

New Paradigms for Diversifying Faculty and Staff in Higher Education: Uncovering Cultural Biases in the Search and Hiring Process

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Introduction

In the last ten years, many colleges, universities, boards, and agencies have jumped on the diverse faculty/staff hiring bandwagon not only by issuing resolutions, policies, and mandates but also by inventing programs, initiatives, and strategies all intended to increase the number of faculty and staff of color in predominantly White institutions. The statistics illustrate the results: 80-90% of faculty and staff in most colleges and universities are still White.

In fact, as Turner (2002) points out, "efforts to diversify the faculty continue to be amongst the least successful elements of campus commitments to diversity" (p.14). So, why, despite the best intentions, are most of these programs and policies failing to increase faculty/staff diversity? With the "window of opportunity" for diverse hiring limited to the next five years or so of faculty retirements, many higher education administrators and bureaucrats are scrambling desperately to find an answer, especially since the growing gap between a multicultural student body and a monocultural faculty/staff has become an educational and political problem.

Unfortunately what is often overlooked in the diverse hiring conundrum is the crucial role that both search committees and institutional culture play in the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and staff at predominantly White colleges and universities.

Myths and Assumptions

There are many myths and assumptions underlying the so-called "promising"

practices for diverse faculty/staff hiring that, for the most part, are ineffective in actually changing the overall composition of the faculty. One of the most common is that if the president, dean, provost, chancellor, department chair, human resources officer, and trustees all openly advocate for faculty and staff diversity then it will be actualized in the search and hiring process. This myth assumes that those who serve on search committees also prioritize diverse hiring when in reality many have never even discussed, let alone agreed upon, the institutional and departmental advantages of a diverse faculty and staff.

To be sure, administrative leadership is crucial to a college's success in attracting, hiring, and keeping faculty and staff of color, but if there is any resistance to diversity and multiculturalism in the institutional culture, such advocacy can spawn a backlash that plays out behind the closed doors of search committee deliberations.

Another more insidious myth is that diversity intern, exchange, mentor, and "grow your own" programs will expand the pool of diverse candidates for faculty positions, which will, in turn, automatically ensure diverse hires for those positions. This set of programs reinforces the notion that the only reason for the dearth of diverse hires is that there are no diverse candidates in the pool. Again, diverse candidate pools do not necessarily result in diverse hires because institutional, departmental, and search committee cultures can overtly and covertly undermine the goal of faculty/staff diversity.

Finally, *recruitment* of diverse faculty and staff is not *retention*, so any initiatives to diversify faculty and staff that do not address hostile institutional and faculty/staff cultures will end up fueling the "revolving door" so common for faculty and staff of color. As a result, the first step in

successfully diversifying faculty and staff is naming and understanding the nature of institutional and individual resistance to diverse hiring in predominantly White colleges and universities.

Naming and Understanding Resistance

Admittedly, addressing resistance to diversity by institutions and individuals is more complex and difficult than inventing short-term fixes, projects, and strategies, but failing to do so will result in only temporary and cosmetic changes in diverse hiring statistics and not in real, long-term diversification of the faculty. Since colleges and universities are composed of people who all carry the baggage of stereotypes and biases, such institutions cannot become progressive, multicultural educational environments without the consent and cooperation of these individuals.

In other words, an institutional culture cannot evolve from a bare-minimum affirmative action approach to diversity to one that values diversity as a competitive advantage for institutions and individuals without comprehensive diversity education for all the people who make up that culture. Although search committees are a microcosm of this dynamic, most search committees are not given any professional development on diverse hiring except for the most general guidance on personnel issues. This lack of expanded professional development on diverse hiring for search committees prevents them from examining how their cultural biases can determine the search and hiring process.

Dovidio (1997) characterizes how this lapse in analysis, what he terms "aversive racism," can impact search committee deliberations:

For instance, an employer influenced by

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feelings of aversive racism might subtly re-evaluate the most important qualifications for a job, depending on the race of different applicants. If, say, a White applicant had broader experience and a Black applicant had more up-to-date training, the employer would decide that experience was more important; if the White applicant had more recent training and the Black more experience, the employer would decide that experience was less important. Thus, the aversive racist would find a way to hire the White applicant without admitting to himself or herself that racial bias played a role in the choice. (p.A60)

The mistaken belief that members of search committees, by virtue of their academic degrees, achievements, and reputations, do not taint the search and hiring process with this kind of bias is a major reason why there has not been much progress on diverse faculty/staff hiring in predominantly White institutions.

The Role of Intercultural Sensitivity

In considering what kind of professional development program will build the intercultural awareness, knowledge, and competence of predominantly White search committees, it is imperative to determine the levels of intercultural sensitivity of faculty and staff serving on search committees. In applying Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1993) to White educators, one can better understand the nature of resistance to diverse hiring. In Bennett's schema, there are three levels of intercultural sensitivity—defense, minimization, and acceptance—that are particularly instructive for identifying which programs are more likely to advance the goal of faculty/staff diversity and which approaches are more likely to exacerbate resistance.

Since people who are "in defense" construe cultural differences as a threat or an attack, "defensive" educators would equate incompetence, affirmative action, and special privileges with diverse candidates and openly deny them equal opportunity. Since "minimizers" prefer to emphasize ethnocentric similarities instead of differences, educators "in minimization" would only consider diverse candidates who are like themselves and who "fit" in the dominant culture of their department or college.

Turner (2002) quotes an academic administrator describing a search committee "in minimization":

An example of dysconscious racism includes the predisposition of search com-

mittees to look for and favor candidates who are like themselves, not necessarily racially or ethnically, but in terms of educational background, social skills, values, and behaviors, and to reject candidates whose education, experiences, or research interests deviate from the traditional academic mold. One might say that search committees, without intending to, look for Afro-Saxons or Hispanic-Saxons. (p.20)

Because a majority of White educators are "minimizers," the "fit" requirement has become a major, covert barrier to diverse hiring. Since people "in acceptance" recognize, appreciate, and value cultural differences, "accepting" educators would be strong advocates of the importance of diverse hiring but generally feel ill-equipped (even paralyzed) from advocating necessary changes in hiring practices, systems, policies, and procedures.

Consider, then, the dynamics of an eight-person search committee at a predominantly White college or university, two of whom are in defense, four of whom are minimizers, and two of whom are in acceptance. How likely will an African-American or Latino candidate be considered, interviewed, and recommended by this kind of search committee, even with an affirmative action officer involved?

The Role of Cultural and Racial Identity

Another essential strand in the functioning, deliberations, and decision-making of a predominantly White search committee is ethnic, racial, cultural identity. Two models of racial/cultural identity are particularly relevant to understanding the friction that can occur between, say, an African-American candidate for a faculty position and a predominantly White search committee, department, and college or university. According to Cross' "Stages of Nigrescence" (1991), there are four stages of Black-identification for African Americans: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, and internalization.

In pre-encounter, the African American is an assimilated individual for whom race is a fairly unimportant aspect of his/her identity; in encounter, the African American, because of an experience of discrimination or hostility, makes race more salient to his/her identity; in immersion/emersion, the African American becomes totally immersed in his/her racial group in order to prove how central Black identity is to self-definition; in internalization, the African American not only internalizes a Black identity but also affirms other

aspects of his/her identity (i.e., gender, nationality, etc.).

Compare Cross' model with Helm's "Stages of Racial Consciousness Among Whites" (1985): in the contact stage, Whites may be aware of other cultures but see themselves as individuals, not cultural beings; in the disintegration stage, Whites experience dissonance at realizing that they are members of a racist, dominant culture and may avoid other cultural groups because they feel guilty and personally responsible; in the reintegration stage, Whites feel "under siege," become defensive about their own culture, and refuse to empathize with other cultural groups; in the pseudo-independence stage, Whites begin to accept differences on a cognitive level and seek greater knowledge of other cultural groups; in autonomy, Whites actively seek out cross-cultural interactions and begin to re-evaluate their own culture.

Consider, then, what kind of conflict can occur when an African-American candidate who is very Black-identified (in immersion) interviews with a search committee of White educators who are either in the disintegration or reintegration stages of racial consciousness. If this candidate ends up being hired, which is highly unlikely, he or she will eventually leave because of the constant, subtle tensions between cultural identities.

If a diverse candidate is selected by this kind of search committee, it will be more likely that he/she will be an assimilated minority, which again reinforces the requirement for minorities to fit into the dominant White culture and consequently eliminates many other diverse candidates from consideration.

Goals of Professional Development

Given the contexts of intercultural sensitivity and cultural identity, then, there should be several key goals of professional development on diverse hiring for predominantly White faculty and staff:

- (1) to assist them in moving out of the defense and minimization stages of intercultural sensitivity and into acceptance and adaptation;
- (2) to support them in developing into pseudo-independent and autonomous stages of racial consciousness;
- (3) to increase their intercultural awareness and understanding;

(4) to build their knowledge and skills in intercultural competence; and

(5) to enable them to identify and address their cultural biases in the search and hiring process.

To be sure, professional development that is effective in achieving these goals will result in an increase in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of diverse faculty and staff. The challenge, however, is to employ strategies and approaches that nurture and support an overall transformation in attitudes and behaviors and do not provoke widespread defensiveness, backlash, and regression.

For example, orders, mandates, and special programs alone generally will not work to motivate White faculty and staff to change attitudes and behaviors on diverse hiring; in fact, these strategies often increase resistance, particularly the underground variety. Prejudice reduction and other kinds of consciousness-raising workshops that stimulate White guilt are also more likely to send minimizing educators back into defense and reinforce the notion that the "White" academy is "under siege" by diverse faculty and staff who are lowering standards and dismantling traditions.

Although it may be tempting and satisfying to use more direct and confrontational methods in order to accelerate change on diverse hiring, the results may be counterproductive, even affecting institutional culture for years afterwards. Consequently, the key to effective professional development for predominantly White search committees is a non-threatening, cognitive-affective approach that combines support, challenge, collaboration, theory, empathy, and practical application.

The DiversityWorks, Inc. Model

DiversityWorks, Inc. is a Champaign, Illinois-based coalition of educators providing comprehensive diversity education for educators in K-12 schools, community colleges, and universities. Our main mission is to assist faculty, administrators, and staff in expanding their knowledge of multicultural education and intercultural competence in order to create inclusive educational communities for both students and employees. (See our web-site at www.diversityworksinc.net for further details.)

In the past ten years, as we worked with thousands of faculty, administrators, staff, and students from institutions around the country, we were asked repeatedly for a workshop on diverse hiring by

educators bewildered by the overwhelming lack of progress in diversifying faculty and staff at their colleges and universities. As we watched the video, *Shattering the Silences: The Case for Minority Faculty* (1997), we realized that most predominantly White institutions had rarely seen themselves through the eyes and perspectives of faculty and staff of color.

As a result, we created a new one-day workshop, *New Paradigms for Diversifying Faculty and Staff in Higher Education: Uncovering Cultural Biases in the Search and Hiring Process*, in order to increase understanding among White faculty, administrators, and staff of the common challenges, struggles, and experiences of faculty and staff of color in predominantly White colleges and universities.

Here are the primary objectives of the workshop:

- (1) To describe the rationale for and the benefits of a diverse faculty and staff for students, the institution, and the community.
- (2) To analyze how the culture of an institution and/or department could be creating an unwelcoming and exclusionary climate for culturally diverse and minority faculty and staff.
- (3) To identify cultural biases in a college's search and hiring process that might be discouraging and/or excluding culturally diverse and minority candidates.
- (4) To examine institutional, departmental, and individual obstacles to hiring and keeping a diverse faculty and staff.
- (5) To create new paradigms, strategies, resources, and practices for recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse faculty and staff.

Through a series of directed and facilitated activities and small-group discussions over the course of a day, we address each objective so that by the end of the workshop faculty and staff participants are making their own suggestions for identifying bias throughout the search and hiring process, for inventing new ways for their institutions to recruit, hire, and keep diverse faculty and staff, and for making their cultures more inclusive and accepting of diverse employees.

The starting point for any discussion of diverse hiring is a simple one that is often assumed or overlooked: why is a diverse faculty or staff relevant to your college,

your students, your mission, your strategic plan, your community? Most faculty and staff at predominantly White colleges and universities have never grappled with this question so there is no consensus on why diverse hiring should be a departmental or institutional goal. A related question is, which groups are included in the description "culturally diverse and minority" faculty and staff?

The overall goal of these two questions is to encourage White faculty and staff to discover how and why diverse hiring is not only in the best interests of their college or university but also in their self-interest as educators, teachers, researchers, and professionals. As participants in the workshop begin to articulate reasons for diverse hiring, the collaborative, problem-solving tone of the discussion begins to disarm the kind of defensiveness often triggered in Whites who feel they are being coerced to hire minorities.

In addition, by showing excerpts of video interviews we have conducted with faculty of color from both universities and community colleges, we not only model *really listening* to the voices of diverse faculty but also encourage empathy for their particular concerns, anxieties, frustrations, and hopes. Because this cognitive-affective approach, woven throughout the workshop, is instrumental in moving minimizers into acceptance and adaptation, there is a greater willingness for a majority of the workshop participants (and not just the "choir") to recommend specific changes that can be implemented immediately to increase diverse hiring at their college or university.

Four Paradigms

To provide search committees with a holistic and comprehensive understanding of what is involved in recruiting, hiring, and retaining diverse faculty and staff, we offer four paradigms for "re-conceptualizing and actualizing" diverse hiring. The first paradigm is the "Five Dimensions of Faculty/Staff Diversity," which includes education/scholarship, community connections, climate/culture, and representation/voice.

In considering these dimensions, a predominantly White college or university can determine which factors are crucial in the decision-making process of a diverse candidate to apply, to accept, and to stay. For example, in the area of education and scholarship, these questions are pertinent:

- ◆ Are the research, scholarship, and teaching interests of the minority faculty member considered important, relevant, and valuable by his/her colleagues?
- ◆ Is expertise in African American studies, Latino studies, etc. seen as the “main stuff” or as marginal to the discipline?

In the area of community connections, diverse faculty and staff might ask:

- ◆ Is this a community where I would feel included and connected?
- ◆ Are there others living here from my cultural group; do identity networks exist to support my life outside the college or university?
- ◆ Does the institution address concerns and issues relevant to my cultural community?

And, in the area of institutional transformation, these issues would be central:

- ◆ What role do minority faculty and staff play in governance, strategic planning, faculty/staff organizations, etc.? Are they treated as central or token?
- ◆ Is the institution’s rhetoric on diversity actualized in systems, structures, and policies?
- ◆ Is the institution open to the kind of vision and change that diverse faculty and staff offer?

The “Five Dimensions” make it possible for White faculty and staff to increase their sensitivity to the issues and concerns of a minority in a predominantly White educational culture.

The second paradigm comes from Harvey’s theory on the stages of impact for African-American faculty (1994) in which an institution’s success in attracting, hiring, and keeping diverse faculty and staff is directly related to how the institution has already been “impacted” by diverse faculty and staff. According to Harvey, the more power diverse faculty and staff have in a college or university, the greater likelihood that others will apply, accept, and stay.

We emphasize the “flip side” or “double-edge” that each stage of impact can have on an institutional culture in order to show how subtle, varied, and pervasive resistance can be. Patai (1991) illustrates one, the “stigma of surplus visibility,” that prevents predominantly White institutions from increasing diverse faculty and staff

from 10% to 40%: “Surplus visibility assures that, in the treatment of minorities and minority views, when *one* ‘of them’ is visible at all *all* ‘of them’ are seen to be taking over” (p.A52).

In order for participants to assess their institutional culture, we combine this second paradigm with the third, “Four Frameworks on Diversity in Educational Organizations,” derived from Hill’s analysis of “Multi-Culturalism: The Crucial Philosophical and Organizational Issues” (1991). By examining how educational cultures regard and arrange differences of any sort (employee categories, disciplines, pedagogy, world views, etc.), workshop participants can describe the difficulties and complications when someone with a pluralistic point of view becomes a part of an organization that either emphasizes similarities (universalism) or categorizes differences (hierarchism).

As Hill sees it, “Higher education, judged by the standards of democratic pluralism, does not take seriously even the diversity within its wall, much less the diversity outside its walls” (p.43). Because both of these paradigms cause participants to reflect on their own experiences and treatment in colleges and universities, they become more open to connecting intolerance for racial and cultural diversity to intolerance to other differences.

Once again, professional development on diverse hiring that demonstrates cultural diversity is “about us too” and not just “about them” is more likely to move minimizers into acceptance and adaptation, which will, in turn, make educational culture more inclusive.

The final paradigm is “Individualism/Collectivism-Relational Dynamics,” which explores how both verbal and non-verbal communication style differences can result in miscommunication, misunderstanding, and intercultural conflict. For example, in determining which candidate for a position might be the “best fit,” search committees will often make judgments based on their own communication style preferences.

Consider this real instance of communication style discrimination: a White male and an African-American male were both equally qualified for a position, but in the interview, the White male answered in a very linear style while the African-American male answered in a more circular fashion; the predominantly White and (linear-style) search committee insisted that the White male should be offered the position without really even understand-

ing how their own communication style biases influenced their decision.

In addition, because communication conflicts across cultural differences can regularly impact the daily institutional lives of diverse faculty and staff, they often precipitate the kind of intercultural conflict that drives diverse faculty and staff out of predominantly White institutions.

This section of the workshop immediately inspires participants to list all the intercultural communication conflicts they have witnessed in their own departments and areas. And, through using the metaphor of an intimate relationship or marriage, we address the power differences that arise when one group insists that the other group’s style is problematic and should change.

Intercultural communication competence, then, becomes just as much of a necessity in a workplace inclusive of differences as effective communication skills are in a harmonious personal relationship. Finally, we demonstrate how intercultural competence for search committee members is a major resource for identifying how cultural biases may be shaping the search and hiring process.

New Strategies, Resources, and Practices

In the final part of the workshop, participants break into small groups to generate recommendations for change on diverse hiring in their colleges or universities. One group uses the handout, “Eight Ways That The Search and Hiring Process Can Inhibit Diversity,” to analyze how to improve the process in order to increase diverse hiring. Another group confers over the handout, “Common Complaints of Culturally Diverse and Minority Faculty/Staff,” to determine which areas of institutional culture, systems, and policies might be causing difficulty for diverse faculty and staff. The final group huddles over the handout, “Creating New Paradigms, Resources, and Strategies,” to envision innovative methods for recruiting, hiring, and keeping minority faculty and staff.

What is always striking about this final section of the workshop is the enthusiasm in the participants’ discussions and recommendations, especially considering that many began the workshop thinking there was no problem with diverse hiring. In order for these recommendations to be converted into action, however, follow-up work must be done with human resources officers, department chairs, faculty/admin-

istrative councils, etc., or else the workshop will be regarded cynically as one more diversity program that changes nothing.

Obviously, this one workshop alone is not going to magically diversify faculty and staff, and not everyone who is involved, particularly those in defense, will shift into acceptance and adaptation. But, for the majority of White faculty and staff who are in minimization, this workshop will provide a non-threatening model of inquiry for analyzing the conflicts and frustrations of minority faculty and staff in predominantly White institutions, for recognizing cultural bias that may be screening out diverse candidates, and for provoking new ways of seeing and understanding diverse faculty/staff hiring.

Conclusion

If predominantly White colleges and universities are serious about their commitment to faculty/staff diversity, if they want to move from empty rhetoric to real action and progress that changes statistics and transforms institutional culture, they must make a concerted effort to educate everyone who serves on their search committees. Although search committees are one part of the diverse hiring picture, diversification of faculty and staff at U.S. colleges and universities can not occur without their eyes being opened to the various biases, assumptions, and stereotypes that influence their perceptions, judgments, and decisions.

As Turner contends, "a solid foundation for campus faculty diversity can be laid by search committee processes—processes which not only reflect the larger institutional commitment to diversity but which also serve as occasions for serious campus reflection on the barriers to recruitment and retention of faculty of color" (p.28).

More importantly, inclusive educational cultures that retain diverse students and employees can not be created without knowledge and skills in intercultural competence. Given the rapidly changing demographics affecting colleges and universities, it is imperative that predominantly White institutions recognize now the serious repercussions of a monocultural faculty/staff serving a multicultural student body and support their employees in moving from minimization of cultural differences to acceptance and adaptation so that predominantly White search committees selecting diverse candidates will no longer be an oxymoron.

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