

Structuring Inclusion into Faculty Recruitment and Retention

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Political science, like many fields, faces some rather sobering data about diversity. Call it a “leaky pipeline,” a game of “chutes and ladders,” or any metaphor you prefer (Crawford and Windsor 2021), but we have had a difficult time diversifying our faculty. Half of undergraduate-degree recipients in political science are women, and women receive about 39.8% of PhDs awarded in political science. However, as we advance up the tenure track, the percentages of women noticeably decline: 40% of assistant professors at top 50 departments, 35.1% of associate professors, and only 22.3% of full professors are women. The percentages are more alarming when we examine underrepresented minorities: 11% of undergraduate students receiving political science degrees are Black (already underrepresented as compared to the general population), but only 8.2% of PhD recipients are Black. At top 50 departments, 5.8% of assistant professors, 4.5% of associate professors, and 3.7% of full professors are Black. By contrast, white males received 37% of undergraduate degrees in political science but they comprise 70% of full professors at top 50 departments (Nelson 2017).

Considering these dismal statistics on diversity in the discipline, this article describes a series of best practices for department chairs garnered from both the literature and our experiences as administrators at large, public research institutions in the United States. Few things are more consequential for a university department than good management of the recruiting and retention of faculty. This article begins with a description of best practices for recruitment that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)—from developing a strategic hiring plan to negotiating an offer with a candidate—and continues with a discussion of best practices for retention that maintain a commitment to DEI after a new faculty member joins the department.

BEST PRACTICES FOR RECRUITMENT

Diversifying the faculty begins well before the recruitment process. Devoting time to developing a strategic hiring plan is foundational to the vision that you and your faculty members have for your department. A strategic hiring plan should envision the next five to 10 years of faculty hiring needs while also recognizing that (un)planned departures or arrivals may occur. It considers teaching and mentoring needs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as areas of faculty research excellence, including centers, institutes, and working

groups. A strategic hiring plan also provides space to reflect on various aspects of diversity among faculty members, including gender, race and ethnicity, and LGBTQ identities. Ideally, the diversity of the faculty will mirror or even surpass that of the student body, thereby providing role models for the country’s changing demographic composition (Taylor et al. 2010). A strategic hiring plan—developed in close consultation with the faculty—can set the agenda for greater DEI in your faculty and may be especially essential when there are changes to upper administration.

The annual hiring requests should then reflect the priorities in the strategic hiring plan. A carefully crafted hiring plan will support the lines that you request from year to year. DEI concerns will be integrated into requests to the dean, thereby strengthening your case for securing a line. Assume that your request was persuasive and that you have been authorized to search for a faculty position. What should your next steps be?

The first step is to write the position description. It is imperative that the description used to advertise the position is as inclusive as possible. Mention specific interests in racial and ethnic politics (REP), gender, or LGBTQ research regardless of the subfield you are targeting and regardless of other substantive areas of research or teaching needs (Ponjuan 2011). Simply mentioning an openness to scholarship on identity may encourage scholars from diverse backgrounds to apply. You also might mention other characteristics of your institution. For example, do you have a high percentage of first-generation students and/or transfer students from community colleges that may further signal to potential applicants your university’s commitment to diversity?

When writing the position description, you simultaneously can create a rubric for evaluating eventual applicants. The design of the rubric may take many forms, but it should identify every required and desired qualification. It also should provide a way to score the applicant on each qualification and space to explain where you identified information pertinent to the qualification (e.g., the CV or cover letter).

After the position description is crafted and approved by the relevant administrators, the second step is to advertise and draw on networks to recruit a diverse candidate pool. Advertising positions can be expensive, but it is critical to ensuring that your job advertisement is seen by a broad audience. There are options that encompass several disciplines, such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, as well as

discipline-specific options including the *American Political Science Association* e-jobs. However, be sure to advertise in outlets such as *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* and to post to social media outlets as well as on listservs associated with diverse groups. Ask faculty members to draw on their networks—and tap into your own—to distribute the job advertisement widely, including to institutions other than those

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most highly ranked. Institutional bias also can reinforce prejudice against hiring faculty from diverse backgrounds. The key to this stage of recruitment is to search actively and mindfully rather than to rely on typical passive searches (Greene 2018). This rarely occurs, as reported in the American Association of Colleges and Universities *Diversifying the Faculty* guide: “[o]nly 11 percent of scholars of color were actively sought after by several institutions simultaneously” (Greene 2018).

In the job advertisement, list the types of materials that a candidate must submit. This typically includes a CV, a letter that outlines research and teaching interests, a writing sample, perhaps evidence of teaching effectiveness, and (historically) letters of reference. Best practice has evolved to recommend against soliciting recommendation letters with the initial application (Iwen 2019). Instead, ask for names and contact information and indicate that letters of reference may be requested at a later date. The problem with including letters in the initial application is that faculty members may be tempted to not adequately review files and instead gravitate to candidates who have letters from scholars whose opinion they value. This may reinforce institutional bias as well as any biases that letter writers may have woven into their narrative. Research indicates a strong gendered pattern in letters of recommendation (Flaherty 2016, 2018), and there may be gendered patterns not only in requesting letters but also in following up with references who are not expeditiously submitting their letters. To limit these negative impacts, ask for letters of recommendation after the search committee has determined a “long” shortlist of perhaps 10 candidates of interest. Typically, personal references have their letters ready to go (especially if the advertisement indicates that letters will be requested), so asking for them at this stage will not incur much delay.

A new addition to materials now commonly requested is the diversity statement. Diversity statements are an opportunity for candidates to reflect on their actual or planned contributions to DEI.¹ They provide an opportunity for a candidate to discuss information about their own identity and background (if they choose); how this relates to their scholarship and teaching; and how they plan to engage the department on DEI issues. If your institution chooses to include a diversity statement in applications, then search-

committee members should be trained in how to read and evaluate them.²

Before reviewing candidate files, members of the search committee also should participate in a training session about implicit bias. Most institutions offer—and even mandate—this training. Sensitizing faculty members to potential implicit bias in their review of applications is essential

and reinforces the importance of using a rubric. A rubric steers committee members to the actual position requirements and desirable qualifications, and away from relying on their own biases and comparing candidates to the “invisible prototype” of the white male (Alexander-Floyd 2015). Also, be sure that the committee is assessing candidate qualifications solely on the materials that have been submitted. Ideally, this should produce a more diverse and inclusive pool of candidates to interview than more traditional ways of conducting a search. Most public institutions also require a candidate disposition sheet that logs why each candidate was or was not interviewed and was or was not hired. A rubric makes this reporting process straightforward.

Once you have identified and received approval to interview your candidates, keep in mind the following. When scheduling the interview, do not expect candidates to pay for flights, hotels, or meals then be reimbursed later. This could pose a significant financial hurdle for some candidates. Ensure that candidates are given their interview schedule well in advance and explain how research talks and/or teaching demonstrations typically operate. Do not assume that all candidates know the unwritten rules of job interviews.

Do not assume that your faculty and search committee members are aware of best practices and behaviors to avoid. Remind them about the types of questions that they are prohibited from asking when interviewing candidates. To ensure that inappropriate questions and topics are not discussed, the search committee chair also should attend interview events (e.g., dinners).

After you and your faculty have selected a candidate and you have approval from your dean to make an offer, remember that you are still recruiting and continue to be attentive to DEI issues. This includes holding your own institution accountable for an equitable offer relative to similarly positioned faculty. Be an advocate for your candidate; be honest about which aspects of the offer are fixed and which are flexible. Candidates may not know the range of items to ask about, so encourage them to speak with trusted mentors about their offer. The “women don’t ask” and other similar phenomena for underrepresented minorities have created inequities that we should all be working to address (Babcock and Laschever 2021). After an offer is made, ask

your faculty to reach out and encourage the candidate to accept the offer and join your department. This emphasizes the inclusion that you are attempting to instill throughout the recruitment process.

your DEI goals. Do your policies recognize the bias that people of color and women face in teaching evaluations, and how do they correct for this? Do your criteria reward faculty for the DEI work that they do?

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BEST PRACTICES FOR RETENTION

As Sinclair-Chapman (2015, 454) argued, “reliance on replacement rather than growth among minority faculty in political science undermines institution-wide investments in diversity, making it difficult to leverage diversity....” Yet, too often the focus is on the recruitment of diverse faculty members and retention takes a back seat.

What happens once your candidate has signed the offer letter? The intervening months between signing and arriving on campus are not the time for radio silence but instead an opportunity to start building dialogue and a relationship of trust. After your new colleague has arrived, be mindful that “no one wants to stay at a place where they don’t feel they belong” (Greene 2018). How can you foster a welcoming culture?

Mentorship plays an important role in the success of your faculty—but do not make the mistake of thinking that mentorship can magically overcome a hostile environment, poor policies, and structural inequities. Formalized mentorship programs can be especially valuable because some faculty

The invisible labor that your underrepresented faculty members perform must be recognized. Encourage your colleagues to document this work on their CVs and promotion documents, and ensure that others are aware of this work. The department newsletter can profile DEI efforts, for example, which not only recognizes a faculty member’s work but also signals that this work is valuable.

Also consider the unintended consequences of policies designed to increase diversity. For example, in an effort toward inclusivity, some institutions require that committees include minority representation. Given the paucity of minority faculty members, such a policy may be taxing them with more service than other colleagues. Even absent such policies, minority faculty members are likely to have greater service duties than their white colleagues (Ponjuan 2011; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group 2017). Minority students often gravitate to minority faculty. Are minority and women faculty members doing more mentoring of students than their white, male colleagues? Then you need to ensure

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members may be reticent to ask for this type of support. Consider carefully the individuals that you recruit as mentors. Do not overlook the value of programs such as the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity—but do not be lulled into thinking that such programs can replace the value of mentorship from within the department (Whittaker-Montgomery 2014). If your university has an institutional account, faculty members can access a wealth of resources, including regular “Monday Motivators.”

Ensure that your expectations of faculty members, especially for promotion and tenure, are clear, easily accessible, and regularly communicated. Keep in mind that there is a hidden curriculum in academia and try to demystify this and talk about navigating the informal rules of the academic game.

As political scientists, we know that policies and procedures matter. Examine your department’s criteria for promotion and tenure and for annual reviews, and align these with

equitable service loads. What can you do to address these inequities?

Ensure that underrepresented faculty members’ teaching and research are supported. This is important regardless of their substantive area of study, and often even more important if their work focuses on REP. Many of us live in places where politicians and legislatures may be hostile to the teaching of REP courses. Have you created a diverse curriculum that supports this type of instruction? Your mainstream department may believe that critical scholarship on race is not a good fit, but it is incumbent on you to set the tone. In what ways can you ensure that such scholarship is supported?

CONCLUSION

Colleges and universities have long rhetorically supported DEI, but the last few years suggest that they now may be moving from words to action. Many political science departments are advertising for assistant professors and

postdoctoral scholars in REP with an obvious goal of diversifying their faculty. This article describes recruitment and retention practices that should align reasonably well across the many types of institutions with political science faculty members; however, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach that will increase DEI.

At our institutions, we have crafted strategies that we have the institutional capacity to implement. For example, as a bridge from recruitment to retention, one of us created the first postdoctoral to tenure-track hire offer. Given its success, this model has since been widely adopted by the university. This option proved an effective strategy for recruiting a candidate with other offers.

We also have personalized our strategies when appropriate. For example, one of us originally came to the university as part of a hiring program that targeted underrepresented minorities as an assistant professor and she is now a full professor. Speaking about her own experience with underrepresented candidates has been helpful in the recruiting process.

The statistics listed in the introduction are dire. The best practices outlined in this article should assist departments that are serious about improving DEI. For this reason, it is imperative that we recruit in the most active, mindful, and inclusive way possible. After we have hired new faculty members, we must provide an environment and resources to help them succeed through promotion to full professor. We hope you make your department the type of place that no one wants to leave.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

NOTES

1. Mahdavi and Brooks (2021) provide an overview for writing diversity statements.
2. Lam and Finn (2018) provide advice on how search committees should read diversity statements. Many colleges and universities also provide their own instructions for how these statements should be read.

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