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Essay on how to build a diverse hiring pool for faculty jobs

Submitted by Armando Bengochea and Roger Brooks on February 1, 2012 - 3:00am

The candidate pool is the single most important factor in the success of an initiative to diversify the faculty. While there are lots of other things colleges can and should do to increase their chances of filling an open position with someone who adds to campus diversity, building a diverse pool of candidates is essential.

At Connecticut College, we define diversity broadly, since our focus on it derives from our mission statement, where we make the commitment to prepare our students "to put the liberal arts into action in a global society." We believe our students learn best when they have experiences interacting with many different types of people. Thus, we include in our consideration of diversity many of the most salient experiences that mark human differences, including experiences based on race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender expression and characteristics and disabilities. While we consider all of these individual and group differences, we are mindful that some are already well-represented on our campus. Therefore, we have chosen to focus our recent efforts on recruiting individuals who remain underrepresented on our campus.

Historical experiences prove that the chances of hiring a diverse candidate for a particular opening are very slim if, say, 250 people apply and only a small handful fall into underrepresented categories. At Connecticut College, before we changed some of our assumptions about how to carry out a successful search, we were regularly in the position of reacting to pools with very little diversity. Our faculty search committees would write an advertisement, post it and wait for applications to flow in. And they did – but the pools were overwhelmingly white, which meant that, far more often than not, the hire was white.

The key to successful searching, we have learned, is vigorous outreach. As Caroline Turner suggests in *Diversifying the Faculty*,⁽¹⁾ you cannot be passive in this way and expect a diverse candidate pool to materialize; you must reach out in all directions to identify desirable candidates and, whenever possible, directly encourage them to apply. This means contacting key people about your openings who can help you find candidates with the personal characteristics and academic prowess reflected in your institutional values and job descriptions. It may also mean picking up the phone and working to personally interest candidates in your search.

There are several ways to do this, and the most diverse candidate pools will be built by search committees that employ all of these methods:

- Use conferences as an opportunity to search for candidates. Look for promising potential candidates for current and future openings. Talk to them, get their contact information, and give them materials about your college and a copy of your ad, if there is a current opening. After the conference, follow up to see if they have any questions or would like more information.
- Keep and reference programs from past conferences. When you do have an open position, look through previous conference programs for presenters who spoke on related topics. Use online resources to search for the presenters and reach out to them.
- Contact those on lists of graduate students or Ph.D.s of color compiled by professional associations. Many if not most fields have professional organizations that compile and keep lists of diverse students and Ph.D.s, and these can be tremendous resources. Connecticut College recently hired a woman who hadn't even heard of our college before she saw our ad on a listserv for one such group.
- Contact chairs of relevant departments and directors of graduate studies. Find institutions that produce the types of Ph.D. candidates you are interested in, and ask the chairs and directors to forward your ad to students and former students who may be qualified. At Connecticut College, each search committee is given an annotated listing of the universities that produce the highest numbers of Ph.D.s of color, along with results of initial attempts by others at the college to identify key contacts at those universities.
- Use your own networks. Send the ad to people you know at other colleges and universities, and ask them to forward it to anyone who might be interested.
- Enlist the help of faculty outside of the searching department. Faculty members tend to have broad networks that often include graduate students and Ph.D.s outside of their own fields. Send your ad to other members of your faculty and ask them to post it to the listservs they belong to, send it to friends and colleagues who might be interested, etc.
- Reach out to alumni. Searching departments should send their ad to alumni who are now in graduate school or who have recently graduated, and ask them to forward it to anyone who might be interested. You may even find alumni who are interested – Connecticut College has five popular and successful alumni faculty members.
- Encourage creativity and ingenuity within your search committee. Faculty are a creative bunch who should use their skills to find great potential candidates and encourage them to apply.

Our strategic initiative to diversify the faculty at Connecticut College – a small, private liberal arts college on the East Coast – began several years ago. Without a strong history of diversity or the affirmative hiring resources of a major university, we knew it would be a difficult task.

We also knew it would not be impossible, and indeed Connecticut College has significantly increased faculty diversity with several successful consecutive hiring years. When we began our initiative in 2008, just 16 percent of our faculty members were faculty of color; now, at the beginning of 2012, faculty of color make up slightly more than 24 percent. As members of Liberal Arts Diversity Officers (LADO), a consortium of colleges like ours dedicated to diversifying our campuses, we have shared our best practices and we are proud to be assisting other colleges as they seek to build a faculty that more closely reflects our country's diversity, as well as our part in an increasingly global society.

Each year, we continue to learn more about how to best search for new faculty colleagues. For a college like ours, that means continuously renewing our commitment to building an excellent faculty that will best prepare our students for life after college. While it is certainly easier to sit back and let the applications flow in, it is well worth the extra effort to build a candidate pool that matches your strategic goals and educational priorities.

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