

**AC 2010-1328: FFCEP: AN INNOVATIVE RECRUITMENT STRATEGY TO FUEL THE PIPELINE AND DIVERSIFY THE PROFESSORiate**

**Renee Baker, Rochester Institute of Technology**

# **RIT's FFCEP: An Innovative Recruitment Strategy to Fuel the Pipeline and Diversify the Professoriate**

## **Abstract**

Despite recruitment strategies and efforts to attract and retain ethnic minorities and women in private and public universities across this nation the challenge for parity still exists. Though presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, and faculty search committees have come to realize and align with the educational benefits of having such diverse populations, continued lack of representation persists. Moreover we still hear the mantra of, "it's not that we don't believe in or support diversity, we don't know where to find them". In addition, deans and department heads quote the statistics reminding us of the small numbers while majority faculty lament about the impossibility of inducing them to come to our campus even when they are sought after. Numerous studies disclose reasons for underrepresentation of these faculty members in the pipeline and throughout all phases of the recruitment and selection process. In an effort to counteract such studies and to diversify its faculty workforce, aggressive moves at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) are raising the bar for universities nationwide. One move, which is the focus of this article, is RIT's Annual "Future Faculty Career Exploration Program." This unique program furthers RIT's diversity efforts by bringing students nearing the end of their doctoral studies and postdoctoral assignments to Rochester to receive the "RIT treatment." Since the program's inception in October of 2003, more than 150 scholars have been invited to attend the annual program. The program has become so widely acclaimed that 185 and 235 applications were received in the past two years, respectively, to fill 27-30 allocated slots. This level of response clearly demonstrates the interest of young scholars and their desire to visit the academy for the value add this program brings to their professional and career development. A review of this best practice and lessons learned will be shared.

## **Introduction**

The 2001 newly hired tenure track faculty class of 125 saw little gains in diversity representation, especially among African Americans. When former President Al Simone looked into the sea of faces at the New Faculty Orientation he stepped up the demands for diversity hiring. This was not only a concern of the President but it became a direct concern of the Board of Trustees; what naturally followed was an inquiry with the Provost and the Deans. When asked why the departments were unsuccessful in increasing the diversity in their applicant pools, they were quick to reply, "It's not that we don't believe in or support diversity, we don't know where to find them." They quoted the statistics on national availability of the number of PhDs conferred annually, reminding everyone of the small numbers. The majority faculty lamented the impossibility of inducing diverse faculty to come to campus even when they are sought after. "Help us," they responded. Certainly the issues and the sense of helplessness voiced were not unlike what many have heard or observed at other institutions.

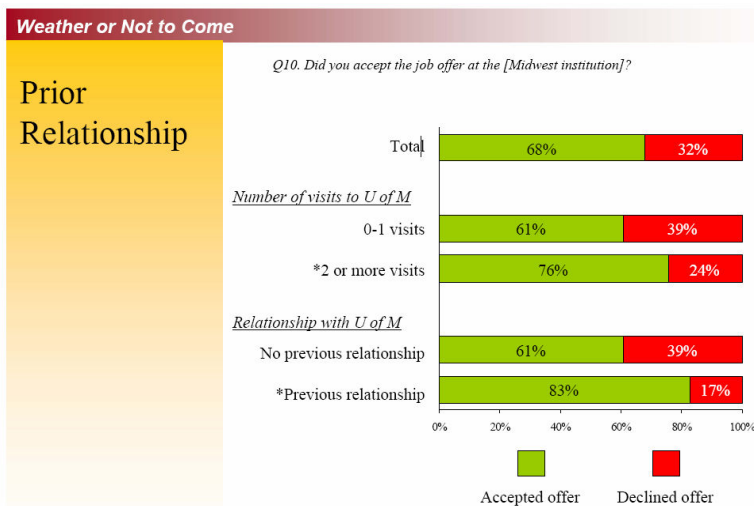
In response to this request and through committed and dedicated leadership from the Board of Trustees, Vice Presidents, deans, and department chairs, the full-time Office of Faculty Recruitment (OFR) was established in March 2002. The office provides support, direction, and

training to faculty search committees. It also serves as a resource in the form of a search and talent acquisition firm for minority and women doctoral students and potential seasoned faculty members interested in becoming an educator at RIT. Current efforts are focused on expanding the pool of applicants by attracting underserved populations, especially African Americans, Latin Americans, and Native Americans (AALANA) and women, to enrich the diverse educational community.

In order to expand the university departments' use of the familiar "good old boy" network, a plan to develop strategic relationships with universities and professional organizations was executed. Because the previous Electrical Engineering department head espoused the virtues of graduates from the Georgia Institute of Technology (GT), it became one of the first universities on the list to develop an authentic partnership; demonstrated upfront commitment began with all the major constituents including faculty, potential prospects, and minority contacts that could spread the word about opportunities. As a result of the partnership with GT and the other established networks, many GT students as well as other top university students began to apply and were invited to participate in the Future Faculty Career Exploration Program (FFCEP).

### Future Faculty Career Exploration Program Background

Why was FFCEP needed? Despite executive leadership, endorsement, financial backing, human resources support, and, equally important, a newly acquired pipeline, competitive advantage amongst pipeline prospects to continue to build upon relationships was lacking. Having attended the "Keeping Our Faculties" conference in April of 2004, the Manager for Faculty Recruitment (MFR) sat in on a breakout session that discussed a study that had been performed by a Midwestern university (see figure 1); this research investigated the candidates' perspective of the recruiting process. It is quite interesting to note that when asked the question, "Did you accept the job offer at the Midwestern university," 76% of the candidates who said "yes" had two or more visits and 83% of "yes" responses had a prior relationship with the university.



\* Indicates a significant difference (p < .05) across analysts groups

Figure 1. From Keeping Our Faculties 2007 Conference<sup>1</sup>

For the past seven hiring seasons, RIT reports that an average 30 percent of its new faculty hires have been from underrepresented minority groups, a testament to the idea that *“if you build the relationship, the candidates will come.”* Prospects are more inclined to accept an offer if an emotional connection is established.

On the recruitment visit to GT earlier in the spring of 2002, the MFR was introduced to the FOCUS Fellows’ program. This program resonated with the university’s MFR who became quite enamored with what was outlined by the representatives at GT. Although one of the FOCUS Fellows’ objectives was on academic careers, GT did not intend, at that time on hiring these PhD scholars. Instead their mission was on encouraging graduates to obtain their PhD. The MFR viewed this as a perfect strategy to bring excellent potential faculty candidates to search committees’ attention by inviting a group to visit RIT. Such an experience could build the talent pool of possible candidates to diversify its underrepresented faculty and infuse innovation on the campus and into the classroom. With this in mind and the new knowledge of the best practices provided by the representatives of the FOCUS program at GT, the concept for FFCEP began to unfold.

RIT’s FFCEP is a career development and talent acquisition program serving as a bridge into the professoriate. Its marketing strategy is designed to inform a vast number of minority PhD students about the program to enable discovery of the brightest talent. The program began as a way to help recruit prospects in the STEM fields, but gained such popularity that it was expanded to accept applicants from all disciplines across the eight colleges at RIT. The program’s aim is to increase minority scholars’ awareness of the benefits and increased opportunities of working at a strong teaching and growing research university. Deans of colleges within the university engage future faculty participants in discussions about their academic work and career interests. A platform for the faculty to share RIT’s teaching and research agenda and to dialogue on current open and anticipated faculty positions is provided. The program also allows RIT to evaluate participants’ fit and potential for a teaching career at the university and to introduce the Rochester community to them in hopes that a match is found and a hire is made. However, if the participants do not choose to accept RIT as their employer of choice or there is not a faculty opening that fits, the hope is that they will share with other colleagues the opportunities available at the university.

### **Future Faculty Career Exploration Program Objectives**

The focus of the program is to provide a unique opportunity for future faculty prospects to explore potential career choices through exploratory interviews; presentations and meetings with the deans, department heads, students, administration and RIT’s President. They also participate in campus and community tours. Participants are able to form valuable social networks and stay in touch with each other along with the faculty members that they meet during the program.

Program objectives:

- *Establish significant, meaningful relationships with the future faculty prospects*
- *Lay a foundation for open communication with other universities*
- *Strategically prepare for pending needs in future curriculum development and course*

*offerings*

- *Proactively seize employment opportunities when qualified candidates are found*
- *Serve as a bridge in the transition from graduate student to faculty member*
- *Assist in preparing future faculty for a career at the university.*

### **Future Faculty Career Exploration Program Structure**

Since the program’s conception in 2003, a certain procedure has taken place to execute the necessary planning and preparation of each year’s program. These procedures are set in stages that stretch throughout the entire year, beginning at the end of the current year’s program. Table 1 provides a breakdown of these stages.

<b>FFCEP Highlights (Table 1)</b>		
<b>PHASE</b>	<b>STEP</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
<b>Phase I. Recruitment &amp; Selection</b>	<b>A.</b>	Recruitment of applicants: Advertising, Outreach, Spreading the Word; Invite to apply
	<b>B.</b>	Receipt of applications: Applicant Tracking
	<b>C.</b>	Review and selection of candidates
	<b>D.</b>	Invitations and rejections
<b>Phase II. Program (Highlights)</b>	<b>A.</b>	Welcome Reception
	<b>B.</b>	College presentations and tours
	<b>C.</b>	Faculty panel, group photo
	<b>D.</b>	Dinner with university President
	<b>E.</b>	Community Interaction (guest panel)
	<b>F.</b>	Night on the Town
	<b>G.</b>	Closing Breakfast
<b>Phase III. Post-Program Wrap-Up</b>	<b>A.</b>	Evaluate the program and send thank you notes
	<b>B.</b>	Debriefing and Data Analysis

#### Phase I: Recruitment and Selection

Phase I involves advertising, spreading the word and the direct outreach and recruitment of applicants. This typically begins during the winter and spring. Advertisements are posted in various paid and free publications and other resources. Invitations to apply are extended to a list of prospects from various universities whom the MFR and her staff have met on recruitment trips, through associations, as well as various internet sources. A great deal of time is spent on “spreading the word” through all of the office’s sources to cast the widest net. It takes relationship building with minority associations and partnering with university faculty, student groups, and advisors to spread the word about the program.

Candidates are encouraged to apply based on the program’s selection criteria:

- *Ability to contribute in meaningful ways to the university’s continuing commitment to cultural diversity, pluralism, and individual differences. We are especially interested in applications from people of color who are underrepresented and underserved in teaching*

*professions at RIT; i.e., African American, Latin American, American Indian, or Alaskan Native.*

- *Within one to two years of receiving PhD -or-*
- *Within one year of receiving or already received MFA -or-*
- *Engaged in a Post Doctoral assignment*
- *Desire academic teaching career at an exceptional institution*
- *Receiving degrees in Business, Liberal Arts, Science, Engineering, Applied Science & Technology, Computing & Information Sciences, Imaging Arts & Sciences, Sustainability*
- *Demonstrate potential to fill open and/or anticipated vacancies at RIT*
- *Be able to travel to Rochester in September*

Incoming applications are tracked and processed. After the application period is closed all completed applications are sent to the applicable colleges for review and selection. College representatives review and rate the applicants using a specified criteria rating form. All final invitation decisions are made by the OFR in consultation with the host college's department. Depending upon the reasons for rejection, some candidates are encouraged to reapply the next year if their anticipated graduation dates allow a time horizon and they are seen as an appropriate fit for an academic program offered at RIT. Since RIT is only able to invite a set number of applicants to participate this can be a very difficult selection process because of all the very promising scholars that apply.

## Phase II: Program

The program takes place in September since the main focus is on hiring for academic careers and the visits need to align with the academic hiring season. Qualified individuals need to have enough time to make a formal application for faculty openings if deemed appropriate. If considerations were to be made, faculty offers generally happen between February and April.

Opening day is Thursday which is scheduled with campus and college tours and the program is officially kicked off on Thursday evening at the Welcome Reception hosted by the Provost. The core activity with the host colleges and departments occurs on Friday which includes presentations of participants' research topic, mutual exchanges with faculty and students, some panel discussions and a participant group photo. One evening of the weekend is spent out in the community enjoying socio-cultural entertainment and dining that gives the participants a taste of the Rochester culture and cuisine. Another evening is spent dining at the RIT President's home with college deans. Tours of the city, visiting historical landmarks and checking out recreational hotspots and potential housing options takes place on Saturday. RIT is pleased to be able to boast of Rochester's rich culture including the fact that it is the home of Frederick Douglas and Susan B. Anthony, two great leaders and trailblazers in social justice and equity. The program closes out at the Sunday breakfast.

Promising participants are then strongly encouraged to make official application to an open faculty vacancy. In special circumstances "hot prospects" may be offered a "target of opportunity" hire. Needless to say, time commitments from the deans, college hosts, faculty, university executive administration, and many other support staff are required in order to effectively host the FFCEP participants.

### Phase III: Post-Program Wrap-Up

At the conclusion of each program, participants and internal stakeholders are asked to fill out a program evaluation. All data is compiled and a debriefing meeting is scheduled within the month following the program. Suggestions and improvements are discussed and applied to the following year's program. An annual data analysis report of the program's applicant and participant statistics is prepared and circulated to the colleges during this time as well. Departments are asked to follow up with any promising participants and maintain communication as applicable.

Faculty, department chairs, and students who met with and/or attended a participant's presentation are instructed to fill out a feedback form for that participant. Each participant receives a summary. The feedback and exchanges given by faculty are considered very useful to the participants in continuing their academic career and in preparation for future visits to the campus.

Participants typically report that they had no pre-conceived notion of expectations prior to their arrival. Nonetheless, the personal evaluation provided by participants about their FFCEP experience shows the benefits and true gratitude they felt from attending the program. Some comments provided by participants throughout the years are noted below:

“RIT has certainly set the benchmark for recruiting trips. I am so glad I participated.” - *G.H., class of 2004*

“The FFCEP has been one of the best experiences of my academic career. I have been searching for a program like this for a very long time. This weekend has exceeded my expectations.” - *W.V., class of 2004*

“This was a wonderful opportunity for me to learn of the process for job interviews for a faculty position. I also enjoyed meeting such warm hearted, intelligent, and genuine people who seemed passionate about their work. It was an honor to be chosen. Thank you!!” - *F. W., class of 2004*

The best part of the program was...“Time spent with the department tour and mutual exchange. It really helped to get a “feeling” of what RIT is about. It's not about the number; it's about people and making a difference not only through research but through real teaching.” – *G. L., class of 2007*

The best part of the program was...“Interaction with the department and faculty. The deans were very receptive and excited to have us here. That is something I don't experience a lot and it lets me know that RIT is serious about education and faculty.” – *Anonymous, Class of 2008*

“I am always hesitant to endorse efforts towards diversity because many of them are just for show but I sincerely believe in RIT's commitment to diversity. I appreciate your efforts, and whether or not my career path leads me to RIT, I am a fan of RIT and I will promote support for RIT and its programs.” - *L.B., class of 2009*

## **FFCEP through the Years**

The inaugural FFCEP debuted in October 2003. This first program specifically sought PhD scholars who were pursuing degrees in the Sciences, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. The program was hosted by the College of Applied Science and Technology (CAST), College of Science (COS), B. Thomas Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences (GCCIS), Kate Gleason College of Engineering (KGCOE), Academic Affairs, and Human Resources. Executive sponsorship and involvement was expected throughout the university and the community to exercise a role in this event.

Through the years, RIT has increased its network with historically black colleges and universities, majority institutions and minority fellowship programs that have been supportive and cooperative in identifying their top scholars. These, along with other various organizations and contacts, are vital to strengthening the FFCEP. As the number of applications and the program's reputation has increased, so have the number of entries in our faculty prospect database and the scope of the FFCEP.

Since 2003 FFCEP has become more comprehensive; expanding to include RIT's other four colleges. In addition to the STEM colleges listed above, applications are now accepted for the College of Liberal Arts (COLA), E. Philip Saunders College of Business (EPSCOB), the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences (CIAS), and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) since these colleges all eagerly requested to participate in the program.

The following two charts show the data analysis throughout the years (no official numeric data was recorded for 2003). Charts 1 and 2 show the distribution of applicants and participants, respectively, by gender, ethnicity, and host college.



### Yearly Comparison of Applicant Data *(Chart 1)*

	2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
<b>Total Number of Applicants</b>	104		176		122		113		185		235	
<b>GENDER</b>												
<b>Total Number of Males</b>	59	<b>57%</b>	83	<b>47%</b>	62	<b>51%</b>	65	<b>58%</b>	92	<b>50%</b>	117	<b>50%</b>
<b>Total Number of Females</b>	45	<b>43%</b>	93	<b>53%</b>	60	<b>49%</b>	48	<b>42%</b>	92	<b>50%</b>	118	<b>50%</b>
<b>ETHNICITY</b>												
<b>African American (AA)</b>	75	<b>73%</b>	125	<b>71%</b>	92	<b>75%</b>	84.5	<b>75%</b>	130	<b>70%</b>	161	<b>69%</b>
<b>Latin American (LA)</b>	25	<b>25%</b>	49	<b>28%</b>	28	<b>23%</b>	25	<b>22%</b>	49	<b>26%</b>	65	<b>28%</b>
<b>Native American (NA)</b>	2	<b>2%</b>	2	<b>1%</b>	2	<b>2%</b>	3.5	<b>3%</b>	6	<b>3%</b>	9	<b>3%</b>
<b>COLLEGE</b>												
<b>COS</b>	47	<b>40%</b>	49	<b>26%</b>	36	<b>26%</b>	31	<b>25%</b>	63	<b>34%</b>	82	<b>35%</b>
<b>SCB</b>	11	<b>9%</b>	28	<b>15%</b>	18	<b>13%</b>	16	<b>13%</b>	9	<b>5%</b>	19	<b>8%</b>
<b>KGCOE</b>	22	<b>18%</b>	31	<b>16%</b>	23	<b>17%</b>	29	<b>23%</b>	31	<b>17%</b>	39	<b>17%</b>
<b>CAST</b>	27	<b>22%</b>	25	<b>13%</b>	24	<b>18%</b>	11	<b>9%</b>	11	<b>6%</b>	12	<b>5%</b>
<b>CIAS</b>	0	<b>0%</b>	11	<b>6%</b>	1	<b>1%</b>	3	<b>2%</b>	6	<b>3%</b>	3	<b>1%</b>
<b>GCCIS</b>	9	<b>7%</b>	10	<b>5%</b>	8	<b>6%</b>	10	<b>8%</b>	10	<b>5%</b>	18	<b>8%</b>
<b>COLA</b>	5	<b>4%</b>	37	<b>19%</b>	25	<b>19%</b>	25	<b>20%</b>	55	<b>30%</b>	60	<b>26%</b>
<b>NTID</b>	0	<b>0%</b>	0	<b>0%</b>	0	<b>0%</b>	0	<b>0%</b>	0	<b>0%</b>	2	<b>1%</b>
<b>*Total (Including Duplicates)</b>	<b>*121</b>		<b>*191</b>		<b>*135</b>		<b>*125</b>		<b>185</b>		<b>235</b>	

<b>Yearly Comparison of Participant Data (Chart 2)</b>												
	2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
<b>Total Number of Participants</b>	24†	-	20	-	20	-	28	-	23	-	27	-
<b>GENDER</b>												
<b>Total Number of Males</b>	14	58%	5	25%	12	60%	13	46%	14	61%	12	44%
<b>Total Number of Females</b>	10	42%	15	75%	8	40%	15	54%	9	39%	15	56%
<b>ETHNICITY</b>												
<b>African American (AA)</b>	21	88%	12	60%	14	70%	21	75%	15	65%	18	67%
<b>Latin American (LA)</b>	3	12%	7	35%	6	30%	7	25%	8	35%	9	33%
<b>Native American (NA)</b>	0	0%	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>COLLEGE</b>												
<b>COS</b>	8	33%	2	10%	3	15%	8	29%	7	30%	4	15%
<b>SCB</b>	1	4%	1	5%	4	20%	2	7%	2	9%	4	15%
<b>KGCOE</b>	4	17%	4	20%	4	20%	6	21%	6	26%	7	26%
<b>CAST</b>	2	8%	4	20%	4	20%	3	11%	2	9%	3	11%
<b>CIAS</b>	1	4%	3	15%	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>GCCIS</b>	7	29%	3	15%	1	5%	3	11%	2	9%	4	15%
<b>COLA</b>	1	4%	3	15%	3	15%	4	14%	3	13%	5	19%
<b>NTID</b>	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2‡	7%	1	4%	0	0%
<i>Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding errors</i>												
† 2004 held two separate programs in different months (October 2004 and April 2005)												
‡ In 2006 NTID co-hosted 4 other applicants in addition to listed amount												

From the program's inception in 2003 to the latest program in September 2009, the intake of applicants has increased by over 600 percent and the number of participants has more than doubled.

### Future Faculty Career Exploration Program Results and Hires

Below, Chart 3 summarizes the results the program has made in regards to offers and hires for participants throughout the years.

<b>FFCEP Results and Hires to date: 2003-2009 (Chart 3)</b>							
<b>RESULTS &amp; HIRES</b>	<b>PROGRAM YEAR</b>						
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Total applicants</b>	35	104	176	122	113	186	235
<b>Total participants</b>	13	28	20	20	28	23	27
<b>Total offers made</b>	3	5	6	2	5	1	2
<b>Total hires</b>	3	2	3	0	1	1	2

It is notable to mention that that because of FFCEP, in 2003, RIT was able to hire the university's first African American into the Electrical Engineering department and the first Hispanic American in the Industrial Systems Engineering department.

## **Lessons Learned**

Through the years of holding and planning this program OFR has learned many lessons on how to better the experience of the participants and for the university representatives, such as:

- Participants need more guidance on their presentation: Had colleges/hosts notify participants in advance about what is expected of them for their presentation
- More student interaction is requested: Implemented an AALANA Student Roundtable
- Participants want to know about the Rochester community: Implemented a community tour with a paid tour guide and then added a realtor to the community tour
- Participants need to be educated on their host college/department: Requested marketing information from colleges to pass along to participants at invitation phase or in their welcome folder
- Need ease in application procedure: Implemented online application process
- All departmental faculty and administration need to know about the program: Communicate year round and provide as much information on the participants as can

## **Conclusion**

The old adage that it “takes a village” is certainly operative in this model as it strengthens ties with campus community efforts to create and sustain a welcoming environment for all. Every attempt is made to make the FFCEP participants interactions as pleasant and receptive as possible. We want them to relate their positive experience to inspire their peers to seek employment with our university.

Making direct contact with potential candidates and investing time in them sends a very positive message. Familiarity brings comfort and further dialogue, allowing ease into a mentoring relationship. FFCEP presents an opportunity to develop appreciation for these scholars as viable candidates for faculty positions.

FFCEP participants also build strong relationships with each other. They are scholars who may come from different fields and who “look like them.” They may become peer mentors, cultivate further social networks, and stay in touch over the years to provide support for one another.

In the seven years since FFCEP began, RIT has built national recognition and raised its visibility. Of note, OFR invites, approximately, 3,200 contacts to apply for the program per year; 936 applicants have vied for consideration to this career development and talent acquisition program; and 142 have actually been exposed to the “RIT treatment.” These scholars will truly become “good will ambassadors” to further spread the word about how RIT is personally nurturing and preparing them for its diverse faculty workforce.

Twelve hires have been made directly from the FFCEP to date. To RIT's credit, FFCEP is just one of the many outreach strategies that are invoked to attempt to gain parity with the national availability statistics of PhDs conferred by AALANA and women across all disciplines. This concern, which is echoed across the country at many higher education institutions, is reported and documented in various venues.

Universities nationwide, such as North Carolina State and the University at Ole Mississippi, have emulated RIT's best practice. Virginia Tech also recently advertised its inaugural program, which was held at its Blacksburg campus on January 10, 2010. This is a positive direction and strongly encouraged. However, in the bigger scheme of things, changing institutional culture to enable outcomes such as these is an entirely different matter. RIT realizes achieving and managing diversity is indeed a journey that takes institutional commitment and individual will.

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