

Recruiting and Retaining Faculty and Students: The Role of Faculty Liaison

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Abstract

The Director of Engineering at Lafayette College, in consultation with the Provost, has developed a new position entitled Faculty Liaison for Recruitment and Retention (FLRR). This paid position allows a faculty member to evaluate and address recruitment and retention issues at both the student and faculty level. The primary responsibilities of the position include attending department head meetings within the engineering division, being a resource person and a facilitator for engineering recruiting and retention initiatives, and initiating and developing contacts with new faculty and with students in order to identify and reduce situations that might result in faculty or students leaving the engineering program. The FLRR position has proved initially to be a successful approach to addressing administrative issues related to recruitment and retention.

I. Introduction

As evidenced by many publications and panel discussions at these and similar conferences, recruitment and retention concerns for both students and faculty are important issues for most institutions. Of the papers submitted for ASEE conferences between 1999 and 2001, 16 percent of the papers dealt with issues of retention and 8 percent dealt with issues of recruitment. While at larger schools, there is often an engineering administrator with the specific responsibility to focus on recruitment and retention activities, at smaller schools, such as Lafayette College, the recruitment and retention responsibilities are typically spread over a number of faculty and administrative positions. An administrative position, such as a dean or assistant dean, is usually given the responsibility of overseeing these activities, however, these administrators more often than not have many other responsibilities. Recruitment and retention activities occupy much of their time, but they may not be able to stay in regular contact with the students and faculty who are targeted by the programs as well as with the students and faculty who are directly responsible for these activities. In an attempt to address this problem, the position of Faculty Liaison for Recruitment and Retention (FLRR) was developed at Lafayette College. This paper briefly reviews the development of the position, the responsibilities of the position, and presents some initial feedback concerning the value of the position to the college.

II. Background

At Lafayette College, the administrative positions within the Engineering Division include the Director of Engineering and his/her secretary. Recruitment and retention activities for both faculty and students are coordinated through the office of the director. In addition, faculty members often take on responsibilities for various aspects of these activities as part of the service component of their employment.

The FLRR position is a new position within the division directly responsible to the Director of Engineering. The position is given to a faculty member within engineering and includes a stipend but no course release. It is expected that the faculty member serving as the FLRR will have reduced service activities in other areas of the division. The position was not developed in an attempt to consolidate existing responsibilities from other faculty and it was not developed in response to a particular event. However, there was a general sense that prospective and new faculty and students needed someone who could both be a source of information and assist in solving problems. In addition, it was believed that the ongoing recruiting and retention activities would benefit from having a person who served as a resource for information and as a facilitator. It was not intended that the FLRR position develop any new recruiting or retention initiatives though it was hoped that ideas for new initiatives might be generated. The position did incorporate some responsibilities that were formerly held by an Assistant to the Director position. This assistant position no longer exists but was also typically held by a faculty member. The Assistant to the Director had no defined objectives or goals and primarily responded to the needs of the Director of Engineering. The FLRR position was established with clear responsibilities so that objectives and outcomes could be defined and assessed.

III. Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the FLRR position are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Attend department head meetings: The primary responsibility of the FLRR at department head meetings is to provide an update on various issues related to recruitment and retention. In addition, at department head meetings, many issues that affect recruitment and retention are discussed. For example, proposed curriculum changes and changes to teaching load distributions between the departments are often on the agenda. These changes may affect prospective and new students as well as new faculty. While it is the responsibility of the department heads to consider these issues, the presence of the FLRR provides a check to insure that these issues are not overlooked. Also, it is at these meetings that new department-based initiatives for recruiting and retention are often conceived. Feedback on these proposed initiatives is typically requested from other departments and with the FLRR present it is possible that additional resources available to the department may be considered.

Serve as a resource person: Faculty, administrators, and student groups are often looking for information concerning recruitment and retention issues. The FLRR is charged with collecting information on these issues and distributing it as needed. The FLRR can also initiate information-gathering activities in response to particular questions. For example, an initial task of the FLRR in fall 2001 was to gather data from the admissions office concerning numbers of minority students who requested information on attending Lafayette, who actually applied to Lafayette, and who enrolled at the college.

Initiate and develop contacts with prospective and new faculty: To serve as an effective resource to prospective and new faculty, the FLRR must establish contacts with this group. The FLRR meets with all prospective faculty during their campus interviews. When new faculty arrive on campus, they are invited to participate in a peer teaching group. This group is facilitated by the

FLRR and meets monthly to discuss issues related to teaching, research, and service as well as promotion issues. The FLRR also regularly meets informally with new faculty.

Initiate and develop contacts with prospective and new students: The FLRR is introduced to prospective students and participates in presentations made to these students during engineering and campus-wide open houses. The FLRR also assists the Director in contacting and recruiting prospective students who have been accepted to Lafayette.

Chair meetings of the Engineering Student Advisory Council: The FLRR chairs meetings of the Engineering Student Advisory Council (ESAC). ESAC is an organization whose members consist of the presidents of each of the engineering student organizations and their advisors. Meetings are held monthly and serve as a time for students to communicate their activities and needs to the other members of the group and to the FLRR. These meetings are also used to give announcements and updates to the students concerning issues related to the entire engineering division, e.g., upcoming ABET visits, building renovations, etc. The FLRR prepares minutes for these meetings and distributes them to council members and to the Director of Engineering.

IV. Objectives and Outcomes

The Director of Engineering and the FLRR meet at least annually to discuss objectives and desired outcomes for the FLRR position. During this initial year of the position, the objectives for the position include first fulfilling the responsibilities listed above and second meeting informally with faculty and students to identify recruitment and retention issues that may have been previously overlooked.

The proposed outcomes for the first year of the position include the following:

- Director of Engineering obtains greater flexibility in scheduling his/her priorities and time with respect to recruiting/retention issues.
- The faculty in the division are aware of the new FLRR position and its objectives.
- The students in the division are aware of the new FLRR position and its objectives.

The Engineering Division has long-range goals concerning recruiting a larger percentage of minorities and obtaining higher retention rates. The FLRR responsibilities relate to these long-term goals, however, the position is not directly responsible for these goals.

V. Initial Results

With respect to the responsibilities defined above, the FLRR has been able to fulfill all the duties except in the area of serving as a resource person. The development of a sufficient knowledge base and the gathering of materials to be used as sources of information by faculty and students is a long-term project. It is anticipated that as the position develops some history, the knowledge and materials will accumulate. Funding has been obtained to assist in the development of a library of resources.

The outcomes with respect to increasing the flexibility in scheduling for the Director of Engineering and to developing the faculty's awareness of the position have been achieved.

Unfortunately, at this time the students are less aware of the position (with the exception of the students who attend ESAC meetings). The current FLRR was on sabbatical leave during the previous academic year and therefore was not present at orientation meetings for the current class of first year students and is also not known by as many of the upper class students as would be desired. During the fall semester, the FLRR invited all third and fourth year women students to attend a dinner. Nearly 50 percent of the students attended the dinner and it was a successful way to introduce the position and to obtain information concerning potential recruiting and retention problems. A dinner with the first and second year women students is planned for spring 2002.

It is important to reinforce that the FLRR position is to serve as a coordinator and a facilitator. The FLRR maintains a full teaching load and a research program and is not responsible for organizing recruitment or retention activities. It is easy for the FLRR to become involved in these activities (beyond the requirements of the position) and this tendency must be steadily resisted by the FLRR. Also, the FLRR is a member of an engineering department, and it is possible that there may be issues related to faculty or students in which the FLRR must circumvent his/her department head to achieve a successful resolution to the problem. The department head must be aware of the requirements and objectives of the position.

VI. Summary

At smaller institutions and in small engineering programs, recruitment and retention activities receive many resources and are highly valued, however, responsibilities for these activities are typically spread over many individuals. The position of Faculty Liaison for Recruitment and Retention (FLRR) provides a contact person for both prospective and new students and faculty and a resource of information and a facilitator for students and faculty who are responsible for recruitment and retention activities.

The position at Lafayette College has been developed with defined responsibilities, objectives, and outcomes. In its initial year, it has been successful in meeting most of its desired outcomes. The FLRR position successfully assists the Director of Engineering at the college and provides a useful resource to students and faculty.

Biographical Information

Mary Roth, Ph.D., P.E., started at Lafayette College in fall 1991 and is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Civil Engineering and the Faculty Liaison for Recruitment and Retention for the Division of Engineering at the College.