

University of Denver/Iliff School of Theology Joint Doctoral Program in the Study of Religion

2020 IDN Experimentation Grant Application

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TITLE: Formation of Thriving Scholars of Color in Challenging Times of Higher and Theological Education

Institutional Mission/Profile

Drawing broadly upon the resources of both institutions, the University of Denver/Iliff School of Theology Joint Doctoral Program in the Study of Religion (JDP) prepares globally minded scholar-teachers through dynamic, interdisciplinary training in the study of religion as theorized and lived. This mission is supported by Iliff's vision to "transform the world by creating new and renewed local and global communities of inclusive justice by generating critical scholarship and engaging what is sacred," and by DU's vision to "be a great private university dedicated to the public good."

Statement of Need

Based on the 2018 mentoring experience assessment, the JDP developed a mentoring manual through communal listening and writing processes during the 2019–20 academic year with the 2nd phase FTE grants. The mentoring manual will be a critical resource for our ongoing work. However, having a well-written manual does not guarantee that good mentoring for our students of color, or peer mentoring among students, will happen automatically. We want to build a structure where systemic mentoring is institutionalized and the mentoring handbook is embodied. Concretely, we want to have opportunities for the faculty and students of color to meet on a quarterly basis. Also, to further benefit our students with expanded perspectives and mentoring opportunities beyond the JDP, we plan to host a series of symposia that feature early career scholars of color. Higher education in general and theological/religious education in particular is experiencing significant changes. Full-time and/or tenure-track teaching positions are rapidly declining. Those of us who are already teaching for the JDP, despite our unique struggles, feel in many ways that our own higher education experience is no longer helpful for our students. Therefore, we want them to engage with early career scholars in other institutions as well as our own faculty of color.

Description of the Work

After two years assessing needs and creating resources to help faculty with mentoring students of color, the focus of this grant will be to provide ongoing support to JDP students of color, mutual support opportunities between students and faculty of color, and to help other non-JDP students of color understand more deeply issues of race and theological/religious academy. We will achieve these goals through a series of symposia and receptions for students and faculty of color.

Symposia

A series of three symposia will be held over the term of the grant to provide mentoring for JDP students of color as they learn about the challenges of academic life and how to navigate them in order to become successful. Additionally, the faculty and students of color will meet on a quarterly basis to discuss the opportunities and challenges they experience in the changing landscape of higher education, specifically in theological schools and departments of religion.

Activities

- Symposia will be held three times over the next two academic years (AY 2020–21 and 2021–22).
 - Two external speakers will be invited to present at each symposium and share their professional journey stories. These speakers will be external scholars of color from different racial/ethnic groups and who are in their early career or in their second academic institution because they felt that they could not thrive in their first institution. Although the JDP has both senior and earlier career faculty of color, hearing from external speakers will bring an added dimension to our ongoing mentoring program. These speakers will be asked to share what helped them to be where they are; tips they would like to share with JDP students; what and/or how to do their doctoral work in these challenging times in higher education and theological education; things they wished they had known during their doctoral work; and other sharings.
 - Responses to the external scholars then will be provided by the JDP faculty of color (probably two, one from DU and one from Iliff) and selected students of color. These faculty and students may be from the same affinity group as the invited speakers. The purpose of these responses is to add to the sharings and perspectives offered and thereby enrich the discussion. Time for questions and answers also will be included.
 - Each symposium will be recorded and made available on the websites of each institution and the JDP, as JDP recruitment and mentoring materials and in order to be available to the public.
 - Each symposium is open to all JDP students and faculty.
- In addition to the symposia, the external speakers will have closed lunchtime mentoring sessions with JDP students of color. These sessions are reserved for the JDP students of color to directly engage with the external speakers. The speakers will be asked to share what concrete challenges they have experienced as people of color in this challenging time in higher education and what tips they would like to share with our students of color as they begin navigating higher education.
- On the same day as each of the symposia, an evening gathering of the JDP faculty and students of color will happen at the home of one of the JDP faculty of color. The purpose of these gatherings is mentoring and fellowship. In this more relaxed and informal environment,

faculty members will help students debrief their experiences of each symposium, answer other questions they may have, and have intentional listening sessions. A summary note will be shared with the JDP leadership including recommendations and ideas generated at the gathering.

- **Schedule**
 - Fall 2020 (mid-September): the first symposium will be held and a US Hispanic scholar and a Latino/a scholar will be the invited external scholars.
 - Spring 2021: the second symposium will be held and an Asian American scholar and a Native American scholar will be the invited external scholars.
 - Fall 2021: the third and final symposium will be held and a queer scholar of color and an international scholar (given the growing number of international students we have) will be the invited external scholars.

Institutional Capacity

This project draws upon conceptual and logistical support from the following DU and Iliff resources: DU Office of Diversity and Inclusion; Center for Multicultural Excellence; the Interdisciplinary Research Incubator for the Study of (In)Equality; Office of Teaching and Learning; Iliff's Dean of Faculty; and Office of Professional Formation. Both institutions have long experience in holding such symposia and other types of presentations and mentoring opportunities with external scholars, such as the annual Vincent Harding Memorial Visiting Scholar lecture.

Anticipated Change

We seek to foster a robust, diverse academic community that will be designed to offer minoritized students and those from underrepresented communities a welcoming space in which to excel personally and professionally.

Continuation Funding

Both institutions support this effort at the highest levels. Dr. Arthur Jones, Interim Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion, and his staff will continue to provide consultation and training; and we have been conscious to propose sustainable initiatives. The faculty of color will continue to host a gathering of the faculty and students of color for mentoring in each quarter.

Learning from the Work

The recorded materials will be available on both the Iliff and JDP's webpages, which are open to the public. Also the weblink will be shared with other IDN institutions and FTE's network, such as FTE's closed facebook group for doctoral students, FTE's partner organizations that provide mentoring for doctoral students of color such as ATSI, PANAAWTM, HTI.

Budget

Budget: \$20,000

- Honorarium for 6 speakers: $\$1000 \times 6 = \6000
- Transportation/lodging for 6 speakers: $\$750 \times 6 = \4500
- Receptions/ box lunch for symposium: $\$500 \times 3 = \1500
- Web page creation and maintenance including video recording/uploading, and other materials; \$1000
- Stipend for student worker: \$3000 (we anticipate hiring a student coordinator who can work with a coordinating faculty for each symposium and with the JDP Program Manager)
- Gift cards to participating students: \$4000