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Black Professors Study to Build First National Dataset on University Governance and Faculty Health

New York, NY (March 10, 2026) — [The Black Professors Study](#) (BPS), housed at Columbia University, has launched as an institutional transformation initiative building the first integrated epidemiologic, governance, and legal dataset on Black faculty in the United States.

Diverse faculty improve research innovation, student success and institutional accountability, yet Black professors remain underrepresented and structurally unsupported. BPS is designed to generate actionable evidence for university leaders, policymakers, and legal stakeholders as well as public health decision-makers seeking to strengthen faculty equity, institutional accountability, and academic governance and inform population health strategy. The study combines rigorous population health research methods with policy and legal analysis to move beyond the production of research findings, toward a description of structural reform.

The 75-participant pilot begins at Columbia University, before expanding nationwide. It will include 1,000 Black faculty across diverse U.S. higher education institutions, using stratified random sampling to ensure a representative sample across key dimensions including institution type, faculty rank, tenure status, and disciplinary field.

“BPS is built to support institutional redesign. The initiative applies population health methods to examine how institutional and legal structures shape the health and career trajectories of Black faculty,” said [Dustin T. Duncan](#), ScD, principal investigator and associate dean for health equity research at Columbia University. “We are developing a dataset that can inform how universities govern, policies function in practice, and the law (including court decisions) shapes the lived realities and health of Black faculty.” Dr. Duncan notes that Black faculty comprise approximately 6% of tenured professors nationally and 3-4% of full professors.

At a time of rapid legal and policy shifts affecting higher education, BPS will provide empirical infrastructure to help institutions navigate governance, compliance, and equity strategy. Current faculty cohort studies, predominantly focusing on disciplinary cohorts and career stage cohorts, focus solely on professional metrics with minimal attention to population health dimensions such as mental health and stress-related indicators. Workplace climate and institutional factors that drive retention and success among Black faculty members have been absent. “Governance is not neutral—it shapes health, careers and institutional outcomes,” said Duncan.

BPS will integrate data across four linked domains:

- 1. Epidemiologic Outcomes and Determinants**
Causal inference and longitudinal modeling of health and well-being (including mental health and sleep), stress, and other health indicators across academic career stages.
- 2. Higher Education Governance and Law**
Policies and governance structures shaping hiring, promotion, tenure, pay equity, grievance processes, and workplace climate, paired with legal analysis designed for policy translation.
- 3. Spatial Epidemiology and Institutional Geography**

A spatial lens examining how region, institutional context, and environments shape experiences and outcomes, supporting place-based strategies for reform.

4. **Courts, Case Law, and Structural Accountability**

A legal component connecting faculty experiences to the broader landscape of higher education law, including how court rulings, litigation trends, and legal standards influence institutional behavior and accountability.

The BPS research team includes Adana Llanos, PhD, MPH and Nour Makarem, PhD from the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, Keosha Bond, EdD, MPH, CHES from the City University of New York, and Diana Sheehan, PhD from Florida International University.

The BPS is guided by a distinguished National Advisory Board of senior academic leaders, including former and current university presidents with expertise and scholarship in higher education governance, law, government and political behavior, public health, medicine, social work, and institutional strategy. Board members have experience leading major research institutions through periods of structural change. They will ensure that BPS findings are translatable into governance reform, executive decision-making, and national higher education policy conversations. The board includes:

Claudine Gay

Political scientist and academic administrator who served as the 30th president of Harvard University, a professor of Government and African and African American Studies.

Danielle Laraque-Arena

A Columbia University pediatrician, holding multiple leadership positions throughout the world and former president and professor emerita of SUNY Upstate Medical University.

Darrell Wheeler

The ninth president at the State University of New York at New Paltz and board member for the Hudson Valley Economic Development Corporation.

Freeman A. Hrabowski III

A national higher education leader, educator, and mathematician who served as president at University of Maryland Baltimore County, and co-author of *The Resilient University* and *The Empowered University*.

“This study will provide valuable insights to academic leaders regarding the overall status of Black faculty across different types of institutions in American higher education. Most important, the results will focus on the health dimensions of these faculty and the impact of institutional climate on their success,” said Dr. Hrabowski.

In addition to scholarly publications, BPS will produce executive briefs for university presidents, provosts, and trustees; governance benchmarking dashboards; policy translation memos for board review; and convenings of presidents and legal scholars.

Recruitment is underway for the study, which is a finalist for funding by The Spencer Foundation, a leading funder of education research since 1971 and the only national foundation focused exclusively on supporting education research.

For more information, to sign up as a participant, or to join the mailing list for updates, visit the BPS [website](#) or contact bps@cumc.columbia.edu.

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