

Best Practices for Improving Faculty Diversity Recruitment and Retention

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Tomorrow’s Academic Careers: Barriers to Faculty Diversity

In conducting research for this book, we examined diversity scholarships, spoke with key leaders across the country, and reflected on our own experiences working directly on these issues. The barriers to faculty diversity are complex. Our research suggests five primary impediments:

- (a) the pipeline challenge
- (b) outdated faculty recruitment and retention practices
- (c) faculty diversity myths that abound in higher education
- (d) the decentralized administrative culture of the academy, and
- (e) the view that faculty diversity is incompatible with academic excellence.

Finally, to overcome these obstacles, our efforts must focus as much on retention as on recruitment. What follows is a brief discussion of each of these barriers.

The Pipeline Challenge

Although colleges and universities have experienced growing racial and ethnic diversity, and women are now the majority of students, the faculty ranks remain homogenous. Despite efforts by many institutions, women and minorities make up only 14 percent of the total instructional faculty nationwide (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education’s latest annual status report illustrates the lack of diversity among full-time faculty: 4.9 percent are non-Hispanic African American, 2.8 percent are Hispanic, 5.8 percent are Asian American/Pacific Islander, and 0.4 percent are American Indians (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012).

Women represent only 25 percent of instructional faculty in higher education (Knapp et al., 2012). The need for a diverse faculty has become even more pronounced in the face of

challenges presented by an increasingly multicultural student body pursuing opportunities in a knowledge-based global economy. However, despite an expressed desire to diversify their faculty, most institutions have struggled to make significant progress. Part of the problem is that there are insufficient numbers of women and minorities on the educational pathway entering the professorate.

Leaks in the educational system at the K-12, undergraduate, and graduate levels have caused a “pipeline problem” in the upper reaches of many academic disciplines. Although concerns about the pipeline are legitimate, this rationale should not serve as an excuse for inaction. The common stereotype that a pool of diverse applicants does not exist or is difficult to access encourages search committees to pursue “business as usual” in their hiring efforts, ultimately perpetuating existing inequalities.

The deeper challenge is that many diverse candidates simply are not aggressively recruited (Smith et al., 2004). To address this challenge, it is important for academic institutions to employ best practices to hire, promote, and retain the diverse faculty talent that does exist. Institutions that are serious in their desire to enhance their faculty diversity can do so, but they must be aggressive, intentional, creative, and focused on creating change over time.

A Need for “Interrupting the Usual”

There are undoubtedly challenges to recruiting and retaining a more diverse faculty, but it is not an unattainable goal. What it involves, at its core, is what Daryl G. Smith and colleagues have referred to as “interrupting the usual” (2004, p. 153). Departments must move beyond the self-fulfilling prophecies about the difficulty of hiring underrepresented faculty and approach recruitment with rigor and creativity.

Effective recruitment requires commitment, diligence, and innovation. Institutions must establish a complex web of partnerships based on open communication and mutual accountability, and establish external strategic partners who can help develop aggressive and effective strategies. To build outstanding and diverse departments we need to take a page from competitive athletics and the world of business by aggressively pursuing the best and the brightest candidates. Indeed, we might have to help in developing these candidates when the potential is there.

The literature on faculty diversification notes that many institutions fail to interrupt in the usual way that they approach the goal of diversifying their institutions and, as a result, miss diversity

hire opportunities (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010; Smith et al., 2004). Active recruitment goes beyond simply writing and posting a job description. Institutions have to recruit if they want to achieve diversity. Too often, departments and search committees assume that they can simply place a job advertisement and wait to see which applicants emerge. Time and again the literature suggests that passivity will result in neither a diverse pool of applicants nor a diverse hire (Jackson, 2006; Smith et al., 2004). The successful recruitment of historically under represented faculty only happens when institutions employ a multidimensional faculty diversification strategy (Moody, 2004; G.A. Olson, 2007; Smith et al., 2004).

Moreover, many institutions do not even have a faculty diversity strategy in place. Basic procedures are absent, such as requiring search committee training, building an understanding of the pipeline of diverse talent, developing targeted efforts to build personal relationships with diverse candidates, or requiring that a search committee stay in the field until it assembles a diverse candidate pool (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010; Moody, 2004; G.A. Olson, 2007; Smith et al., 2004). Rather, many academic departments use a *laissez-faire* approach to faculty recruitment.

Typically, search committees place the job ad based on a previous faculty member's research and credentials, post the jobs in the traditional venues, receive nominations from trusted colleagues at other institutions, review and rank candidates, develop the short list, interview top candidates, and ultimately make the job offer (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010). The problem with this approach is that it generally fails to result in a diverse applicant pool, let alone a diverse hire (Smith et al., 2004; Turner, 2002). Daryl Smith and colleagues (2004) examined nearly 700 searches to determine whether specific interventions resulted in the hiring of African American, Latino, and Native American faculty at three large American Association of Universities institutions when one of three conditions was met:

- (a) the job description explicitly engaged diversity at the department or subfield level;
- (b) an institutional "special hire" strategy, such as a waiver of a search, target of opportunity hire, or spousal hire, was used; and
- (c) the search was conducted by a diverse search committee.

The results demonstrated that using one or more of these three techniques often led to a diverse hire. Among those faculty hires, 86 percent of African American, 100 percent of Native American, and 57 percent of Latino faculty were hired through a search that used one or more of the diversity-enriched search processes. Unfortunately, only 26 percent of the searches included in the study used these more targeted faculty search techniques.

The sad reality is that if the search did not use a diversity-intensive strategy, a diversity hire did not take place.

Engaging Faculty Diversity Myths

Another barrier to faculty diversity is the persistent myths surrounding the faculty search process (Moody, 2004; G.A. Olson, 2007; Smith et al., 2004; Turner, 2002). Among the most prevalent is the notion that institutions cannot compete for candidates who are highly sought after by the corporate sector. Another stereotype is that faculty of color do not want to come to a particular campus or a region of the country because it is not diverse or not urban enough. Other departments fail to recruit diverse faculty because they believe that minority faculty will ultimately leave for a more desirable position as soon as they make tenure. Finally, still others believe that a strategic effort to recruit more faculty of color perpetuates “reverse discrimination,” undermining efforts to hire the best candidate for the job.

All of these claims are either false or grossly exaggerated. The simple fact remains, many well-prepared minority faculty candidates are not actively recruited and do not have the luxury of considering multiple job offers (Moody, 2004; Olson, 2007; Smith et al., 2004; Turner, 2002). In her study of labor markets, Daryl Smith and her colleagues (2004) found that only 11 percent of the scholars of color within a sample of approximately 300 interviewed participants were “sought after” by institutions of higher education. Other findings included the following:

- (a) scientists of color were often found in postdoctoral positions and were not being pursued for faculty positions;
- (b) scholars were interested in working in a wide range of institutional settings, despite a common myth that they are exclusively interested in well-known institutions;
- (c) when diverse faculty transferred to another institution, they were often motivated by personal rather than financial incentives;
- (d) the choice to leave academia was often a function of the specific criticisms of academia rather than the irresistible temptations outside of academia; and
- (e) White scholars still enjoyed a consistent advantage in finding faculty positions.

The Decentralized Nature of the Academy and the Key Role of Senior Leadership

Marjorie Fine Knowles and Bernard W. Harleston (1997) examined the faculty diversity efforts of 11 highly regarded research universities. Their American Council on Education report,

“Achieving Diversity in the Professoriate: Challenges and Opportunities,” concluded that the decentralized nature of academic institutions was a significant barrier to increasing faculty diversity. Senior leaders have little ability to directly influence hiring decisions, although they can create a context for faculty diversity to emerge. Most policy decisions about hiring are made at the departmental level, where considerable power resides with chairs and their hiring committees.

Department heads and senior faculty develop recruitment plans and decide what constitutes quality, including how scholarship quality is measured, how publications and research are credited, and the areas of scholarship to be emphasized. Commitment to diversity must therefore take place concurrently at departmental and senior administrative levels. If institutions are going to be more successful in the future, we must integrate our departmental and central diversification efforts.

Research by Knowles and Harleston (1997) found that many faculty members did not know about existing diversity resources and were confused by current legal and institutional policies regarding diversity. Because faculty tend to lack expertise in these areas, CDOs need to educate academic deans and department chairs about the resources available for promoting diversity. This means making faculty diversity part of new faculty orientation events where faculty hiring and retention issues are raised. The more prevalent faculty diversity efforts become, the more they enter an institution’s day-to-day culture.

When talking to senior leaders, Knowles and Harleston (1997) found that many campus presidents and provosts saw themselves as having a limited ability to influence faculty hiring decisions. This is a major barrier to faculty diversity as the support of top leaders is essential to creating a broad institutional context for promoting faculty efforts. Senior leaders can prioritize diversity in campus strategic and academic plans, authorize specific financial resources (e.g., target of opportunity hires, targeted recruitment funds, etc.), and develop accountability strategies that convey an institution’s commitment.

In 2005, Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger implemented a \$15 million faculty diversity effort that featured on-the-ground leadership of a CDO, search committee education, proactive recruitment efforts, and a host of other techniques designed to make a measureable difference in the composition of faculty, and by extension the research and learning environments (Freudenberger, Howard, Jauregui, & Sturm, 2009).

CDOs can embolden senior leaders to understand that investing in faculty diversity efforts is foundational to expressing an institution's commitment to core values of inclusion and academic excellence. Even though their decision-making culture is usually decentralized, most institutions cannot deter the efforts of the intentional, determined presidents and provosts. However, just because senior leaders publicly declare their support for hiring diverse candidates does not mean that there will be success on the ground. Faculty diversity efforts must have top-level support and on-the-ground engagement by faculty, departments, and search committees.

To this end, it is important for faculty and department chairs to understand how to access the various faculty diversification tools that may exist on campus.

The Compatibility of Diversity and Academic Excellence

CDOs will inevitably encounter faculty members who view diversity as ancillary with academic excellence (Knowles & Harleston, 1997). Indeed, many faculty fail to recognize that departmental hiring decisions are connected to the broader campus's educational priorities. This is something that needs to change. Clearly, every faculty member must have the requisite competencies and expertise required to fulfill the teaching, scholarship, and service requirements of his or her position. At the same time, it is important for provosts, deans, department heads, and search committee chairs to emphasize that campus search committees represent the interests not only of their school or department, but the entire academic community.

For CDOs and others working directly with search committees, this means helping committees to understand the role they can play in shaping the campus's diversity agenda. The unfortunate reality is that many who serve on faculty search committees have never even discussed the cultural and academic advantages of promoting a diverse faculty and staff. CDOs must be able to discuss the educational and organizational benefits of diversity.

In many instances, this involves leveraging recent research and educating leaders about the importance of diversity in promoting cross-cultural understanding and breaking down stereotypes, essential skills for the workforce and society of tomorrow. CDOs must rely on research demonstrating that a diverse student body promotes better learning outcomes and provides for more enlightening classroom discussion (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005).

Another tactic includes finding faculty members willing to share their personal experiences with faculty colleagues and serve as diversity champions. Their participation adds an important qualitative element as they can share their experiences in the classroom, mentoring diverse students and engaging in diversity issues and topics. The insights of these trusted scholars can help create support among other faculty (Brown-Glaude, 2009). By engaging faculty diversity champions with strong academic credentials and a history of institutional leadership, a college or university can create support for its diversity efforts from within (Freudenberger et al., 2009). The support of the administration is crucial to reaching out to diverse candidates.

Such support includes providing resources like funding for travel to conferences that facilitate exposure to more diverse candidates, sponsoring presentations by faculty members who have led candidate searches, and providing class buyouts for those leading the effort to diversify the candidate pool. In short, the pursuit of faculty diversity goals must be more than an unfunded mandate.

A Focus on Recruitment and Retention

Finally, institutions must invest in both recruitment and retention activities if they are going to successfully diversify their faculty. Even richly diverse institutions struggle to retain their minority faculty and staff (Moreno, Smith, Clayton-Pederson, Parker, & Teraguchi, 2006; Turner & Myers, 2000). Put simply, recruitment does not guarantee retention, so any faculty diversification effort that does not address mentorship, improving the institutional culture, or attending to dual-career needs may end up fueling a “revolving door” with respect to new minority hires.

A study of 27 colleges and universities funded by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that the turnover rate for ethnically and racially diverse faculty is higher than among majority faculty. Looking at a five-year period, the study found that one of every two minority faculty hires constituted a replacement for a previous minority hire who had left the institution (Moreno et al., 2006).

One reason for this high rate of attrition is what the American Federation of Teachers Higher Education (2010) refers to as a “culture that sometimes breeds a sense of isolation and exclusion, creates confusion about how to meet job responsibilities and advance professionally, and imposes unreasonable work burdens on faculty from racially and ethnically underrepresented groups” (p. 6).

In developing their strategic diversity agendas, CDOs must partner with academic deans and department heads not only to recruit diverse faculty, but to retrain and promote them.