Recruiting for Diversity and Excellence in STEM: Reflections from Faculty Search Committees

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What strategies and tactics do search committees use to recruit diverse and excellent candidates and what key challenges do they face?



Actively recruit

- Personally invite underrepresented scholars to apply
- Attend women and minority-related professional meetings; circulate postings through related listservs/boards

Broaden the pool

- Define position in broadest terms possible (e.g. rank and scope of scholarship)
- Consider early scholars and those outside of traditionally ranked universities



Evaluate objectively

- Develop and use shared criteria
- Emphasize
 non-comparative
 scoring/rating
- Review recommendation letters later in the process to mitigate bias

Key challenge: Timing of process

- Narrow application review window in some fields
- Hiring timelines are too tight and feel rushed
- Increased speed of academic job market due to competition



Get prompt feedback

- Gather prompt feedback from department members after each visit
- Use a candidate evaluation tool to solicit feedback on specific criteria

Key challenge: Communication wit leadership

- Poor communication between search committees, department chairs, and school/college leaders
- Reliance on leadership to make successful hire

Cultivate future candidates

- Develop future faculty workshops for graduate students/postdocs (e.g., NextProf)
- Keep track of promising scholars in field and invite to give research talks (before active search)
- Proactively build a community of diverse scholars (e.g., online directory of women and minority scholars)
- Create a standing personnel committee

Key challenge: Broad vs. narrow position

- Hard to balance broad disciplinary scope with specific teaching/training needs
- Pressure from colleagues/ leadership to specify narrow position
- Lack of support for open rank hire

Consider diversity statement

 Ask applicants to submit a diversity statement to help identify candidates who will contribute to department's commitment to diversity and inclusion

Key challenge: Lack of buy-in

- Pressure from senior colleagues to disregard rules/procedures
- Inappropriate
 conversations/remarks
 during evaluation or
 selection process
- Emphasis on "fit" in ways that perpetuate bias

Review and revise short list

- Consider representation of candidates at every stage of process
- Use checkpoints to facilitate a thoughtful, considered list of candidates
- Require external review of short list (e.g., by executive committee or dean's office)

Create inclusive selection process

Create an inclusive
 process that allows all
 voices (e.g., junior
 faculty) to be
 represented in selection
 of final candidate

Key challenge: Dual career timing

- Insufficient time to resolve dual career issues after offer is made
- Especially problematic in recruiting faculty with academic partners

Study Background and Design

STRIDE Faculty Recruitment Workshops

- Since 2004, the Committee on Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence (STRIDE) has offered campus-wide workshops for faculty members participating in faculty recruitment efforts. The workshops provide background information and concrete advice about practices that make searches more successful (e.g., producing diverse candidate pools).
- Many schools and colleges at U-M require attending a STRIDE workshop in order to participate on a search committee.

Study design and sample

- We invited ~100 chairs and members from ~50 search committees undergoing faculty searches in the 2017 academic year.
- We purposefully chose search committees located in units that required STRIDE workshop attendance to explore their adoption of the recommended practices.
- We interviewed 29 search committee members/chairs from 26 committees.
- 11 committees were located in STEM, 15 in the social sciences or humanities.
- Interviews were conducted by an ADVANCE research staff member and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about their committee's activities during the search process.

Implications for STEM Departments

The STRIDE workshop model works!

- Interviewees adopted many recommended strategies, tactics, and resources from the faculty-led STRIDE workshops, and also adapted them to fit their departments' needs.
- Interviewees were able to articulate the benefits of STRIDE practices in helping their departments recruit a diverse and excellent faculty.

Strategies for navigating tensions and challenges

- Anticipate and prepare for key challenges before search begins.
- Challenges can serve as a mechanism for rethinking and transforming common practices (e.g., moving application deadlines).
- Articulating and affirming a shared departmental commitment to diversity and excellence can help address many of the key challenges identified in our study.

Focus on promising practices

- The practices identified by interviewees were successfully implemented across a variety of departments and disciplines.
- Many of these strategies were developed and implemented in departments where women and minorities are persistently underrepresented.
- In addition to the specific strategies highlighted by our interviewees, the ADVANCE Program at U-M has identified many more evidence-based strategies to improve the faculty recruitment process.

Resources from the ADVANCE Program at U-M

The following resources are easily accessible on our website: www.advance.umich.edu

- Information about STRIDE Faculty Recruitment Workshops, including workshop slides, sample candidate evaluation tool, lists of best practices, frequently asked questions, and more
- Comprehensive handbook for faculty searches and hiring
- Compilation of scholarly literature informing the faculty search process (organized and tagged by theme)

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