



Strategies for Increasing Faculty Diversity

Elizabeth Leigh Farrington
Volume 14 (11), p. 37-8
Expose and eradicate the Qualified Candidate Syndrome

Now in her fifth year at Loyola Marymount University in California, **Dr. Abbie Robinson-Armstrong** arrived during an exciting time for the Jesuit school.

Its president had just put money into the university's budget to hire 100 full-time faculty members, seeking to reduce the school's reliance on part-timers and to strongly increase the faculty's diversity. It was an opportunity for Dr. Robinson-Armstrong to experience her vision.

As the assistant to the president for intercultural affairs, Dr. Robinson-Armstrong was a part of a team that worked to create a series of programs to train faculty to recruit for diversity. The programs' intent was to clarify the mission of diversity recruitment for faculty and to debunk myths and stereotypes for hiring. Attendance was mandatory for anyone who wanted to sit on a hiring committee. This ensured that people doing the hiring at LMU believed in the mission of the university and wanted to support it.

Framework for the programs came from research obtained as one of 14 participants in a Diversity Scorecard program created by the University of California. LMU "took the data and ran with it," said Dr. Robinson-Armstrong, using it to inform its decisions and shape its programming.

She described her school's strategy for increasing faculty diversity at the fall meeting of the Southern California Higher Education Resource Consortium (HERC) meeting at UC-Riverside in September.

Start with the numbers

Currently, LMU has 312 tenure track faculty, 25% of whom belong to underrepresented groups. Of its 843 staff members, 47% are of underrepresented groups. Of 5,418 undergraduate students, 42% are of underrepresented groups. To achieve absolute educational equity, the university still needs to increase faculty diversity by 17%.

Figures such as these present a concrete framework for understanding why diversity recruitment is necessary. "We give them the research because they are faculty members and they need it to process the information," said Dr. Robinson-Armstrong.

Use of the data fits in with the program's five goals:

- Enroll program participants in the university's mission and provide concrete examples to clarify institutional goals
- Debunk myths and stereotypes associated with diversifying the faculty, including myths about the search process, institutional competition, qualified candidates and faculty availability
- Help program participants build a conceptual framework that makes a strong connection between academic excellence, quality and diversity
- Create and sustain a university-wide culture of evidence that affects decision making at all levels of the campus community
- Increase the percentage of underrepresented faculty to equal that of underrepresented students and achieve educational equity

Robinson-Armstrong said the theoretical framework for the program focused on: equity in higher education, organizational learning, diversity in higher education, faculty diversity and organizational culture and climate.

The faculty diversity training program consisted of three levels. Part I, "Best Practices for Recruiting and Hiring Faculty for Mission," covered the LMU mission and goals. It defined hiring for mission and discussed the objectives of increasing and promoting diversity, excellence, equity and quality in higher education. The sessions also sought to debunk certain myths and to expose and eradicate "Qualified Candidate Syndrome."

"You have to hit them before they hit you," said Dr. Robinson-Armstrong, describing how the programs take a proactive approach to educate faculty members before they have a chance to formulate their arguments.

Part I of the programs also contained practical tools, such as sessions on how to create ethnically sensitive job announcements, draft appropriate interview questions or access certain databases and forms. As a complement to the program, LMU also provided faculty with access to other information for recruitment, including a bank of more than 300 potential interview questions.

Faculty were also explicitly told to "be nice to the candidates" during the recruitment process.

The nuts and bolts

Part II of the program, "Selection Committee Briefing," addressed faculty members who were about to be on a search committee. Its goal was to teach faculty how to move away from traditional recruitment, by learning how to create proactive plans and discuss their actions before beginning the search.

Proactive recruitment involves essential prerequisite search activities, such as networking, writing letters to people and accessing lists of women and minority PhD graduates. The program provided participants with a tool kit with information on which schools promote and graduate the most students. The program's manual also has a section with addresses, forms and letters faculty can adapt and use for their own purposes.

LMU's program also covered the role of and responsibilities of proactive search committees, including adhering to legal standards, maintaining consistency and following ethical principles.

Other components of Part II included a very popular workshop that explores the concept of "qualified candidates." Presenters gave the audience five different questions, asking who is more qualified for a position.

Best practices for campus visits were covered. They included scheduling time for females going into an all-male department to talk to other females on campus, for example, or finding conversation partners for candidates who are GLBT, members of a minority group or parents. "Invite candidates to say what they would like to do or see," while on campus, suggested Dr. Robinson-Armstrong.

At this stage of the training process, LMU invited faculty from other departments who have done a great job of increasing diversity recruitment to serve as "Internal Experts," which faculty always love to do, she said. LMU also asked faculty to record their experiences in print and then publicizes them, because that stirs competition between departments: "If math can do it, you can do it too!"

Evaluating the process

Part III of the program was about accountability. Following a search, faculty filled out an online evaluation. It included quantitative questions that reflect program content, and open-ended questions that allow participants to reflect on the success or failure of the hiring process. Quantitatively, the diversity scorecard can be used to analyze which candidates were in what pools and to what levels they advanced.

Following the program's implementation, results at LMU were phenomenal. There were increases in the number of both women and minority faculty. "The numbers skyrocketed, because people could see the links between the pedagogy and the mission," said Dr. Robinson-Armstrong, noting that the program also resulted in an increase in:

- The percentage of new faculty who demonstrate an understanding of and appreciation for the mission and goals of the university
- Participation in pedagogy workshops
- Participation in diversity oriented programs sponsored by Center for Teaching Excellence
- The number of faculty grants that focus on some aspect of diversity

Individual departments also registered success stories. One department had only one woman initially. Within one year, it had hired a female dean and associate dean and two minority faculty members—and two more in the next year. "They never said anything, and fought us during the programs, but somehow it sank in," said Dr. Robinson-Armstrong.

Obstacles to overcome

Resistance to the program's materials and practices included an adherence to traditional recruitment mythology, most linked to the relationship between diversity and educational excellence, she said. Stubborn, persistent mythology included the notion that in order to diversify, a search committee needed to lower its standards.

These myths stem from a Eurocentric and/or exclusionary thought model, and reflect cultural morés that tend to define predominantly white higher education institutions in the United States, said Dr. Robinson-Armstrong: "This is why you hit them before they hit you. You know that the academe has been the academe since 1636, and if you try to change it you're in trouble."

She outlined other obstacles including:

- Inflexibility: "If it isn't broke, why do we need to fix it?"
- Uneven support at the administrative level
- Implementing change within the academy

- Discipline-focused recruitment
- Unclear understanding of and/or lack of focus on institutional mission and goals
- Lack of knowledge of research on faculty diversity
- Left hand failing to know what the right hand is doing

Using best practices

As the numbers at LMU have demonstrated, schools can overcome obstacles to diversity recruitment. Dr. Robinson-Armstrong shared her strategies for success:

- Garner support from the top and from the bottom.
- Individualize the program to focus on your specific mission and goals.
- Use a qualitative researcher to develop internal documents, case studies and processes as part of the program.
- Obtain critical reviews of the program's content from across the campus, including key staff.
- Take lessons from the literature on organizational learning: Include all members of the search committee in the faculty diversity program.
- Identify and utilize internal experts and their success stories.
- Be up-front about institutional values throughout the program.
- Create Web-based "Tools of the Trade" information banks for easy access.
- Incorporate a measure of accountability into the program.
- Allocate fiscal resources to support the program.
- Utilize "Time on Target" as an excellent tool for creating leaders who are willing to support institutional transformation.
- Evaluate the program regularly.
- Communicate success to internal campus community frequently.
- Include faculty diversity data in all annual reports to the campus community.

Dr. Robinson-Armstrong also recommended training faculty by department. Smaller presentations are more effective because departments have different cultures and tend to ask different questions. Having achieved success with faculty training programs, LMU is getting ready to roll out a diversity hiring program for the staff side. It will focus on the same topics, especially on re-enrolling staff in the school's mission.

**Contact Abbie Robinson-Armstrong, PhD, Loyola
Marymount University
arobinso@lmu.edu
310.338.7598**

Copyright © 1998- 2008 Women In Higher Education, all rights reserved.
Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.