

Why GAO Did This Study

While the U.S. population has become increasingly diverse, college faculty may not reflect those same levels of diversity. Little is known at the national level about the relationship between faculty diversity and student outcomes. Separately, faculty have reported experiencing discrimination at colleges.

GAO was asked to review faculty diversity and employment discrimination at colleges. This report examines (1) selected aspects of diversity among faculty, (2) efforts by colleges to recruit and retain a diverse faculty, and (3) how Education and EEOC process employment discrimination complaints at colleges. GAO analyzed Education data on faculty and students from fiscal years 2003–2021, national workforce data from the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics ranging from calendar years 2014–2021, Education complaint data from fiscal years 2011–2022, and EEOC complaint data from fiscal years 2011–2021 (each set was the most recent available). GAO also conducted literature reviews; reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and policies; and interviewed agency officials and selected higher education experts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations. One recommendation directs Education to track the timing of employment discrimination complaint referrals to EEOC. Education agreed. One recommendation directs EEOC to develop a protocol to ensure it receives and processes all complaint referrals from Education. EEOC neither agreed nor disagreed, but acknowledged the importance of processing all referrals, and is taking related action.

View [GAO-24-105516](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or emreyarrasm@gao.gov.

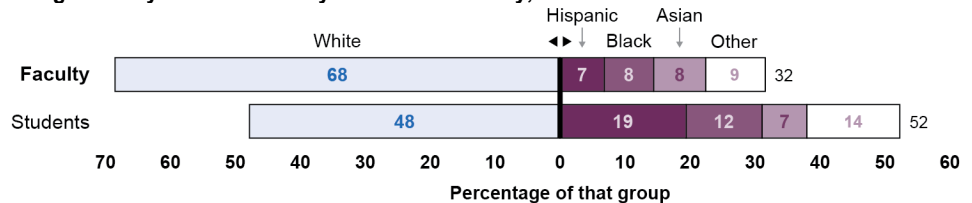
HIGHER EDUCATION

Employment Discrimination Case Referrals between Education and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

The proportions of Black or African American (Black) and Hispanic or Latino (Hispanic) college faculty increased from fiscal years 2003 through 2021. Yet, there were lower proportions of Black and Hispanic college faculty compared to Black and Hispanic workers with advanced degrees (e.g., master's and doctorate) and professional workers (e.g., lawyers and engineers), according to GAO's analysis of Department of Education and Census Bureau data. Black and Hispanic individuals were also less represented among college faculty than among students, according to GAO's analysis of Education data. For example, in fiscal year 2021, 8 percent of faculty were Black compared to 12 percent of students, and 7 percent of faculty were Hispanic compared to 19 percent of students.

College Faculty and Students by Race and Ethnicity, Fiscal Year 2021



Source: GAO analysis of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data. | GAO-24-105516

Notes: Black refers to Black or African American. Hispanic refers to Hispanic or Latino. An individual who self-identifies as Hispanic only, or both Hispanic and any race category, would be classified as Hispanic. The Other category includes individuals such as those that identified as Native American, Pacific Islander, multiple races, or unknown race.

GAO's literature search identified strategies used by colleges to recruit and retain a diverse faculty, given the potential benefits to their students. Colleges have enhanced their job search processes, developed mentoring programs, and improved campus climate to recruit and retain a diverse faculty.

Education refers certain employment discrimination complaints against colleges to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) for investigation consideration but has been consistently late in doing so. In fiscal year 2022, Education processed and referred to EEOC 99 complaints alleging employment discrimination at colleges based on race, color, national origin, or sex. GAO found that Education referred the complaints in 71 days on average, although Education policy calls for doing so in 30 days. However, Education does not track the timing of these referrals. Without doing so, Education could miss an opportunity to learn from offices that are more timely than others and apply those lessons agency-wide to reduce delays. Individuals with delayed complaints may experience adverse effects, such as continued discrimination or less pay. In fiscal year 2021, EEOC processed 1,342 complaints alleging employment discrimination at colleges based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or disability, some of which were referred by Education. However, EEOC does not have a protocol to consistently track and account for the complaint referrals. Recently, one such referral was not initially received by EEOC until the individual who filed the complaint followed up. Without a protocol to ensure that EEOC receives and processes all Education complaint referrals, some may be missed or resolution may be delayed.