

Best Practices in Diversifying Political Science

Melissa R. Michelson, *Menlo College, USA*

Betina Cutaia Wilkinson, *Wake Forest University, USA*

For decades, the diversification of the field of political science has been the subject of research, yet the challenge of achieving equity within the field persists. Given the voluminous published research on best practices, how to generate that improved climate is no mystery. However, the gap between knowledge and action persists. It is a gap in investment and action.

THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of bias are pervasive and persistent throughout academia, including in political science, and these problems have been documented extensively (Fraga, Givens, and Pinderhughes 2011; Lavariega Monforti 2012; Lavariega Monforti and Michelson 2008, 2020; McClain et al. 2016; Thomas and Hollenshead 2001). First-person perspectives on these challenges and institutional racism have been shared by Alexander-Floyd (2015), Sinclair-Chapman (2015), and Smooth (2016), to name only a few. Individuals from historically excluded groups, especially women of color, have been tokenized by their departments and institutions and asked to assume extra, uncompensated service tasks (Simien and Wallace 2022). They feel invisible, are the subject of microaggressions, and report a sense of not belonging to departments that tend to be dominated by white men (Ghosh and Wang 2022).

This rich literature of previous work also documents best practices for institutions and departments to adopt to ensure that they are achieving their diversity and inclusion goals. Yet, lack of implementation of these recommendations persists. After reviewing and summarizing best practices in transforming campus climates, hiring, and retention, this article addresses the persistent gap between institutional knowledge of what should be done and the lack of action among most political science departments.

TRANSFORMING CAMPUS CLIMATES

University administrators are crucial to fostering an environment of diversity and inclusion, and they should make administrative hires with diversity in mind. Deans should insist on additional hires for the purpose of diversifying their departments, and administrators should approve those hires (Fraga, Givens, and Pinderhughes 2011). Deans and other administrators should send frequent messages that restate their commitment to equity and inclusion efforts, and they must back up those statements with resources. Department chairs should

make diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives part of their goals, providing annual reports of progress. Administrators must require search committees to increase their expertise in basic recruiting and hiring practices. Faculty members must be incentivized to participate in and resources must be allocated to deliver quality, in-person antiracism trainings (Lavariega and Michelson 2008).

BEST PRACTICES IN HIRING

Sinclair-Chapman (2015) listed the following eight general steps required to diversify political science departments:

- (1) create and support gender and racial caucuses or affinity groups
- (2) use national and regional associations to advocate for DEI efforts
- (3) rely on political science students to serve as allies and present to administrators short- and long-term plans to change the department
- (4) solicit support from faculty senate committees
- (5) raise the issue of faculty diversity in venues that normally would not address it
- (6) seek allies in interdisciplinary departments and institutions
- (7) obtain buy-in from departmental administrators and ensure that powerful leaders serve on diversity committees
- (8) connect departmental diversity initiatives to the university's larger diversity mission

Multiple studies document best practices for increasing diversity through the hiring process (Beckwith 2015; Fradella 2018; Meier 2021). These include widely advertising postings to diversify a department's applicant pool and making the department more attractive to members of historically marginalized groups. The latter can be achieved by implementing curricular changes at the departmental level (e.g., adding a course on race and ethnic politics) or institutional policies that push back against gender inequities, such as paid maternity and family leave policies and free childcare and aftercare. Regardless of how departments work to ensure that short-listed candidates are diverse, choosing to interview a more diverse set of candidates will lead to more diverse hiring choices.

A persistent and recurring finding is that implicit bias continues to affect faculty hiring; however, this bias can be mitigated. Hiring committees should be mindful of implicit

biases and stereotypes that they and others may have about a candidate. Departments should conduct blind reviews of applications (e.g., by removing candidate names from application materials) and conduct preliminary interviews by telephone rather than on Zoom. Interviewers can share information about local schools, neighborhoods, and family leave policies, but they cannot ask candidates if they are married or have (or plan to have) children. Interviewers also should avoid assuming where candidates may want to live

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based on racial composition or other characteristics of local neighborhoods and how they do or do not complement a candidate's identity. Most important, interviewers must ensure that they speak up if a colleague is inappropriate in front of a candidate or during the hiring process.

Deans and hiring committees should take positive steps to call out and mitigate barriers to departmental diversification, including racism and misogyny. They should be mindful that usual standards for research may set barriers for women and members of historically marginalized groups, including first-generation scholars, and that steps should be taken to mitigate the negative effect that this can have on efforts to diversify the faculty.

Cultivating a more inclusive, diverse faculty through hiring is a long-term project that requires the support of all university members. Departments should commit to 10-year plans with multiple and periodic markers of progress. When writing a job advertisement, departments must be attentive to how it can be phrased as more attractive to candidates from historically marginalized groups. After an advertisement is finalized, departments should cultivate a diverse pool of applicants by reaching out directly to advisors of students who are women and/or people of color or to individual potential candidates, encouraging them to apply. Job descriptions and candidate-evaluation templates should include various measures of what defines a "quality" candidate beyond elite institutional pedigrees and that consider the way in which a candidate will contribute to and potentially improve the campus climate. A search committee short list should comply with the "Rooney Rule"—that is, it should include at least one member of a historically marginalized group. If it does not, administrators should insist that the search committee revisit the pool of candidates, or recruit additional candidates if necessary, before moving forward with the search process.

To make a department more attractive to candidates from historically marginalized groups, departments must coordinate with other departments and offices to cultivate a campus community that is welcoming and that fosters their growth, or communicate to candidates that there is a long-term plan to do so. During job interviews, department administrators should inform candidates about the opportunity to

meet with campus members from their self-identified groups, even if they are outside of the department. Administrators and departments also should pursue cluster hires.

Every search committee should include at least one equity advocate to mitigate bias and maximize the likelihood that candidates from historically marginalized groups will apply and be interviewed. The equity advocate should be included in writing job descriptions and in scheduling on-campus visits. The advocate should be a voting member of the search com-

mittee and from an external department—either a senior faculty member or a senior staff member. The advocate should have a checklist to follow derived from research on best practices for recruiting faculty from historically marginalized communities (possibly provided by the dean's office) and have accountability measures for the search committee. If the equity advocate observes bad behavior or bad actors, there should be clear reporting procedures and consequences imposed (e.g., if advice from the advocate is ignored, the dean will be notified).

BEST STRATEGIES FOR RETENTION

Once faculty members who are members of a marginalized group are hired, additional actions are needed to cultivate their retention and success (Alexander-Floyd 2015; Mickey, Kanlee, and Misra 2020; Smooth 2016). Given the well-documented bias against women and people of color in student evaluations, teaching evaluations should be based on teaching portfolios rather than only student evaluations (Holman, Key, and Kreitzer 2019). Furthermore, new faculty members' time should be protected with restrictions on service assignments. It is vital to provide them with time and resources to focus on their research, such as paid leave time or a reduction in teaching load, funds for data collection, or resources that cultivate mentoring relationships with senior scholars. Teaching faculty also benefit from this form of support, with a focus on professional development that enhances their ability to teach in inventive and productive ways.

Robust mentoring programs also are crucial (Abdul-Raheem 2016; Lavariega Monforti and Michelson 2019, 2020; Mickey 2020). New faculty members should be able to choose their own mentors and community rather than (or in addition to) having mentors assigned to them. However, administrators should ensure that this does not result in unequal mentoring burdens on faculty who are women and/or members of historically marginalized communities. Mentors need not share the identity of the mentee. Strong mentors provide not only advice and feedback for how to succeed in the discipline but also proactively open doors for their mentees. This latter role is one that men and white academics often are well poised to fill.

In addition to mentoring women and people of color, retention of a diverse faculty requires cultivating a campus

climate of inclusion—that is, ensuring that all faculty and staff appreciate the value of equity and diversity. Scholars of color should not be treated as less prepared or capable than white scholars. They also should not be reminded of promotion and tenure expectations more often than their white counterparts. Colleagues may believe that these reminders are helpful, but they can impact new faculty members by causing unnecessary

department or institution means recognizing the difference and prioritizing equity and long-term equality over short-term equality.

Administrators should send frequent messages that restate their commitment to equity and inclusion efforts and then support those statements with resources to departments, other campus groups, and DEI events. Administrators

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stress and anxiety about whether they belong in the department. Colleagues should not tokenize individuals by asking them to assume additional service assignments, and they should not ask marginalized scholars to police the actions or attitudes of other colleagues or students. Although it may be obvious, colleagues must address all faculty members by their correct (and correctly pronounced) name and not confuse them with other individuals from the same identity group (e.g., confusing the only two Black faculty members).

Department chairs should maintain clear and documented communication with deans and other higher-level administrators to ensure a consistent message about plans and expectations. Institutions should collect and share information about the diversity of their faculty and staff and efforts that have been adopted to hire, retain, and support faculty from historically marginalized groups, as well as efforts to teach existing faculty and staff how to mitigate implicit bias.

Departments also should create a DEI culture so that faculty from historically marginalized groups feel welcomed and supported. Tenure should not be a shield against censure and punishment for perpetuating a hostile climate. The burden should fall not only on people of color; white men and women also should be DEI advocates in their departments and institutions. They often are more influential in bringing about change at the departmental and institutional levels than people of color. For example, white colleagues might consider speaking less in faculty meetings and deliberately amplifying comments made by their colleagues of color—not to take credit for those comments but rather to draw attention to them and to their origin.

Another possible barrier to change is unconscious bias and the tendency for institutions and individuals imbued with white masculinist supremacy to reproduce themselves.

Hiring and retention practices should be mindful of the difference between equality and equity. Equity recognizes that different people have varying needs of support and assistance and that systems must be able to support individuals based on their specific needs. Cultivating a diverse, inclusive

can provide financial support to affinity groups (e.g., Black student centers and LGBTQ centers) and programs that support the academic study of historically marginalized groups (e.g., majors and minors in Chicano/Latino studies and women and gender studies). There should be a campus DEI officer—preferably at a high level (e.g., a vice president)—who is charged with fostering DEI measures across the entire campus.

PERSISTENCE OF CAMPUS CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Given the many published opinion and research articles on the topic, why do so many departments and institutions continue to fail to change their campus climate to be more inclusive and equitable?

Some people with the power to make change simply do not want to take the necessary action. They may believe that the problem is too big and that they cannot succeed, or that there is an insufficient number of people available in the pipeline from historically marginalized groups. They may believe that their campus or department should not be competing for those scholars when there are other institutions at which they will be more successful. They may be restricted by a lack of financial resources (or a perception of a lack).

Another barrier to change is unconscious bias and the tendency for institutions and individuals imbued with white masculinist supremacy to reproduce themselves. Many of our colleagues claim to not see the problem to be solved or claim an inadequate understanding that precludes their ability to take corrective action. Some even seem

puzzled or unconcerned by the ongoing whiteness and maleness of the spaces they occupy. Overcoming these challenges of awareness can be remedied by an ongoing focus on the issues of racism and sexism highlighted in this article, and by messaging from campus leaders about the

importance of doing so. When faculty members retire or leave an institution, deans should use this opportunity to diversify faculty.

Other colleagues may be deliberately committed to the status quo and not see a need to actively cultivate change. For example, they may think that research conducted by scholars of color is not of general interest and is tangential to the major questions in the field. They may think that these methods of generating a more inclusive and equitable campus climate are forms of reverse racism and that policies should be colorblind. They may think that as a woman or a person of color, they succeeded without these efforts, and therefore it is fair to expect those coming up behind them to do the same. These perspectives, to be blunt, reflect the misogyny, racism, and unexamined white supremacy that persist in the discipline.

Various carrots and sticks can be used to mitigate this resistance. Carrots include providing resources to departments so that they do not have to develop tools for cultivating inclusion. APSA has a role in this: the association could create and distribute shovel-ready toolkits for departments that are seeking to recruit and retain faculty and graduate students from historically marginalized communities. APSA also could maintain a website with links to supportive trainings and resources or examples of resources maintained at exemplary higher-education institutions. With APSA's support, departments must make it as easy as possible for colleagues to cooperate. Annual reviews can require sections that document how faculty members contributed to their department and university DEI plans. At the institutional level, administrators can provide extra funding or more faculty lines to departments that want to increase an offer to a preferred candidate who is a member of a historically marginalized group or to reward a department that has actively worked to diversify its faculty. Sticks might include clear consequences for faculty and staff who exhibit bad behavior or otherwise undermine progress on a DEI plan.

The best practices are out there. Quality graduate students and faculty who are members of historically excluded groups are out there. It is time to move past studying the problem and on to implementing these best practices into action, thereby developing a robust, diverse, and inclusive discipline of political science that will benefit our students, our departments, and our communities.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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

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