Beating Biases: Training Search Committees to Build a Stellar Diverse Faculty

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Women in Science and Engineering System Transformation (WISEST)

- The goal of the WISEST Initiative is to increase the number, participation, and leadership status of women-majority and minority-in academic science and engineering through institutional transformation at UIC.
Efforts at UIC: WISEST

- Warm the climate & decrease the isolation of women STEM faculty
- Pilot initiatives to attract & recruit minority women faculty
- Transform STEM departments to foster diversity & women’s leadership
- Promote STEM women’s scholarship & teaching
- Improve the ability to track & report on gender equity in STEM
- Advocate & collaborate across UIC & nationally
The WISEST Faculty Search Toolkit

HTTP://WWW.UICWISEST.ORG/
Necessary Environment

- Highly visible commitment on the part of top administration to create a diverse faculty
- Benefits of a diverse faculty regularly communicated to Deans, Department Heads, and faculty
- Institutionalized rewards and sanctions attached to the goal of increasing faculty diversity
Training Search Committees

Before the Search
Climate

- Department head should ensure that the committee members are sensitive to gender and diversity issues
- Familiarize committee members with research findings on work-life issues, gender schemas, critical mass & evaluation bias
- Discuss what have been some roadblocks to increasing diversity in the department in the past
Raise Awareness of Unconscious Assumptions and Their Influence on Evaluation of Candidates

- Large body of research on evaluation bias.
  - Gender Schemas
  - Evaluation Bias
  - Lack of Critical Mass
  - Accumulation of Disadvantage
Overcoming Bias

- Be familiar with the phenomenon and research.
- Discuss evaluation bias in the committee and commit to working against it.
- Look for opportunities to structure initial evaluations to make them gender neutral and avoid triage via pedigree.
- Try to have more than one woman or minority on the short list; research shows that gender and ethnicity will then become less of a factor in the decision-making process.
Overcoming Bias (cont.)

- Spend sufficient time evaluating each applicant (15-20 min); research suggests that gender schemas play more of a role when consideration time is brief
  - Filling out the Candidate Profile Template in the Tool kit keeps the focus on factual information for comparison of applicants across the board
  - Evaluate the entire application rather than immediately culling the pile by relying too heavily on one element—letters of recommendation, prestige of degree-granting institution or post doc program.
A critical mass of women have to be recruited into the applicant pool.

Applicants have to be compared across the board using the same metrics.

Search committees have to be conscious that gender bias may affect the length and quality of letters of recommendations for women applicants.
Prepare an Effective and Efficient Process

- Build a diverse committee—if no women or minorities are in your dept, bring in from another dept, make sure members are committed to diversity and can be ambassadors for the institution.
- Dean gives charge to committee.
- Raise and discuss issues of diversity, research on differential evaluation, and accumulation of disadvantage.
Training Search Committees

During the Search
Pay Attention to Bias

- Word the position description so that it conveys the College’s commitment to excellence, equity & diversity.
- Function as a Search Committee, not a Letter-Opening Committee.
- Consider women and minorities who are ‘underplaced.’ Avoid triage by pedigree.
Actively Recruit an Excellent and Diverse Pool of Candidates

- Everyone hired should understand that they were hired because they were the best person for the job not because they are a woman or minority.
- Very narrow searches disadvantage women and minorities and eliminate candidates who would qualify for your position but have a different profile.
- Consider including “experience working with/teaching diverse groups/diverse students as one of the preferred criteria.
- Use multiple channels to recruit—phone calls, emails, letters, postings, curbsides at professional meetings. Also contact potential candidates and encourage them to apply.
Develop and Implement an Effective Interview Process

- Develop a core set of questions and guidelines for interviewing; utilize the *Interview Scoring Sheet from the Tool kit*.
- Know which questions are inappropriate or illegal.
- Provide opportunities for candidates to meet with women and minority members of the dept and with a FAAC member.
Broaden Criteria

- Make several short lists using multiple criteria for scholarship/quality.
- If possible, have >1 woman (minority) on the short list; schemas will have less power.
- Spend sufficient time evaluating each applicant; schemas have less power when more time is spent with a candidate.
- Provide an opportunity for women (minority) candidates to talk to other women (minority) faculty, not on the search committee.
Ensure a Fair and Thorough Review of Candidates

- Create the long and short list.
  - Are there qualified women and minorities included? If not, consider whether evaluation biases or assumptions may have influenced the rating.
- Evaluate the short list. If no women or minorities are represented consider whether evaluation biases or assumptions may have influenced the rating.
Know UIC Policies and Programs

Provide a handout outlining:

- New Faculty Orientation
- Tenure Roll Back
- Family Medical Leave
- Campus Childcare
- Faculty Mentoring
- Underrepresented Faculty Recruitment Program
- Dual Career Hiring
- Department Heads Workshops
What Can Search Committees Do?

- Know about UIC support units:
  - Faculty Academic Advancement Committee (FAAC)
  - Office of Faculty Affairs (OFA)
  - Center for Research on Women and Gender (CRWG)
  - UIC National Center of Excellence in Women’s Health
  - Office of Women’s Affairs (OWA)
  - Chancellor’s Committees on the Status of Women, Blacks, Latinos
Training Search Committees

After the Search
After the Search

- Search Committee Chairs debrief with administrators on the search process:
  - What worked well
  - What were the challenges
  - What kind of support would have helped facilitate the committee’s work
Success with WISEST
(http://www.uicwisest.org/)

- NSF Advance Grant
- SUCCEED presents to train search committees
- Where trainings were required, there was considerable success
- WISEST Faculty Search Toolkit