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Dean Strives to Recruit Minority Scholars to Liberal-Arts Colleges

Middlebury College

Shirley M. Collado

Enlarge Image

Shirley M. Collado, 41, dean of the college, chief diversity officer, and an associate professor of psychology at Middlebury College, has been working to diversify the faculty at the institution and help other liberal-arts colleges do the same. Here’s her account of that effort, as told to Audrey Williams June.

THE PROBLEM SOLVER

In 2007, the same year I arrived at Middlebury, I co-founded a national organization with Michael Reed, vice president for strategic planning and institutional diversity at Williams College. We are co-chairs of that group, Liberal Arts Diversity Officers. One of our members’ biggest issues is the lack of faculty diversity in private, elite liberal-arts colleges. The narrative was, It’s too hard to diversify faculty. But many of us in LADO said, This can’t be acceptable at institutions with our resources and ambitions. Let’s figure out how to make this happen collectively.

Speaking with Josephine Moreno, graduate diversity director at the University of California at Berkeley’s College of Letters & Science, made us realize that top research institutions like hers were eager to recruit more diverse graduate students with bachelor’s degrees from liberal-arts colleges.
They also wanted to send their graduate students on to promising places to do their teaching and scholarship.

In 2008, we went to Berkeley and met with 150 graduate students across many disciplines who were on the market that year, most of them people of color, women, and students from nontraditional pathways to college. We explained what it means to be on the faculty of liberal-arts-college campuses like ours. They told us, "Many advisers would never advise us to come there." So this has been a wonderful educational opportunity on both sides.

At first we ran Liberal Arts Diversity Officers as a labor of love, with an action-oriented agenda. But now a $4.7-million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is allowing us to go a step further, with the formation of the Creating Connections Consortium, or C3. The three-year grant allows us to formalize a reciprocal relationship between more than 20 LADO colleges and Berkeley and Columbia University.

Undergraduates from underrepresented minority groups at member colleges will go to Berkeley or Columbia to participate in summer research internships, starting as early as this summer, and work with faculty mentors who have similar backgrounds. Graduate students at Berkeley and Columbia can apply for two-year postdocs—initially at Middlebury, Connecticut, and Williams Colleges, the three institutions leading C3. These postdocs will be assigned to cohorts of four individuals per C3 institution—a total of 12 fellows each year. We want the students to have a personal experience of teaching and doing scholarship at a liberal-arts college. Afterward, they'll be encouraged to apply for faculty positions at all the LADO colleges. C3 will also hold an annual summit at a liberal-arts college.

When I was younger, I never thought I would have a Ph.D. from Duke or be a dean. I was a first-generation college student born and raised in Brooklyn by parents who came here from the Dominican Republic. I know there are multitudes of students who are just like I was. They haven't even figured out how to dream about having a career in the academy.

Since 2007-8, the percentage of faculty of color at Middlebury has hovered around 12 percent, so we, too, are challenged by this issue. None of us in LADO could do this work alone. We're ambitiously hoping C3 will provide a model that will create a wave of new thinking about diversity, inclusion, and the professoriate in higher education.