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Recruitment Inclusive Champions: Diversifying Engineering Faculty

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Recruitment Inclusive Champions: Diversifying Teaching and Research Faculty

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Introduction

The rapidly changing demographics in the United States is making it imperative for higher education to transform its diversity landscape. The Census Bureau estimates that within the next 20 years, United States will be multicultural more than she has ever been. In 1991, Wunsch and Chattergy predicted that the face of higher education would be drastically different by the year 2000. We are living that reality now. In this mix, is a sleuth of international students and faculty that have increased exponentially in the past several years? Diversity has been a subject of several studies though the majority has been in the area of diversifying the student body. But a diverse student body needs a faculty body that reflects the racial and ethnic characteristics of the student body. Much has been done in the area of K-12 to attract students to choose STEM disciplines. One example is the Million Women Mentor, an organization of women in key positions in academia, corporations or government who mentor potential female K-12 protégés interested in pursuing a scientific or technical career. Efforts have also been directed at attracting women into faculty ranks. In this paper, faculty refers to Teaching and Research Faculty and Term Faculty.

What is diversity?

Diversity is more than race or ethnicity. It includes gender, sexual orientation, ability, language, religious belief, national origin, age, and ideas. The level of published literature on macroaggressions, cultural competencies, and assessment of diversity issues, inclusion and social justice shows that diversity related activities have increased and evolved over time.

Why is diversity necessary among faculty ranks?

A diverse workforce creates an opportunity for varying perspectives, ideas, and skills that can lead to increased productivity and high quality output. Moreover, diversity in an organization makes it less likely to be taken advantage of in a global environment. The importance of collaborating in a global marketplace necessitates a workforce that can meet the needs of diverse users. Although student preparation and ability represent important predictors of student navigation along scientific pathways, progression through undergraduate majors may be strongly influenced by the types of opportunities, experiences and support students receive in college (Phinney, Campos, Kallemeyn and Kim, 2011) It is a widely accepted fact that faculty interaction has a positive influence on the cognitive growth and development of students (Astin, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). It is more so if the students have faculty that they can identify with and who can serve as role models. Based on research highlighting the supportive nature of HBCU's, it is not surprising that these colleges and universities serve as a significant pipeline for the production of minority engineers (Hurtado et al, 2011). Moreover, diversity among faculty ranks provides leadership for student organizations such as National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), a society that nurtures emerging minority engineers. Faculty play a key role in the identification and training of the next generation of scientific talent.

Review of the Literature

Recruitment of diverse faculty is full of myths and assumptions. One of these myths, the ‘supply problem’, says in view of the fact there are no qualified minority faculty to hire for particular positions, they have to hire non- minority. In a study funded by the Ford Foundation, and undertaken by Harleston and Knowles (1997) this myth was uncovered. They found that the eleven campuses interviewed, had graduated over one thousand women doctorates but had hired only seven in the period in question. Apart from recruitment challenges, underrepresentation in engineering may also be due to poor science degree completion rates among these groups as racial minority students have much lower STEM completion rate than their white counterparts (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2010). This creates scarcity of minority Ph.D.’s that feed the faculty ranks in engineering and related fields.

The literature discusses many factors that affect recruitment of diverse faculty. Implicit bias is one of them. Greenwald and Krieger (2006) introduces implicit bias as “an aspect of the new science of unconscious mental processes that has substantial bearing on discrimination law.” In implicit bias, actors do not always have conscious, intentional control over the processes of social perception, impression formation, and judgement that motivate their actions (Greenwald and Krieger, 2006). According to Moody (2010), both negative and positive stereotypes are the most widespread cognitive errors. As Nell Painter, a woman of color in the academy puts it, “any woman and any black person must prove that she or he is not dumb”. Moore and Wagstaff in their study, contacted six thousand black educators in two and four year colleges. Three thousand responded. In one of the responses, one African American faculty in a white majority institution states that, “one is on probation from the first day on the job till one retires” (Moore and Wagstaff, 1974). Sociologist Lois Benjamin found that almost all of the one hundred African American Professionals she interviewed for her book, *The Black Elite* felt they were

indeed on perennial probation. On the contrary, the majority group surrounded by positive stereotype of being competent receive more positive evaluations on performance than they deserve. A European-American discloses that though he worked hard, a good measure of his success results from societal perception (Frank, 1999). Other cognitive errors that may impact recruitment of diverse faculty include: raising the bar, elitism, first impression, cloning, good fit/bad fit, provincialism, extraneous myths, wishful thinking, self-fulfilling, seizing a pretext, character over context, premature ranking, and momentum of the group (Moody, 2010).

Initiatives by VCU

Background

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is a premier urban research university focused on advancing knowledge and student success. VCU is classified as doctoral research university with highest research activity in the Carnegie classification of higher education (R1). It has the most diverse student body of all doctoral universities in the state of Virginia, but falls short where diverse faculty and senior administration are concerned. For years, the minority student body wished the university administration would hire faculty that understands them and can inspire, motivate, and mentor them. In other words, the diversity in the student population is not represented in the faculty body. Between 2011 and 2016, total under-represented (URM) minorities added was 36, a 20.2% change bringing the total number to 214, 9.4%. In the same period, total white faculty added was 99, 6.4% growth, bringing the total number to 1644, at 72.3%. Enrollment of URM students for fall 2017 was 29%.

In 1990, VCU conducted an environmental scan. The result of the scan informed phase I of the strategic plan which was approved in 1993 by the board of Visitors. The mission of teaching, research, public service, and patient care is specially oriented to the challenges and opportunities of metropolitan

America. In 1996/97, phase II of the strategic plan with its fifteen strategic directions and 160 specific actions, was to advance the university as a leader among urban research universities. In this phase, the new School of Engineering opens up collaborative teaching and research opportunities and economic development possibilities. The fourth of the five themes also states that the university will provide an environment for working and learning that attracts, retains, and supports outstanding, diverse, and dedicated staff, administrators, and faculty. From 2006, VCU has been working on correcting the issue of the dearth of diverse faculty. In 2011, the university launched VCU's Quest for Distinction a strategic plan that will guide the university through 2018. One of the goals in theme I was to "recruit and retain progressive and diverse faculty, staff and senior leadership with the skills and talents to advance quality teaching and learning, along with high impact research, scholarship and creative expression". Therefore, the university launched a university-wide initiative to aggressively recruit and retain outstanding and promising minority and women faculty, staff and administrators. VCU mandated all sections of the university to prepare a diversity plan which should be in sync with the university's grand plan. One of the goals on the strategic plan, is to have a diverse faculty called inclusive excellence by the year 2020. In this context, (VCU) developed a strategic plan to make recruitment and retention of diverse faculty one of the main themes of VCU 2020, VCU Quest for Distinction. Under this theme, Office of Faculty Recruitment & Retention (OFR) Division of Inclusive Excellence established a new initiative. It is called Recruitment Inclusive Champions (RIC). The objective of the program is making sure all recruitment efforts across all units, including the School of Engineering pay attention to diversity and inclusion.

Recruitment Inclusive Champions

The objective of this program is to train one high level faculty member from each unit in the University who will then share the knowledge of recruitment and retention of inclusive excellence with the rest of

the unit as they serve as consultants to the unit's search committees. Seventeen faculty members representing each unit of the university were nominated by their dean or equivalent to undergo the training for one year. Recruitment Inclusive Champions (RIC) by virtue of their training will acquire the particular knowledge necessary to rise above cognitive errors in recruitment.

Apart from training participants on how to recognize cognitive errors and eliminate implicit bias in the hiring process, promotion, and tenure, the curriculum includes discussions of roles of academic leaders, provosts, deans and other senior administrators. Also included in the curriculum are comprehensive recruitment strategies, excellence in recruitment, recruitment sources, procedure for posting, invitations, and nominations.

Retention

There cannot be a successful recruitment without retention opportunities built into it. A survey conducted by The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) showed faculty of color are less likely to remain in their employment long term. The curriculum for training RIC, included several retention initiatives. Onboarding is important in making newly hired faculty members feel welcome and at home, and integrated into the community. New faculty have varying degrees of experience with local multicultural issues (Wunsch and Chattergy, 1991). This is why New Faculty Orientation (NFO) has gained grounds at VCU. At the beginning of the school year, the different units in the division of faculty affairs meet with new faculty to familiarize them with local campus policies, regulations, processes and procedures of the university. Other units such as Technology Services and Libraries also provide orientations that aim at familiarizing the new faculty with their resources and services.

Mentoring

Another retention goal is mentoring. New faculty members will be more successful at their jobs and in the university if they have mentors that can guide them through the rubrics of teaching, scholarship, service, evaluations, promotion, and tenure. In the COACHE survey, findings show mentoring is very low for all categories of faculty. Mentoring of minority faculty is widely encouraged at VCU. Black Educators Association (BEA) is an association at VCU whose mission is to create a community of black scholars committed to using collective resources to:

- collaborate with the university to realize its mission and strategic plan in regard to diversity, inclusive excellence and equity,
- encourage the equitable utilization of Black faculty throughout the university community,
- and prioritize issues of diversity and equity within policy making at VCU, (BEA).

Other retention effort particularly for diverse faculty is the collaboration with the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity. This center offers writing on site program which encourages writing. It also provides daily advice and inspiration for faculty success. It is particularly useful to junior faculty and underrepresented faculty who are trying to find their niche in academia.

One of the factors contributing to attrition is microaggression in the workplace and in the classroom. Comprehensive discussion on macroaggression was initiated across campus. These discussions make the campus community aware of macroaggressions and the reasons to avoid it in their daily activities. Others include limiting the number of committees that a junior faculty should participate in. This allows the faculty member to develop his credentials for tenure in a timely manner. In another move, the President's office conducts several forums on equity and inclusive excellence a few times every year. In

support of recruiting inclusive excellence, the guideline for evaluations, tenure and promotion was revised paying attention to equity and fairness.

End of RIC training

At the end of the RIC program, it was decided that, to keep the conversation going, there should be occasional gatherings of RIC to report on activities relating to recruiting diverse faculty from each unit, across the university.

Record shows that though the number of diverse faculty increased, attrition also increased, giving a net zero effect. This means more work is necessary in order to have a positive and sustainable outcome. No recruitment exercise can succeed without simultaneous efforts to promote retention.

Continuing in the same direction campus wide workshops on “Building Inclusive Communities” (BIC) were developed, facilitated by Visions Inc. These workshops were for the whole campus population and though they were not mandatory, there were many of them on different days and times to encourage participation. Goals for the workshop include:

- To surface and understand VCU diversity, equity and inclusion issues
- To support the VCU Great Place core competencies
- To identify, assess and interrupt the dynamic of historically-included and excluded groups at VCU
- To identify and avoid behavioral traps that contribute to cycles of inequity
- To address and practice alternatives to inequity and institute collaborative change
- To create a personal plan for changing inequitable behaviors and practices

In addition, VCU has an effective Faculty Mediation and Grievance Procedure Policy and an Office of the Ombudsperson, for faculty that feel they may have been treated unfairly.

Awards

Two diversity related awards help to motivate underrepresented faculty and staff.

The Annual Presidential Awards for Community Multicultural Enrichment (PACME) recognize contributions and efforts made toward enhancing the goals of inclusive excellence and VCU's commitment to diversity and inclusion. The award carries a \$500 value per recipient.

The Annual Burnside Watstein Award honors the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people and allies here at Virginia Commonwealth University. It was launched in 2006 to recognize those who work to enrich the lives of VCU LGBTQIA+ students, staff and faculty.

Conclusion

An institution with a diverse student body requires a faculty body that is representative of that student body. Diversifying the faculty particularly in engineering and related fields has been a challenge at VCU. One of the factors that creates dearth of minority faculty is the completion rate of minority students in engineering. This is lower than that of white students. Since search committees have a much smaller pool of candidates to choose from, recruiting inclusive excellence in these fields creates problems for institutions. Several factors impact recruiting excellence such as cognitive errors and implicit bias. In rising above cognitive errors one must constantly self-correct, use matrix to keep evaluations fair, do not rank the candidates and do not rush to judgement. Institutions can overcome these challenges by proper, training, tutorials and workshops to create an awareness of the problems and prescription for solutions.

Senior administrators, search committees, and tenure committees have to pay attention to these cognitive errors in order to avoid contamination of the decision process. Retaining minority faculty is equally as important as recruiting them. Efforts to retain faculty including onboarding, mentoring, workshops for improving teaching and writing assistance should not be taken lightly. Training RIC is a smart move for VCU. It is already paying high dividends as they populate search committees across the university. Now, VCU has been successful in recruiting some under-represented minorities in senior administration Dean, Associate Dean, Vice President, and Vice Provost, for example, the Dean of Engineering is a female. These senior administrators can work towards diversifying the faculty in their respective units. The university continues to make inroads into recruiting diverse faculty in the STEM fields in general and in engineering in particular.

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