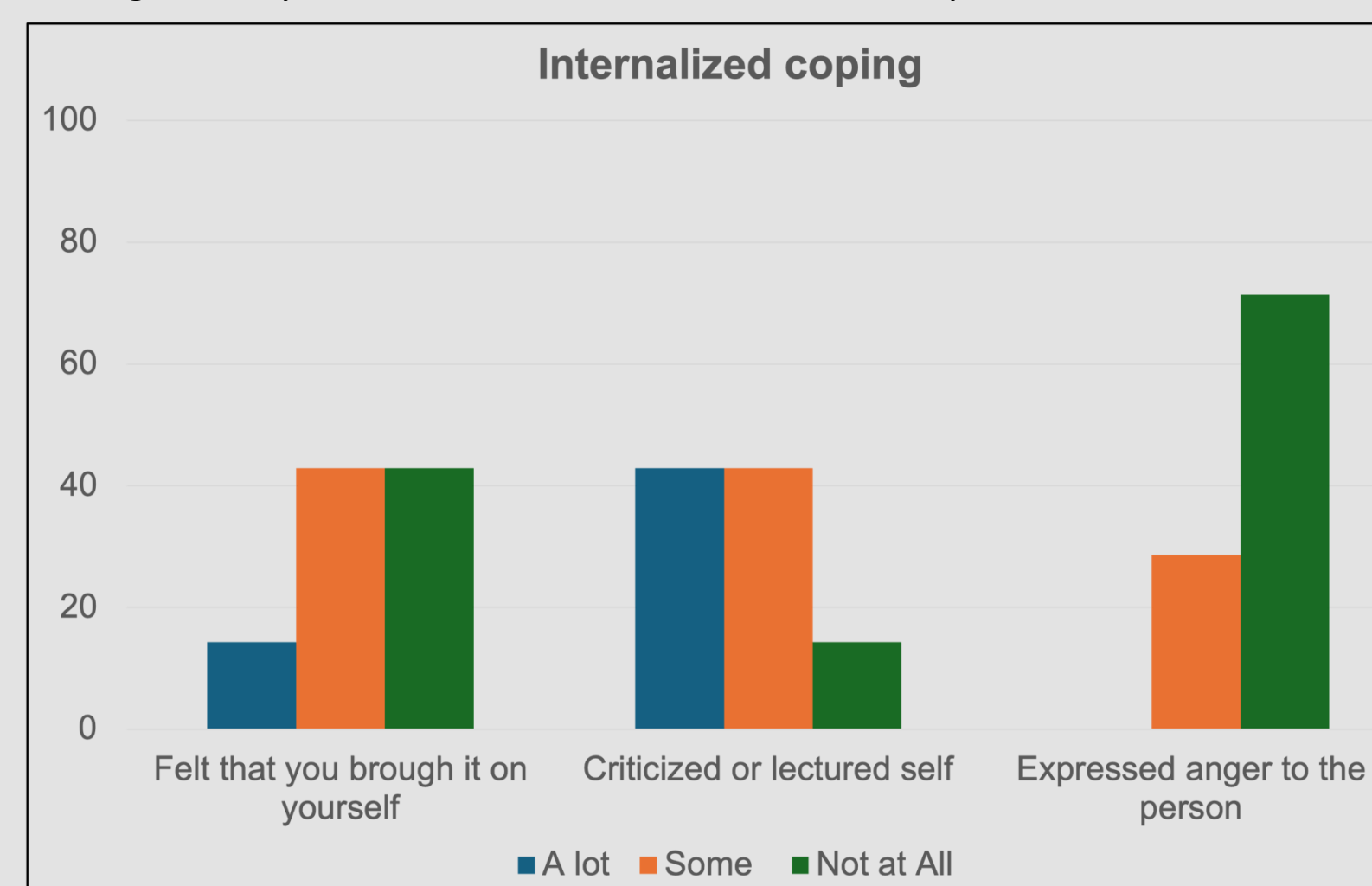
Professional Coaching: Coaching occurred from April 2024 through December 2024. After the interview, participants were contacted directly by the Professional Coach, Ms. Susana Rinderle.

Of the nine participants, 67% completed all sessions, 22% dropped out and did not respond to follow-up, and 11% completed coaching early.

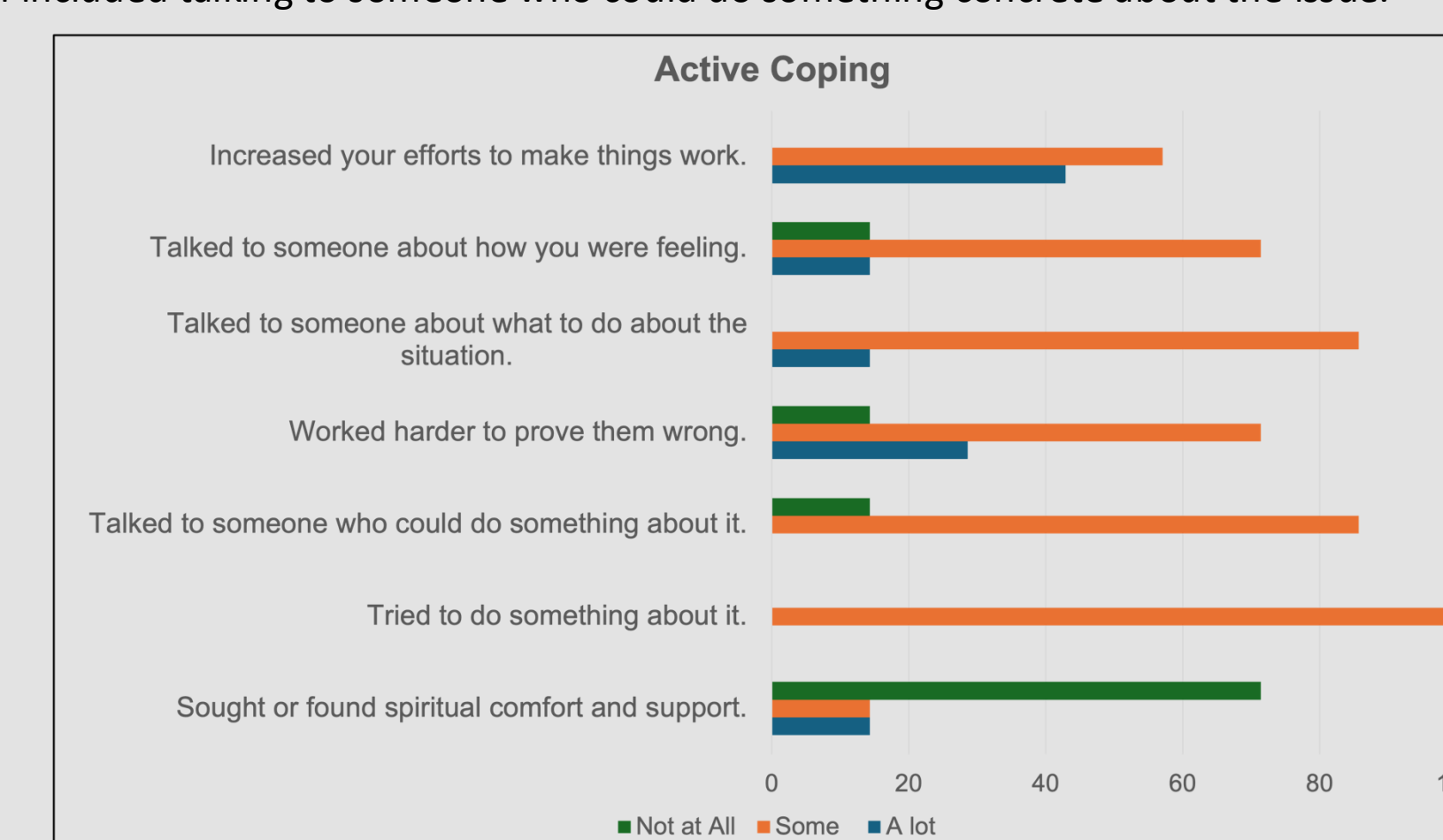
Results

Chronic Work Discrimination and Harassment	Once a week or more (%)	A few times/mo. (%)	A few times/yr (%)	< once a year (%)	Never (%)
1. How often are you UNFAIRLY given jobs that no one else wants?	14.3	28.6	28.6	28.6	
2. At work, when different opinions would be helpful, how often is your opinion not asked for?		42.9	14.3	28.6	
3. How often are you watched more closely than others?	14.3	28.6	0	28.6	28.6
4. How often does your supervisor or boss use racial/ethnic, LGBTQIA+, gendered, or disability slurs or jokes?			14.3	14.3	71.4
5. How often does your supervisor or boss direct racial/ethnic, LGBTQIA+, gendered, or disability slurs or jokes at you?			14.3	14.3	71.4
6. How often do your coworkers use racial/ethnic, LGBTQIA+, gendered, or disability slurs or jokes?			28.6		57.1
7. How often do your coworkers direct racial/ethnic, LGBTQIA+, gendered or disability slurs or jokes at you?			14.3	14.3	71.4
8. How often do you feel that you have to work twice as hard as others work?	28.6	14.3	42.9		14.3
9. How often do you feel that you are ignored or not taken seriously by your boss?	28.6	28.6	28.6		14.3
10. How often do others assume that you work in a lower status job than you do and treat you as such?	28.6	42.9			28.6

About 43% of participants reported frequently and unfairly given jobs that no one else wanted, felt that they were watched more closely than others, and felt like they had to work harder than others. 42.9% reported not being asked for their opinions when they would be helpful and 57% felt ignored by their boss. 71.5% felt treated as if they were of a lower work status.



Faculty reported engaging in passive and active coping strategies. About 80% of respondents criticized themselves for the issue. For active strategies, faculty reported "trying to do something about it," which included talking to someone who could do something concrete about the issue.



Coaching Outcomes

- All participants created two-to-four personal and/or professional goals for coaching.
- Participants were asked to rate their "success" or "satisfaction" with each goal on a Likert scale of 0 to 10.
 - Metrics were obtained the day they defined their goals (session #1 or #2), midway (around session #6), and upon completion.
 - All seven faculty who participated fully saw increases in their quantitative goal metrics at mid-point and completion.
 - Average point increases were 3.9 to 6.3
 - Most participants were surprised by their scores (Coach assessed metrics without first disclosing their previous numbers).

Themes from Journal entries

- Leadership development
- Strategies to "Manage up" to keep meetings focused on faculty needs and work
- Work position impacting personal life.
 - Not having the resources or support to be successful in my current work position
- Being "seen" by an external professional

Conclusion

Participants understood what was expected of them to be successful in their faculty positions (excellence in research and teaching) and all felt that the University of Utah was a collaborative environment. However, the work environment was not, in some cases, set up for them to succeed. Outright discrimination occurred a few times per year, and most frequently, feelings of inadequacy were experienced. Experience with being ignored, working harder than others, and not being asked to share an opinion when it would be helpful occurred as frequently as once a week or more. Faculty participants reported talking to someone who could help, yet the frequency of occurrences suggests the strategy was ineffective. Also, feeling the need to work harder and being given jobs nobody wants are examples of "taxation" found in this sample.

- Nearly half of the faculty participants did not have an academic mentor. Mentors are needed to help protect time and advocate on behalf of new faculty.
- Departments do not have adequate administrative support, causing faculty to have to learn how to do administrative tasks in addition to doing their work (work harder than other faculty).
- Some Department Chairs are not ready/qualified to "hear" or support their faculty.
- Many participants struggled to understand coaching, and some weren't "coaching-ready". A few participants were highly passive, struggled to identify topics for sessions, had difficulty connecting with personal agency or ownership, and had frequent challenges with follow-through.
- Some faculty participants were looking to leave the University of Utah and academia altogether.

Recommendations

Conduct a department audit to ensure administrative resources are appropriate for the department size.

Provide necessary support and training for Department chairs in their mentoring and support of URM and FGF.

Review faculty contracts to ensure each faculty regardless of track has an assigned mentor. Follow up to make sure mentor and mentee are compatible and make adjustments as needed.

Help foster and sustain URM and FGF communities both in and outside departments.

University developed department chair training for new chairpersons.

Evaluate potential chairpersons, being an excellent researcher does not equate to being an excellent chairperson. Rethink qualifications for the chair positions (rank, track, etc.)

Require department process for restorative justice. Faculty colleagues need to feel comfortable supporting faculty who are experiencing these issues and not fear retaliation.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Faculty mentorship is a valuable resource for transmitting social and cultural capital for belonging, career guidance (growth), and helping secure tenure and promotion (success). As a form of professional socialization, formal mentorship involves faculty of higher rank and experience serving as mentors to instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate career development for mentees or faculty with less experience [1,2]. Informal mentorship comes from any colleague as the transfer of knowledge on norms and behaviors, amassing social capital, reciprocal learning, networking, and navigation of organizational politics and power structures [3]. Under-represented minority (URM) and first-generation faculty are more often left without formal or informal mentorship [4].

Without mentorship, faculty are left unprotected, without social support, connection, or a sense of belonging, causing higher levels of stress and added responsibility. The overtime spent on extra responsibilities comes at a cost for URM, known as the minority tax [5,6]. Protection from too much service is necessary for new faculty. Often URM are asked to mentor URM students, contribute to inclusion initiatives, and serve on committees more than their non-URM colleagues. Too much service is burdensome for individuals involved and leaves them less time for academic and clinical work [7]. Tied to minority tax, reasons for attrition include lack of opportunity for advancement, low pay, leadership issues, and microaggressions and discrimination [8].

Social connectedness and social support can buffer against the effects of minority tax, microaggressions, and discrimination [9,10]. Among URM and first-generation faculty feeling connected to one's in-group can counter negative outcomes such as race-based distress and low self-esteem [11]. Scholars have found that minority stress, a stress response to discrimination, is mediated by self-concept, specifically self-esteem and self-mastery [12]. University faculty and peers have a role in developing self-concept and social connectedness.

The study's purpose is to research belonging, growth, and success for the retention of URM and first-generation faculty at the University of Utah. The aim is to understand the experiences of underrepresented and first-generation faculty that contribute to success and if professional coaching can impact experiences for retention, growth, and belonging.