

Diversity and Faculty Recruitment: Myths and Realities

Diversity is an issue that comes up in every search. Building a diverse pool of candidates requires conscious effort from the very beginning of the process. It is too late to discuss diversity when and if asked, “Why are there no women or underrepresented minorities on the short list?” Frequently, search committees answer such questions by claiming that there were few women or minority applicants because the field is too cutting edge or too traditional, or too wide or too narrow, or too quantitative or too qualitative, or any number of other reasons. But a goal of every search should be to ensure that there are outstanding women and minority candidates in the pool equal or above their availability in the national pool. Think broadly and creatively. In virtually all fields, simply placing an ad in one or two journals and waiting for applications is not enough; that route will miss some of the best candidates for the position, regardless of their gender or ethnicity.[1]

People harbor several myths about hiring and diversity. Some of the most common are:

“We are focused on quality as our criterion for hiring. Adding diversity means compromising quality.”

No one recommends sacrificing quality for diversity, and no qualified candidate wants to be considered on the basis of diversity alone. But some of our current practices unintentionally exclude highly qualified people. By recruiting a pool that reflects the availability of candidates from all groups, and by ensuring that we do not use criteria that may disadvantage women or minority candidates, quality will increase, not decrease. Furthermore, the best candidate has skills and talents that will benefit many aspects of the university, including its students and faculty. Diverse faculty members can enhance the educational experience of all students, an important goal of the university.

“Relatively few qualified women or minority candidates are available, and these are highly sought-after, so we are unlikely to recruit them.”

Although the availability of women and minorities varies across fields, in many areas we are currently hiring well below that availability. And as the studies detailed in the articles on “How to Diversify the Faculty”[2] and “Interrupting the Usual”[3] show, many highly qualified minority postdoctoral scholars were not actively recruited by academic institutions. Institutions are not often “fighting over” a few candidates. Search committees have every reason to expect to be successful in finding qualified women and minority candidates for their pool.

“The problem will solve itself as more women and minorities move through the pipeline and the “old guard” retires. (Corollary: we really don’t have to do anything new or different now).”

Although the number of minorities and particularly women obtaining PhDs and entering the workforce has steadily increased over the last several decades, hiring and advancement of these groups has not kept pace. Faculty who are being hired are still disproportionately white males, and business as usual is not solving the problem. For more information about hiring specifically at the University of California, see information about the [University of California ADVANCE PAID program \(http://www.ucop.edu/ucadvance/\)](http://www.ucop.edu/ucadvance/).

[1]

<http://www.faculty.diversity.ucla.edu> (http://www.faculty.diversity.ucla.edu/), and “Diversity and Faculty Recruitment: Myths and Reality,” by Marlene Zuk, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Equity and Diversity, UC Riverside, 2006.

[2]

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Smith, D.G. (2000). "How to Diversity the Faculty," *86 Academe* 48.

[3]

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Smith, D.G., Turner, C.S., Osei-Kofi, N., Richards, S. (2004). *The Journal of Higher Education* 75(2).

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