

# Challenges to Inclusion and Diversity in Faculty Hiring: Research and Best Practices

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# CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN FACULTY HIRING: RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

## *Colleges and Universities Continue to Find Difficulty Diversifying Faculty*

From the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which focused attention on equity in higher education, to the trend toward affirmative action of the 1980s and 1990s, to recent student protestors' demands for more racially diverse faculty,<sup>i</sup> the matter of college and university faculty diversity has seen frequent discussion over the last half century. No matter the level of debate regarding the prospect of mandating diversity in higher education, today's academic institutions generally accept the importance of faculty diversity—often citing research on the benefits of organizational diversity at all levels in their plans to make their faculty more representative of the surrounding world.

A substantial body of research has shown that exposure to diverse perspectives better equips students for success in a multicultural and global society, meaning that it helps create productive citizens, professionals, and future leaders and innovators. Faculty diversity has been shown to result in better scholarship, boosting institutions' academic impact and prominence. And yet despite these benefits, and in many cases public proclamations of new priority placed on increasing faculty diversity, colleges and universities are still earning failing grades for their efforts.

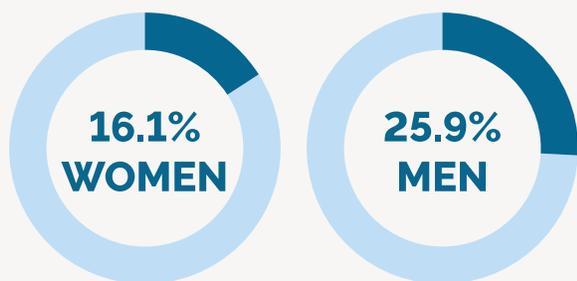
# CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN FACULTY HIRING: RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

## By the Numbers

As of recent census data and projections, ethnic and racial minority groups compose roughly one-third of the population, and, as projected, within three decades, non-white minorities will constitute a majority of all Americans.<sup>ii</sup>

Women comprise 50.4% of the United States.<sup>iii</sup> Yet minorities and women are underrepresented in the faculty and professoriate, as compared to the national population. In 20 years, though there was an increase in faculty diversity, the gains have been slow. The numbers tell the story. Underrepresented minority groups held approximately 13% of faculty jobs in 2013, as opposed to 9% in 1993. They still hold just 10% of tenured jobs.<sup>iv</sup>

- » Full-time professor makeup by group shows large disparities: White males: 58%; White females: 26%; African American males: 2%; African American females: 1%; Hispanic males: 2%; Hispanic females:



*Gender Composition of Tenured Faculty<sup>viii</sup>*

**“ Minority groups compose roughly one-third of the population, yet minorities and women are underrepresented in the faculty and the professoriate, as compared to the national population. ”**

1%; Asian/Pacific Islander males: 7%; Asian/Pacific Islander females: 2%.<sup>v</sup>

- » In some fields, such as mathematics, computer science, astronomy, and physics, underrepresented minorities constitute just 2% of the professoriate.<sup>vi</sup>
- » The numbers of women faculty members lag behind men generally, and the gap is even greater in certain disciplines (e.g., electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, and physics), where they make up fewer than 10%. Broken further down, women of color make up a small fraction of this number.<sup>vii</sup>
- » There is a 6:1 ratio of white-to-underrepresented minority faculty member in tenure track appointments.
- » There are 1.7 male for every 1 female faculty member and 16.1% female tenured faculty compared to 25.9% male tenured faculty.<sup>viii</sup>

# CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN FACULTY HIRING: RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

## AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE FULL-TIME FACULTY



*African-American women's proportionate presence among all women full-time faculty has remained virtually unchanged in two decades.<sup>viii</sup>*

As the data shows, faculty diversity out of sync with national population. Significantly, it is also out of sync with the student body, which today includes high percentages of racial and ethnic minorities (40%)<sup>ix</sup> and women (56%).<sup>x</sup> For many higher learning institutions, faculty diversity has become a critical objective for the very pragmatic reason that the ever-increasing diversity of the student body demands it.

## A Diverse Faculty is Good for Students and Scholarship

The fact that faculty-to-student diversity levels are out of harmony is problematic because it conflicts with the accepted rationale that diverse faculties provide role models, perspectives, and experiences reflective

of a pluralistic society for minority and non-minority students alike. Further, faculty diversity is said to foster academic settings that make underrepresented groups feel comfortable enough to engage productively, which in turn improves retention of minority students.<sup>xi</sup>

Research shows that diversity leads to smarter organizations. Diversity has been found to lead to higher-quality research and has been positively associated with departmental rankings when considering research, publications, grants, and scholarly awards.<sup>xii</sup> That is because students with varying backgrounds and experiences bring differing perspectives and help create an environment that contributes to advanced scholarship and critical learning. In general terms, diversity is good for problem solving, new perspectives and information, enhanced creativity, and has even led to “unfettered discoveries and breakthrough innovations.”<sup>xiii</sup>

## OFCCP compliance

If research about why it makes sense to care about faculty diversity is not enough to compel academic institutions to take more action on the issue, regulatory obligations may demand it. Beyond its benefits for students and scholarship, proof of attempting to diversify faculty is also a matter of government compliance. Under the Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), academic institutions that receive government funding (e.g., as part of research grants) must comply with affirmative action and nondiscrimination regulations.<sup>xiv</sup>

# CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN FACULTY HIRING: RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

To prove compliance, just like any supplier that receives federal contracts, academic institutions must furnish affirmative action plans that focus on employment (not admissions) practices. This means colleges and universities obtaining funding from the government must prove they cast a wide net for a diverse applicant pool, set goals for diversity, engaged in outreach and recruitment, and removed barriers to equal opportunity. Basically, especially as academic institutions have reported increased audits, non-compliance exposes them to potentially serious and damaging impact on current or future scholarship, since non-compliance risks contract termination, loss of research grant funding, fines, and exclusion from future federal contracts.

## Why Faculty Diversity Goals are Falling Short

Many schools have initiated large diversity initiatives in their promises to students and the public to prioritize the hiring of underrepresented minority faculty. Yet, public rhetoric and initiatives—or even sincerely caring about the issue—are clearly not enough to ensure increased faculty diversity. By and large, educational institutions do not follow up on earlier proclamations of faculty diversity initiatives with pronouncements of success, and that is because their methods have not worked.

Colleges and universities have stories of failure of executing faculty diversity plans despite the best intentions and investment. For example, when Yale

University administration revealed a \$50-million faculty diversity initiative in 2015, an ad hoc committee endeavored to understand why formal efforts to recruit faculty members from diverse backgrounds since 1972 had not made significant impact. The committee delivered a report that analyzed dozens of plans for increasing faculty diversity, finding that the action and resources needed to make progress were deficient.<sup>xv</sup>

Solving the faculty diversity problem has been difficult to achieve because it is not attributable to a single, simple challenge. There is not “a simple, foolproof method for ensuring that a group is well represented across racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, or gender lines.”<sup>xvi</sup> Accordingly, the methods academic institutions have used have not been comprehensive or consistent enough. They have suffered from deficiencies in accountability, monitoring, leadership, financial resources, and training for chairs and search committees.

At the very base of what makes diversity recruitment and hiring difficult is that historically it has been

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# CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN FACULTY HIRING: RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

difficult to track the makeup of the applicant pool. Only by understanding that makeup can a key goal of building diversity into an applicant pool have a chance of success.

As outlined below, there needs to be a consistent, full throttle, objective approach to fostering faculty diversity, and simple changes in how academic institutions track applicants can lead to meaningful improvements in the results of faculty diversity efforts.

## Tying Faculty Diversity Initiatives to Outcomes

To ensure diversity initiatives do not fall by the wayside into the land of empty rhetoric, goals must be tied to outcomes. Though there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to faculty diversity initiatives, recommended practices to improve success in faculty diversity efforts are described below.

### COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF FACULTY RECRUITMENT

To retain faculty and foster growth in diversity, institutions should comprehensively review and even revamp their recruitment plans to incorporate diversity. Diversity initiatives have proven successful when there is a full-time staff member dedicated to diversity, such as a diversity officer; a diversity task force made up of employees who are held accountable; active and targeted recruitment programs focused on furthering diversity; and specific training to committee members in subjects such as implicit bias.

“ To build a diverse candidate pool, faculty recruitment plans should include instructions on building diverse search committees and executing persistent, out-of-the-box recruitment and hiring practices. ”

To build a diverse candidate pool, faculty recruitment plans should include instructions on building diverse search committees and executing persistent, out-of-the-box recruitment and hiring practices. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) recommends that academic searches go beyond passive searches with highly specialized job descriptions and instead leverage the personal and professional networks of diverse search committees to access and evaluate candidates of different backgrounds. The narrower the search, the more likely a committee will overlook diverse talent; the more flexible the search process, and the earlier it can be instantiated, the better changes for finding ideal diverse candidates who can make positive impacts on the institution.<sup>xvii</sup>

# CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN FACULTY HIRING: RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

## CLEARLY DEFINED, OBJECTIVE CRITERIA

Implicit bias marks human interactions and decision-making. As part of making sense of a complex world, unconsciously and involuntarily stereotyping members of groups is somewhat inevitable.<sup>xviii</sup> “These types of cultural biases are like smog in the air,” said psychologist Jennifer Richeson,<sup>xix</sup> and often such biases are in direct conflict with people’s core values. This is why clearly defining criteria of faculty searches is important, because it helps combat implicit bias that may inadvertently result in rejection of qualified candidates and a less diverse applicant pool during different hiring stages.

While implicit bias can lead to both favorable and unfavorable assessments of people based on such characteristics as ethnicity, gender, appearance, and age, research demonstrates the negative ways it affects minorities and women.<sup>xx</sup> Myriad studies have shown the impact of such bias on hiring and in the workplace, as well as in law enforcement, healthcare, and educational settings. For example, in one study, researchers gave hiring managers the same resume with stereotypical African American names (such as “Jamal”) or with stereotypical white names (such as “Greg”). The candidate with the “white name” was 50% more likely to get a call back.<sup>xxi</sup> Other studies have revealed that different standards are used to evaluate male and female applicants when committee evaluation criteria is not clearly or adequately defined.<sup>xxii</sup>

Many subjects in studies on implicit bias do not believe themselves to be prejudiced despite how they may have acted in a given scenario. Thus, institutions

## Case Study

Institutions that have used Interfolio to gather EEO data have seen exponential increases in collection that have helped them hone their faculty diversity initiatives and achieve 100% compliance on diversity mandates (such as those required by OFCCP). The product facilitates EEO tracking in each applicant file and at each stage as well as related reporting and data analysis. For example, UMBC has used Interfolio’s diversity tracking tools to analyze diversity patterns in the applicant pool and decision-making process, which in turn spurred updates to job posting language and recruitment policy, ultimately resulting in more diverse candidate pools. Many campuses currently use Interfolio to collect demographic data to comply with fair hiring requirements in order to maintain and retain federal grants.

that use clearly defined, objective criteria can avoid this phenomenon of “criteria creep,” where irrelevant details that may play into (involuntary) biases—such as information on race or gender or names—are included in applicant dossiers. Making bias more visible can go a long way in increasing representation of women and minorities among U.S. faculty.

## TRACKING EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY (EEO) INFORMATION

Collecting EEO information is a critical step in ensuring diversity in the hiring process, which

# CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN FACULTY HIRING: RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

of course forms the basis for all faculty diversity initiatives. Most institutions still struggle to collect accurate data because they rely on paper or postcard-based collection methods that typically garner a measly 5 to 15% return rate. Today's searches, often marked by cumbersome and lengthy processes and intense competition (i.e., candidate pools of several hundred), do not inspire applicants to take the time to mail back such data.

Experts advise that institutions should establish practices to examine data on appointments and promotions by gender, race, and ethnicity to promote and retain a diverse faculty.<sup>xxiii</sup> Successfully tracking the applicant pool for open positions and promotion opportunities allows institutions to collect baseline data that can inform their diversity initiatives in tangible and actionable ways. The simple improvement in EEO data collection has helped institutions tangibly improve and execute their diversity initiatives.

## **BUILDING A DIVERSE APPLICANT POOL THROUGH EACH STAGE**

Along with actually tracking an applicant pool, it is also important for search committees to track diversity at each stage of the recruitment processes. If diversity drops off in the early stages, faculty diversity plans will fail. Monitoring the applicant pool at each stage provides accountability and fidelity to the overall faculty diversity plan, and data analysis can point to failures or successes in the plan if there are significant differences in the applicant pool from stage to stage.

Applicant tracking at each stage of the hiring process also provides the foundation for an objective system

of checks and balances against implicit bias, since it literally demonstrates the number and makeup of candidates and can pinpoint where and how implicit bias may have stymied diversity efforts.

By focusing on executing objective and tangible actions associated with faculty diversity initiatives, colleges and universities will achieve the outcomes they desire to support the needs of their students and their scholars, as well as the outside world that depends on them to produce productive graduates and groundbreaking research.

# CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN FACULTY HIRING: RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICES

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- iii <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS>.
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