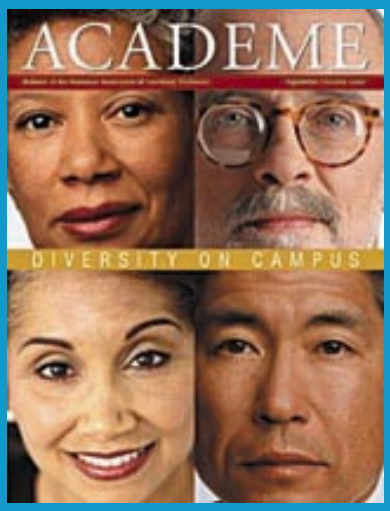

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Features

How to Diversify the Faculty

By Daryl G. Smith

Get beyond the myths and adopt new hiring practices if you want to add significant numbers of minority group members to the faculty.

We've all heard the refrain that most colleges and universities fail to diversify their faculties because so few scholars of color earn doctorates. A parallel claim is that members of underrepresented minority groups who seek academic posts are in such great demand that they can pick and choose among multiple offers.

Despite the abysmal job market, many people also believe that the academy's commitment to diversity, combined with a limited supply of minority-group scholars, has created a bidding war that favors faculty of color over white men. Non-elite institutions that accept this argument think they are not rich, well-located, or prestigious enough to attract the few candidates who are in such high demand. "Although a concerted effort has been made," explains one prestigious research institution in a typical plaint, "small candidate pools and intense competition between top universities has made growth in [minority] faculty numbers extremely difficult."

And yet many faculty and administrators of color do not see themselves as the beneficiaries of bidding wars. On the contrary, they say, minority scholars have trouble landing tenure-track jobs; like their white colleagues, faculty of color suffer not only from the poor academic labor market, but also from the traditional hiring practices of most institutions.

It should be clear by now that a schizoid condition characterizes the current discourse about diversity. Each side supports its position with competing anecdotes. To supply some empirical evidence, a research team at the Claremont Graduate University decided in 1996 to study how the job market treats potential faculty members-especially the minority-group scholars among them. I was a member of that team.

We wanted the study to include the most desirable job candidates, so we invited all the recipients of the prestigious Ford, Mellon, and Spencer Fellowships who had completed their Ph.D.'s from 1989 to 1995 to participate. We interviewed 299 of the 393 scholars, or 78 percent. African Americans accounted for 26 percent of the sample, Asian Pacific Islanders for 4 percent, European Americans for 35 percent, Latinos for 32 percent, and Native Americans for 3 percent. This sample, half of whom were women, included scientists from underrepresented minority groups.

It was an elite cohort. Ninety-three percent of the participants had doctorates from research institutions, mainly from the most prestigious universities; a third of the sample had degrees from Ivy League schools. Seventy percent of the sample held faculty appointments, 17 percent were in postdoctoral positions, 5 percent worked for corporations, and 6 percent were in other types of jobs. Thanks to this survey and similar research by other scholars, we now have enough information about the job market to identify strategies for improving hiring practices.

Myths

The prevailing ideas about diversifying the faculty involve myths that impede the search process. Consequently, the first strategy for recruiting and retaining faculty of color must be to confront and debunk the myths. Here are the most prevalent ones that emerged from our study.

Myth. The scarcity of faculty of color in the pipeline means that many institutions must compete against one another to seek out and hire minority candidates.

Reality. In fact, only 11 percent of the scholars of color in our sample were recruited for a faculty position and encouraged to apply. If the candidates had a choice-and many did not-it was usually between two or three institutions, but not the two or three

Twentieth Alexander Meiklejohn Award

of their choosing. And even among this select group, few had institutions bid for them. If they got to negotiate, it was usually over a computer or a modest research stipend.

This pattern did not, however, hold for all the scholars of color in our sample. Overall, 11 percent of these scholars were sought after, but only 3 percent of Puerto Ricans in the group were. One participant, a Latina, commented, "I would say that I find it a little surprising that I do not regularly get phone calls with regard to recruitment. We are so few, it's amazing that most universities will say [they] can't find anybody, yet persons like myself are not recruited. I think I should be getting phone calls, and I don't get phone calls."

An African American woman reported on efforts at her institution to hire persons of color: "Out of eleven faculty hires, there was one person of color. . . . One of the excuses is that black people won't come here. . . . I have been lucky personally, but the notion that it is easy to get a job if you are a person of color is not true."

This research does not necessarily negate the "pipeline" argument. If all U.S. institutions of higher education were aggressively diversifying their faculties, there would be too few scholars of color in the pipeline. But it seems that most campuses substitute talk about diversity and "business as usual" for effective approaches to change.

Myth. The scarcity of faculty of color in the sciences means that those who are available are in high demand.

Reality. Most of the scientists in our sample, all of whom were persons of color, were pursuing postdoctoral study. Only 16 percent held faculty positions. None of those doing postdoctoral work had been sought out by colleges or universities. Indeed, many worried about finding permanent jobs; others had already left academe for industry because of their inability to find faculty positions.

One Chicano astrophysicist spent four years in postdoctoral positions and finally, after unsuccessful academic searches, took a job in industry. A Latino geophysicist from a prestigious East Coast institution went into industry after getting no academic offers. He commented, "I thought that everything was based on merit. From what I have seen, compared to business, academia is more politically driven, especially in hires and funding. It's a

much more competitive and dog-eat-dog world than I ever imagined."

Myth. Faculty of color are leaving academe altogether for more lucrative positions in government and industry.

Reality. Most of the scientists in our sample who took nonacademic posts discussed the need to establish a career before age forty; they did not want to continue in multiple postdocs. Others spoke of inhumane search processes that left them feeling unappreciated. Still others noted the difficult job market. Thus the decision to leave academe often reflected problems in academia, not irresistible temptations outside.

Myth. The kind of scholars represented in this study, both because of their competitive positioning in the market and their elite education, consider only prestigious institutions in their job searches, making it virtually impossible for other institutions to recruit them.

Reality. The participants in our study expressed interest in different positions, regions, and institutional types. Limited mobility explained some but not all of these preferences. The candidates based their choices on the environment in which they wished to live, a desire to teach a diverse student body, an interest in institutions with missions related to their professional goals, or other factors. Some participants regretted not having been recruited by a regional institution with which they had some affinity.

Myth. Wealthy and prestigious institutions draw established faculty of color away from nonelite institutions with fewer resources, creating a revolving door that limits progress for any single institution in diversifying its faculty.

Reality. Outside offers do lure some faculty members away from their institutions. But most of our participants indicated an unwillingness to move frequently solely because of monetary incentives. Moving oneself, let alone a family, is not easy. The participants who had moved did so because of dual career choices, questions of fit, or unresolved problems with their institutions, such as having to deal with multiple demands as a result of being one of just a few faculty of color in a department or an institution. A Chicano said, "For many faculty, the institution was a revolving door, not only because you get recruited, but also because of

issues. It is a battlefield-you are constantly struggling."

Myth. Campuses focus so heavily on diversifying the faculty that heterosexual white men have no chance.

Reality. Our sample included white men and women, which allowed us to address this argument. Most of the European American men in our study, like the others in the sample, were highly successful. Those who had expertise related to diversity issues enjoyed a special advantage on the job market. The few who had difficulty finding a regular faculty appointment specialized in fields that had virtually no openings. The pattern for white women was similar.

The white faculty members in the study had an important perspective on the hiring process. Instead of reporting that they had been hurt by affirmative action, they suggested that efforts to diversify the faculty at their institutions could have gone further. One white woman in a faculty position at an elite liberal arts college reflected, "When I look at whom we hired, of the twelve jobs available, we hired only one minority and we got special funding for her."

A white male professor of classics said, "A lot of people in my demographic group talk about the lost-white-male syndrome and say that all the jobs are going to women. I really don't think that's true. The field is still largely dominated by white men. . . . The inherent bias in the field is so strong that others are not taken as seriously from the interview stage onward."

Similarly, a white male faculty member in art history reported, "There is a lot of talk about diversifying, but when push comes to shove, there is still a lot of hiring of white males, and I am a white male."

If institutions really want to hire and retain faculty of color, they must move beyond merely debunking the myths. They must commit themselves to diversity and transform their search procedures. Approaching the search process in the usual ways simply will not work. In fact, our research and that of others suggest that how institutions handle hiring decisions is more important than the pipeline issue.

To successfully recruit and retain faculty of color, institutions and departments need to consider how diversity will affect their

institutions. Why is it important to the department or to the institution? Institutions that have recruiting plans incorporating diversity are much more likely to succeed. But all too often, search committees proceed according to tradition, looking for qualities associated with focused, if not narrow, disciplinary concerns that exclude new scholarship or persons with different academic backgrounds.

Colleges and universities should treat diversity in the same way they do technology. Many campuses have started to seek radically new kinds of qualifications and experience in prospective faculty because of the increasing importance of technology in many disciplines. Technology's growing prominence has also prompted a rise in interest in candidates with work experience in industry.

The parallel to diversity is apt in that a diverse faculty can bring new kinds of scholarship to an institution, educate students on issues of growing importance to society, and offer links to communities not often connected to our campuses.

Strategies and Issues

As they begin to explore what diversity can contribute to higher education, institutions might consider the following strategies and issues.

Mission. How is the mission of the institution related to and served by diversity? Many institutions have committed themselves to educating their students to function and thrive in a pluralistic and global society, in much the same way that they have dedicated themselves to educating students for technology. This commitment positions diversity at the center of what is taught, how it is taught, and to whom students are exposed.

Many campuses point to the changing demographics of the student body as the rationale for diversifying the faculty. An even more compelling reason to rethink faculty searches, however, rests in the need to educate all students for diversity. Qualities to look for in candidates include teaching experience with diverse populations and scholarly expertise related to diversity in a discipline or area.

Scholarship. The emerging evidence shows that faculty of color often introduce new scholarship that engages issues of diversity. As more campuses add diversity requirements to the curriculum,

the demand for faculty who have expertise in nontraditional areas will increase. Diversifying the curriculum is not a superficial exercise; it means more than simply introducing a book. Sound curricular development requires scholarly expertise.

Teaching. The rise in diversity among students on U.S. campuses demands that job descriptions stress experience in teaching different kinds of students as well as skill in developing classroom environments that facilitate learning for all students. Looking for these qualities is especially important in the sciences, where the content of the curriculum may or may not change because of issues of race and gender, but where helping students of diverse backgrounds to succeed is a widespread goal. Many faculty of color bring the expertise needed to accomplish that goal.

Institutional viability. Increasingly, the viability of our campuses will rest on whether they reflect the diversity of society. Institutions that desire credibility among communities on and off the campus will need to look diverse at all levels. Student diversity and success are important but not sufficient if the rest of the campus remains homogeneous.

Active searches. Institutions need to abandon passivity in their searches if they want to diversify their faculties. The standard practice of issuing highly specialized job descriptions, advertising, seeking written recommendations, and sending form letters does not work well for this purpose.

A more successful strategy calls for developing personal connections, or networks of people who have expertise in the areas of scholarship the institution needs. The ability to start the search process early and to act quickly also helps, as does flexibility regarding candidates' specialties and a willingness to hire faculty for the perspectives and experience they bring instead of for the groups they supposedly "represent." The most successful approaches involve personal contact with the candidate after the search committee or administrator has become familiar with the candidate's areas of interest and fit for the position.

Leadership. Leadership at all levels can ensure that searches begin early and that action is taken quickly. A close working relationship between the search committee and the administration can make a big difference in both the success of the search and that of the candidate hired. In addition, faculty and administrators from underrepresented groups can serve as important resources for searches.

Diverse search committees. The search process, in which faculty committees look for multiple talents and potential fit with an institution, is by necessity complex and subjective. Having a diverse search committee helps in gaining access to and evaluating candidates of different backgrounds; it also makes it less likely that the committee will overlook talented individuals with nontraditional kinds of experience.

Personal support. Our study found that the presence of a "champion" was one of the most important factors in determining whether a candidate of color was hired. The champion was someone at the hiring institution, on the search committee, or from the candidate's graduate institution who knew or got to know the candidate and served as a supporter. The champion facilitated communication, advised the candidate about the process, and made sure the committee had the opportunity to fully assess the candidate's talent.

Elitism. Relying on institutional prestige as a surrogate for quality undervalues many talented individuals. Search committees serious about diversity need to consider real indicators of excellence rather than surrogate ones, such as the institution from which the candidate earned a degree.

The tight academic labor market allows search committees in teaching institutions to ratchet up requirements to match those of elite research institutions. A search committee in the sciences, for example, may be impressed by a candidate who has had three or four postdoctoral research assignments to the point of ignoring whether the candidate's interests and background fit the needs of the campus. A committee at a teaching college would do better to consider the mission of the institution and the candidate's success in teaching the kinds of students it attracts.

Affirmative action. Our study indicated that scholars of color support affirmative action, but with some ambivalence. People want to be hired for their scholarship and abilities, not solely for their ethnicity. The faculty of color in our sample had little respect for colleges or universities that sent out form letters urging minorities or white women to apply instead of making personal efforts to contact them. They believe this practice shows a lack of genuine interest in the candidates themselves. Many also spoke eloquently about their fear that the current backlash against affirmative action would reduce incentives to diversify the academy and work against the hiring and retention of faculty of

color.

Dual-career issues. The challenge of dual-career relationships is an important theme in academic hiring today. Our study found that helping candidates with dual-career concerns influenced the successful outcome of searches. Because the pool of faculty of color is limited, this issue becomes even more important when an institution seeks to diversify its faculty. Campuses prepared to help partners find positions on campus or to connect them with employment possibilities nearby are taken more seriously than those that provide no assistance.

Post-hiring support. Getting a job in the academy is only the first step. Achieving tenure is a much more challenging proposition. Many faculty of color in our study stressed the importance of earning tenure, despite the difficulties involved, especially if a faculty member wants to assume institutional leadership. But the climate on campuses makes it hard for many faculty of color. Issues of isolation, lack of appreciation, institutional disinterest in diversity, racism, and sexism were all mentioned as barriers to earning tenure.

Open Doors

To engage issues of diversity successfully, colleges and universities need to develop a truly diverse faculty. They cannot rely on myths. Faculty search committees that hold unverified assumptions cause campuses to engage in self-fulfilling prophecies regarding the recruitment of minority faculty.

Concerns about the scarcity of faculty of color are indeed valid, but campuses also need to take a new look at their recruitment and hiring processes. They must understand how faculty diversity affects their institutions, revamp their search strategies, and institute a program for championing candidates of color. And these efforts must be forceful and intentional, not passive or bureaucratic. In a word, search processes will need to change in ways that open rather than close doors.

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