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WINNING THE RECRUITING CHALLENGE: HIRING DIVERSE AND TALENTED IS FACULTY MEMBERS

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ABSTRACT

Serving on an IS recruiting committee can be a challenge to most faculty members. In addition to standard committee responsibilities, the IS search committee is strategically important to the department's mission. Hiring a diverse faculty group provides even more challenges to an already difficult task. Particularly in IS, where qualified women and minority applicants may be difficult to find, the task of the search committee is challenging. This paper provides an overview of the IS search committee process, focusing on strategies for recruiting diverse and talented faculty members. Specific strategies include providing relevant training for the committee members, developing appropriate advertising strategies for the position, including diverse faculty in the composition of the committee, removal of any gender or minority identifiable material before review, and courting the candidate to accept the position. These strategies should lead to an increase in recruiting diverse and qualified IS faculty.

Keywords

Recruiting, service, diverse faculty, search committee.

INTRODUCTION

As faculty members, we are expected to teach our students with exceptional skill, publish research in leading journals in our fields, and last (and certainly least), provide service to the field. The problem is, service is the undervalued portion of the triad, with little recognition in tenure and promotion portfolios. Faculty members are expected to provide an adequate level of service, however that level may be defined - or more often, not defined – in tenure and promotion guidelines. In fact, previous studies have reported that the service role of faculty is very difficult to define (Plater, 2008; Ward, 2003). Department chairs, Deans, conference coordinators, journal editors, and university committees often find it difficult to recruit active and involved faculty members for service roles. It is particularly difficult to get faculty members to serve on committees (Mason, 2005), especially in the current academic climate where teaching is most valued, followed by research, and where superior service activities do not predict merit pay increases for faculty members (Schulz & Tanguay, 2006). Even in this climate, academics still profess a strong commitment to service (Berberet, 1999).

This paper describes a discipline-specific service activity, the search committee for IS faculty members. There has been little research focusing on discipline-specific service activities (Ward, 2003), and this paper addresses specific service activities of the IS Search Committee. Because of the aging workforce and retirements (Pawloski, Datta, & Houston, 2005) and large numbers of retirees (Plater, 2008), many IS departments will have to replace current faculty members. Search committees will need to form, and faculty members will need to take on the task of selecting future colleagues. For community colleges, which are experiencing large increases in enrollment (Evelyn, 2001), the recruiting committee work may become even more burdensome.

THE IS SEARCH COMMITTEE

The IS Search Committee is strategically important to the department. In this service opportunity, committee members will select colleagues to partner with in research activities and to teach future generations for the IT workforce. These new hires will be with the university for many years, representing a significant investment of time and money. This paper describes one portion of the search committee's activities: how to recruit a diverse group of applicants for the open position. Although diversity may comprise numerous attributes, such as type of position available (e.g., teaching vs. research-intensive), areas of experise (e.g., programming, database, strategy, etc.), workload (e.g., 2-2, 3-3, 4-4, etc.), and many other elements important to finding an appropriate fit, this paper defines diversity in terms of demographic qualities of the applicant. In other words, we focus on strategies that will encourage an applicant pool that includes sufficient numbers of women, African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, the disabled, and other underrepresented groups in IS. The IS Search Committee needs to

ensure that a wide net is cast, such that qualified faculty from underrepresented groups are not excluded from the search. We are not proposing that underrepresented groups be given preferential treatment; rather, we are proposing that the IS Search Committee must complete due diligence to ensure that a diverse group of qualified faculty apply for the open position. Once the IS Search Committee secures an applicant pool that is diverse, then the committee must determine which applicants may may be a good match for the open position, without regard to demographic variables that have no bearing on the applicant's fit for the open position.

Everyone who has served on a recruiting committee understands the stated importance of getting a diverse pool of applicants for the open position. Women, minorities (African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans in the IS field), and the disabled continue to make up a small portion of IS applicants. There are fewer women hired in academia and more women in junior faculty positions (Kulis, Sicotte, & Collins, 2002) across disciplines, but the lack of women and minorities is particularly pronounced in the IS field. The current lack of diversity in IS makes it very difficult to hire women and minorities. Women are more likely to be hired by universities that already have a large percentage of women (Marschke, Laursen, Nielsen, McCarl, & Rankin, 2007), and IS certainly does not qualify as a field with a high percentage of women, making it even more difficult for women and other underrepresented groups to rise to the top of a large applicant pool. Without other women around, there are few opportunities for mentoring (Hamilton, 2004), which has been shown to be an effective way to retain women over time. Women often end up in low-end, less prestigious jobs as part-time faculty or research assistants (Kulis, Sicotte, & Collins, 2002). Therefore, hiring a diverse faculty group is not an easy process. In the next section, we describe strategies that institutions can use to attract and hire a diverse IS faculty.

STRATEGIES FOR HIRING A DIVERSE IS FACULTY GROUP

In this section, we describe five strategies to use when recruiting diverse and talented IS faculty: diversity, training, outreach, application handling, and closing the deal.

Diversity Strategy

To hire a diverse faculty group, the IS Search Committee should have reasonable diversity itself. Therefore, professors in various ranks, including part-timers for non-tenure track positions, would be one method of diversity (Plater, 2008). Including professors who are teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level is another method of diversifying the committee. Further, including faculty members with varying levels of seniority provides a level of diversity to the committee. In particular, more junior faculty may connect better than senior faculty when talking with applicants who have recently received their PhD. The obvious diversity factors for the IS search committee include having a sufficient number of women and minorities. However, many IS departments have only a few women and/or minorities. This leads to the problem of over-committing women and minorities to provide diverse perspectives (Ward, 2003). Researchers recommend not overusing underrepresented groups on committees, particularly when there are only a few of them in a department (Mooney et al., 2007). Payton, White, & Mbarika (2006) concur, recommending against the overuse of minority faculty members just to "showcase" diversity.

Training Strategy

Faculty members on the IS Search Committee face significant challenges to recruit diverse and talented faculty members. Since faculty members in IS are not typically knowledgeable about legal aspects of hiring, the human resource department and/or diversity group on campus, should provide a training session on which questions should not be asked of candidates, how to approach diversity, how to get qualified applicants to apply, etc. Once the training session is completed, the search committee should develop a detailed job description, in consultation with the decision makers (i.e., Chair, Dean, Provost) regarding the final job offer. The job description should mention that women and minorities are especially encouraged to apply for the open positions. Furthermore, the committee should develop a formal process to recruit the applicant for the open position. This process should describe receiving the applications, reviewing the applications, telephone interview questions, campus visit strategies, etc. For the telephone interviews, developing a set of standard questions, in consultation with Human Resources, would decrease the likelihood of committee members asking inappropriate questions, such as family status, ethnicity, etc.

Outreach Strategy

To secure a diverse applicant pool, the department should reach out to multiple organizations, groups, and magazines/journals. Advertisements in Communications of the ACM will reach a large audience of potential applicants for IS

positions. Targeted advertising in Diverse Issues in Higher Education will reach a more focused potential candidate pool. In the IS field, contacting the PhD Project group (http://www.phdproject.org/) , which encourages participation from minorities in business and related fields such as IS, is also recommended. Other focused groups, including the NAACP in your area, and local and regional technology associations, such as Women in Electronics, help to cast a wide net for applicants. Focused e-mail messages to women and minority groups on campus and to women and minority colleagues across the nation, provides another outlet for potential job applicants.

Application Handling Strategy

Once applications begin to be received, the search committee should attempt to remove any potential bias in terms of minority group or gender. The committee chair or an administrative assistant should remove any pictures included by applicants who apply for positions. Some applicants include a picture and/or date of birth on their CVs, and this information should be removed before review begins. The committee should establish a set of guidelines to complete the review process, particularly focusing on the qualifications set forth in the job announcement. Applications should be kept in a secure area, and committee members should review them in a timely manner. Each committee member should keep notes or indicate opinions on candidates for open discussion at committee meetings. A short list of applicants should be selected for telephone interviews. After the telephone interview process, another short list should be chosen, approximately 3-5 applicants. Based on budget constraints, at least two of these applicants should be brought to campus for an in-person interview.

Closing the Deal Strategy

The last part of the IS Search Committee's task is selecting a candidate and closing the deal. Faculty members should be encouraged to court the candidate – but within guidelines. Obviously, since fewer women and minorities obtain PhDs in IS as compared to their White male counterparts, the underrepresented applicants may secure multiple job offers. Unless the university can participate in a bidding war with other well-funded institutions, the committee members should instead describe non-monetary characteristics that may be appealing to the applicant, including location, potential nearby consulting opportunities, family-friendly university policies, etc. For some candidates, money may be the main reason to accept an offer, but for others, non-monetary factors may be equally or more important than the salary offered. Committee members should never promise something that cannot be delivered (large lab spaces, teaching assistants, reduced teaching loads, etc.). Similarly, the faculty members should not present a picture of the community that does not exist. Faculty members should be open and honest about the work environment, the colleagues, the potential for research, class sizes, development of new courses, shared faculty governance, etc. Although the committee is courting the candidate, faculty members should put forth an honest and straightforward assessment of the environment. After all, the committee is looking for a match to the candidate who will succeed and contribute to the department and degree programs. The candidate is following the same process. Since these colleagues will be around for many years, it is important to find the best match for the department and the best choice for the candidate, using a broad outreach policy to reach as large a pool of qualified applicants as possible.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper focused on strategies that the IS Search Committee may use to increase the chances of hiring diverse and talented faculty members for open positions. This initial research should be expanded to include applicant strategies to secure the IS position that is a good fit, based on desired attributes. How to design an appropriate cover letter and vita, along with the type of presentation to make at a campus visit, are only two of the strategies that applicants should use to secure an appropriate faculty position. The applicant should also research and select an institution that has a balance of teaching, research, and service that matches the goals of the applicant. Likewise, administrators who negotiate faculty offers should use appropriate strategies to hire an applicant that meets the goals of the universities, while keeping hiring costs at a level commensurate with similar faculty hires at similar institutions. While this paper provides a starting point for hiring diverse and talented IS faculty, there are clearly many more facets to consider when making an appropriate hiring decision, and these factors should be discussed in future research. Moreover, understanding the interaction between diversity – in terms of demographic variables – and fit – in terms of type of position available (e.g., teaching vs. research-intensive), level of teaching (e.g., graduate vs. undergraduate), areas of expertise needed (e.g., graduate vs. undergraduate teaching, expertise in areas such as programming, database, etc.), and workload (e.g., 2-2, 3-3, 4-4, etc.), should be included in future discussions of how to hire diverse and talented IS faculty to fill open positions.

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed a topic that is absent in most research journals, yet inherently important to the success of an IS

department. Most faculty receive adequate and appropriate training on how to publish research papers; many of them also receive training, either formally or on-the-job, in effective classroom teaching strategies. However, few IS faculty receive any training on how to serve on a recruiting committee and how to attract diverse applicants to the position. This paper described five strategies for recruiting talented and diverse faculty. These strategies include having a diversity policy for committee members, training committee members on legal and ethical issues associated with recruiting, properly handling the applications to avoid any appearance of impropriety, and formulating a method of closing the deal with the chosen applicant. When recruiting committees use these strategies, they are likely to attract diverse and talented faculty to fill open positions.

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