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The Department Chair's Role in Fostering Equity: Recruitment and Hiring

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The Department Chair's Role in Fostering Equity: Recruitment and Hiring

Universities want to hire faculty who can succeed and add value to their institution.

Additionally, many universities seek to hire diverse faculty members to diversify teaching, research and service activities and mentor an increasingly diverse student body. In striving for inclusive excellence, universities recognize that the goals of quality and diversity in hiring are not mutually exclusive. Institutions that create recruitment and hiring processes that are equitable will have an edge in hiring diverse faculty candidates who want to be at, can add value to, and can succeed at their institution.

Typically, faculty search committees advise the Chair and Dean on their evaluation of faculty candidates. Chairs can play a key role in ensuring that the criteria and process the committee uses to evaluate faculty candidates are fair and equitable. The authors developed online resources for [faculty searches](#), including an online [Hiring Faculty Toolkit](#), that are openly available to use to improve the recruitment and hiring processes. Key parts are summarized below.

What can you do to find diverse applicants?

Where are they? Are there enough? Will they consider us? How do we attract them?

Below are ideas for recruiting diverse applicants.

- Show that your department is inclusive through the language and images used online and in promotional materials.
- Recruit even when there is no open position. You want potential future applicants as well as current applicants to know about your department, know that it is inclusive and where they want to be.

- Connect with diverse feeder institutions to help with locating diverse candidates for continuous recruitment. Examples of continuous recruitment include bringing to campus or connecting with potential candidates through teaching or research presentations, which can have the added benefit of developing collaborations.
- Use your networks, including specifically asking colleagues to nominate or refer diverse candidates.
- Recruit at conferences and conference events that target underrepresented scholars.
- Write better job postings. See resources online, including in the [Hiring Faculty Toolkit](#). For example, broader job descriptions widen the potential pool of qualified applicants. Signal the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion with statements like “ability to contribute to our DEI mission.”
- Require the search committee to produce a list of their recruiting efforts along with information about the applicant pool before proceeding with the search. Ask questions to make sure that the search committee’s outreach has been extensive.

What can you do to hire diverse applicants?

Show that your department values diversity, equity, and inclusion. Below are ideas for assisting with hiring diverse candidates.

- Assemble a search committee that is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. To the extent possible, the search committee should include diversity in gender, race, rank, age, etc. Research supports that, applicant pools include more women when women chair search committees. Similarly, applicant pools include more underrepresented minorities (URM) when URM faculty members chair search committees (Kazmi & Spitzmueller, 2022).

- Make sure that members are recently trained. Search committee training with a focus on minimizing bias may be available from the Equal Opportunity Office or Human Resources.
- Include a third party (often called an equity advisor) to assist the search committee in ensuring an inclusive search process. Equity advisors typically are tenured faculty who serve as non-voting, external members of a search committee. They undergo extensive and ongoing training to support them in developing the critical self-awareness needed to engage in equity work and to gain knowledge about best practices in effective recruitment and hiring, legal issues, and inequity in higher education. Equity advisors support search committees with implementing and carrying out inclusive recruitment and hiring strategies throughout the entirety of the search process.
- Set expectations in your charge letter to the committee. A template charge letter is included in the [Hiring Faculty Toolkit](#).
- Remind faculty of the types of questions that may be illegal to ask job candidates (e.g., where were you born, are you married, are you pregnant). It may be tempting to ask these types of questions particularly in informal settings like taking the candidate out to dinner. as a way to get to know the applicant, but these questions should never be asked in a job interview context.
- Require each job candidate to be asked a consistent set of job-related questions that are prepared in advance. Use rating scales or rubrics to evaluate job candidates' responses so they are evaluated consistently.
- Strive to make each applicant feel welcomed and valued.

- Provide all interviewees information about your institution's family-friendly policies, dual career support, disability support services, campus constituency groups, and equity initiatives.
- Provide all interviewees information about the region, including childcare options, schools, and the cost of living.
- Include a meeting during the campus interview with a third party who is otherwise uninvolved in the search but can answer questions candidates may be unwilling otherwise to ask (such as about family friendly policies, dual career support, childcare options, and disability support services).
- Share a tentative agenda with the applicant and ask them if there are other people they would like to meet with during their visit. For example, you might include a meeting during the campus interview with diverse faculty members from other units. They may be able to provide additional information about the university and job candidates may feel more comfortable asking for information that will help them clarify their impressions of the university.
- Hold the search committee accountable for their hiring recommendations. Ask questions about how they arrived at their decision to ensure that their decisions were arrived at fairly.
- Remember that salary is only one part of a compensation package and only one component of a candidate's decision to accept or decline your offer. Candidate perceptions of the climate for diversity may be an important factor in making their decision.

Conclusion

It is possible to recruit and hire diverse applicants, even when your faculty are not currently diverse. And department chairs play an important role in setting that expectation and requiring a search process that reduces the barriers to that goal. Chairs also influence the ability to recruit and hire diverse faculty by creating an inclusive, equitable climate for current faculty and by ensuring the retention and promotion of their diverse faculty. Key aspects to creating an equitable climate are supporting inclusive excellence in the use of family-friendly policies and in faculty evaluation for tenure and promotion. To learn more about these additional topics, check out our follow-up articles appearing....

References

Kazmi, M. A., Spitzmueller, C., Yu, J., Madera, J. M., Tsao, A. S., Dawson, J. F., & Pavlidis, I. (2022). Search committee diversity and applicant pool representation of women and underrepresented minorities: A quasi-experimental field study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *107*(8), 1414–1427. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000725>

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