



SEAS Center for Women in Engineering

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Best Practices for Search Committees to Broaden Participation

One of the most impactful opportunities a faculty member has to influence the direction of his or her department is to participate in the search for new faculty. That participation can be as a member of the search committee, as a host on a visit day, as a voting member in decision making, or as a welcoming colleague when the new faculty member begins his or her tenure.

The entire search process is slowed by policies and practices and departmental or institutional culture. Women may find less support or less of a welcome in both respects. Why so? A lack of diversity in the department and among majors may deter some women from applying for faculty positions. And, even when women and underrepresented minorities do apply, they are not selected for the position. Search committees may evaluate women harder than men. In fact, there is some evidence that both men and women evaluate women harder (Steinpries, et. al., 1999). Women have to work much harder to be evaluated as highly as men—that is, women are undervalued, often in small ways that build up over time to significant disadvantage (Valian, 1998, 2004). One consequence of faculty holding these schemas is that hiring decisions are subtly pushed toward favoring male candidates.

Is all lost then? Will we not be able to recruit and retain a diverse faculty? WE CAN! There are many strategies that can be used, even at this late date in your hiring process, to ensure the best possible candidate search.

Strategies

Setting the Stage

- Policies and Communication have to indicate the desire to have a diverse faculty.
 - Have the institution signal the importance of female faculty by making positive declarative statements, establishing a committee on women, exercising oversight over the hiring process, and devoting resources to hiring women. Note Dean Lach's attention to diversity, the Center for women, the culture of the city.
 - Take steps to diversify search committees.
 - Modify and expand faculty recruiting programs by creating special faculty lines, diversifying search committees, encouraging intervention by deans, and assessing past hiring efforts.
- Improve institutional policies and practices such as the tenure clock, child care, leave, spousal hiring, and training to combat harassment.

- Improve the success rate of women candidates by means of career advising, networking, and enhancing qualifications.
- Write an advertisement to reach a wide audience:
 - Identify support such as relocation assistance, other family friendly policies.
 - Opportunities in the area for “trailing spouse”.

The Search

- Cast a broader net to identify candidates.
- Delve more deeply into the pool of candidates before going forward with invitations for job talks.
- Rely on personal networks with colleagues at other institutions.
- Ask whether colleagues making recommendations could also suggest women or minority candidates. This request usually results in the emergence of several qualified candidates.
- Don’t discount lower-tier institutions. Remember that productivity and location may be related, candidates from low-tier institutions may be even better than they look, especially if they are outperforming typical productivity for their location.
- Write job descriptions that encourage women to apply (samples are included in the reference section).
- Collect data on each search by gender. Such data could include the number of candidates, number of candidates interviewed, number of offers, and number of hires.

The Search Committee

- Convene a diverse search committee whose members understand processes and best practices.
- Ensure search committee members and supporting staff understand their roles and how transparent, equitable decision making will take place.
- Establish a clear charge to the committee. Develop a shared understanding of diversity and excellence. (See the sections below on Know Your Data and Understand Unconscious Bias.)
- Ensure colleagues, and even students, are informed about what the position entails and how you are going to make decisions.
- Determine your decision making processes.

Broadening the Pool

See earlier WiE Center materials.

Evaluation

There are many schemes for evaluating the candidates. The following have been shown to support diversity.

- Evaluate inclusively at each stage, thinking about what attributes in the application merit progress according to the criteria.
- Rate against the criteria, not ranking candidates against each other.

- Understand that interdisciplinary and collaborative research take longer and are harder to evaluate. Review committees tend to under-credit women and people of color regarding their leadership, contributions and independence in producing scholarship through these modes.

Examples of Materials

- The Search Process:
 - <https://advance.cc.lehigh.edu/best-practices-faculty-recruitment> Excellent website with ideas on every state of the search process. (Lehigh University)
 - https://faculty.harvard.edu/files/fdd/files/best_practices_for_conducting_faculty_searches_v1.2.pdf (Harvard)
 - <https://wiseli.wisc.edu/workshops/hiring-diverse-excellent-faculty/faculty-recruiting-resources/> (Wisconsin)
 - https://wiseli.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/662/2018/11/SearchBook_Wisc.pdf
- Data gathered:
 - The University of Pennsylvania's 2003 report, "Gender Equity: Penn's Second Annual Report," (University of Pennsylvania, 2003).
- Proactive language
 - <https://advance.cc.lehigh.edu/sample-letter-colleagues-help-broadening-pool-applicants>
 - <https://advance.cc.lehigh.edu/sites/advance.cc.lehigh.edu/files/JobAdPrimer-6-2-18.pdf>
 - <https://www.du.edu/diversity-inclusion/media/documents/proactivelanguageexamples.pdf>
 - <https://www.du.edu/diversity-inclusion/media/documents/tipsfordesigningastrongpositiondescriptionandadvertisement2.pdf>
- Interview and Evaluation – when and how
 - https://wiseli.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/662/2018/10/BiasBrochure_3rdEd.pdf
 - <https://advance.cc.lehigh.edu/sites/advance.cc.lehigh.edu/files/CandidateEvaluationTool-Cornell.pdf>
- Success stories
 - <https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-to-Do-a-Better-Job-of/237750>

References

Lehigh University <https://advance.cc.lehigh.edu/best-practices-faculty-recruitment> Excellent website with ideas on every state of the search process.

National Academy of Sciences: Recruiting Women Faculty To Recruit and Advance: Women Students and Faculty in Science and Engineering

National Institute for Faculty Equity <https://serc.carleton.edu/facultyequity/index.html> Reaching the African American Community.

Steinpress, R, E., K.A. Anders, D. Ritzke, The Impact of Gender on the Review of the Curricula Vitae of Job Applicants and Tenure Candidates: A National Empirical Study. Sex Roles Volume 41, Issue 7-8, pp 509-528

Valian, V., Why so slow? MIT Press, Cambridge (1998)

Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute <https://wiseli.wisc.edu/> A major resource for recruitment process across engineering and computer science. The guide book is dated (2012) but there is a tremendous amount of information in it: https://wiseli.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/662/2018/11/SearchBook_Wisc.pdf