Reviewer’s report

Title: A survey of trainee specialists experiences at the University of Cape Town (UCT): Impacts of race and gender

Version: 1 Date: 11 February 2009

Reviewer: Dana Lawrence

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions: None

Minor Compulsory Revisions:
1. It may be beneficial to link the actual survey to the paper so that readers can understand which specific questions were asked.
2. There is a possibility that those that responded were those with some sort of recollection bias, and I note that the overall response rate was low at 19%; this may obviate some of the findings here, notable as they are.

Discretionary Reviews:
1. One of the initial concerns I had while reading this was with the use of the terms “Black,” “Coloured,” and “African,” but the authors have explained why those terms were chosen and have noted issues relative to the social construction of meaning implicit here. I appreciate that clarification in the paper.
2. I further appreciate the fact that the authors are careful in attributing the modest improvements they noted to the specific policies designed to do just that; the study is itself descriptive and could not support any further conclusion.
3. I do feel that one additional step might have been considered, though I do not believe its omission should affect the publication of this manuscript. However, it would have been a good idea to hold a few focus groups or individual interviews to flesh out what respondents meant when, for example, they described the teaching and learning environment as “poor.” It is possible, again for example, that the poor environment was due to budget cuts and increased workloads, or due to discrimination and a feeling of being unwelcome.
4. I also would have welcomed some information on how this survey was developed, pre-tested and revised. However, I find the study itself well designed and have no significant complaints over its methodology, save for its poor response.

I am comfortable recommending this be published, though I would be grateful for their consideration of my recommendations.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interests.