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NEW MODELS FOR ACHIEVING DIVERSITY IN MANAGEMENT, UNIONS AND THE PROFESSORIATE: THE UMASS-AMHERST CASE

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This feels like a bit of a homecoming for me, not only because I was born and raised in New York City (actually, not far from here), but also because my father and grandfather were union leaders and I was a faculty union grievance officer before I became a university administrator or, as some of my colleagues put it, went over to the dark side.

I share this sentiment with you not just out of personal reminiscence, but as acknowledgment of the model and philosophy on which we have sought to build at UMass-Amherst. I believe that what we have achieved at our university regarding enhanced diversity results from a fundamental but often unspoken collaboration between the faculty—including the faculty union—and the university administration.

As an overview of my remarks, here are five areas I touch on:

1) key challenges to our goal of promoting faculty diversification even when we have the resources to hire new faculty
2) basic data concerning UMass-Amherst
3) changes introduced at UMass-Amherst
4) reflections on these changes in regard to the suggested or implied models
5) reflections on where we might go from here

One thing I do not discuss is why faculty diversification, particularly in gender and race, is important. I assume we share the belief that it is important to diversify: in part, because it is simply the right thing to do, part of the ongoing effort to correct current and past centuries of social injustice. Furthermore, diversification of the faculty is useful and necessary – it enriches our lives,
our perspectives, our curriculum and our students. Diversification provides positive role models for all, promotes understanding and mutual respect, and so on. Taking this as a given, there is no need for me to delve further into this belief.

Despite these largely shared values, efforts to enhance diversity in universities face daunting challenges. Major challenges include:

1) The unfortunately consistent belief among many of our colleagues that qualified candidates from under-represented minorities are very scarce
2) Considerable passivity in diversifying recruitment methods—that is, a tendency to rely on published ads and traditional networks
3) A tendency towards “academic cloning,” resulting from the comfort in hiring colleagues similar to oneself
4) The fear of some that attention to diversity and equity will distract from the pursuit of excellence
5) Concern that administrative layers and review may slow down the search process, or worse, interfere with the pre-eminence of the faculty in the search and hiring process

In the changes that we have introduced at UMass-Amherst, we have sought to be sensitive to these issues and concerns. A few words about UMass-Amherst provide some context for this discussion. It is the flagship campus of the public higher education system in Massachusetts, located about 90 miles west of Boston in a rural area. We enroll roughly 19,000 undergraduate and 6,000 graduate students and employ approximately 1,000 tenure-track faculty, spread over ten schools and colleges with more than 70 departments. Like most large universities, we are a loosely coupled blend of individuals and administrative units bound together largely by common parking facilities.

About six years ago, the university experienced severe cutbacks due to a downturn in the state economy. Only in the past three years has significant re-building of the faculty become possible, under the leadership of our Provost, Charlena Seymour, our former Chancellor, John Lombardi, and with the support and encouragement of our faculty senate and faculty union.

With about 100 tenure-track faculty searches per year, this year and for the next several years, this faculty re-building provides a rare opportunity to promote diversification, particularly in regard to gender and race or ethnicity. There is special concern for reaching out to and attracting those of under-represented minorities: namely, African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans.
This concern arises in part out of the recognition that we have what might be called, “a diversity gap.” While Caucasians constitute about 67% of the overall population of the U.S., they comprise almost 80% of university faculty at most large public research universities such as UMass-Amherst. African-Americans and Hispanics constitute about 28% of the overall population, yet only about 9% of the faculty identify as these groups. Similarly, women make up just over half of the general population, but less than a third of university faculty.

Typically, about 40% of the hires coming out of our tenure-track searches are women, and 27% of the tenure track hires are minorities, including 12% under-represented minorities. Last year was the second full year in which the administrative changes I’ll describe were in effect. Of the 70 tenure-track hires last year, 56% were women and 42% were minorities, of whom 26% were under-represented minorities.

The specifics of these percentages show a basic trend of dramatic increase in the proportion of women, minorities and under-represented minorities hired into tenure-track positions at UMass-Amherst. I hasten to add that there was no indication that standards or expectations were in any way lowered or compromised. For example, in the vast majority of searches, the candidate hired was the first choice of the search committee.

This trend was the result of a concerted effort to adjust our hiring practices, and certain changes introduced were particularly effective in fostering more diverse faculty hirings. First, the highest levels of the campus administration (the Chancellor and Provost) gave very clear and strong support to the importance of diversity in institutional priorities.

Second, the availability estimates data were updated, re-analyzed, and disseminated. Estimates of the availability of minority and women doctorates had been based on twenty-year composites (1984-2003) of doctoral recipients. Re-analysis focusing on the most recent three years predictably indicated that in many fields there were 10-15% more women doctorates available, and about double the percentage of under-represented minorities than indicated in the longer-term composite data.
Third, entry interviews with new hires were conducted to monitor their progress and to encourage a climate of support, mentorship and accountability. This particular initiative is especially relevant to the retention efforts I describe below.

Two sets of efforts have been especially effective in fostering the growth of diversity in faculty recruitment and hiring. First, we have instituted a more extensive mentoring and retention program. This entails providing small grants to facilitate mentoring; holding networking events to foster community-building; developing more extensive and systematic guidance with respect to career, research and teaching; lightening teaching loads in the early years of appointment to facilitate research and publication efforts; and so on.

I have been very involved with the second major set of initiatives. The Provost has developed a series of “checkpoints” in the search process to strengthen accountability and the faculty/administration partnership in this process. The monitoring and accountability system is organized around three checkpoints – requisition, invitation, offer (RIO) – each step of which requires the Provost’s authorization in order to move on to the next stage. Reflecting on the models suggested or implied by these initiatives, I judge that no one ingredient or single factor would be sufficient to bring about the positive results we have thus far achieved.

Accompanying the crystallization of these checkpoints was the creation of an Associate Provost for Faculty Recruitment and Retention, charged with monitoring and advising on the searches for tenure-track faculty. Essentially, this role is a combination cheerleader, coach, nag, matchmaker and stage manager ensuring quick turnaround in recommendations and communications; most importantly, this person is an advocate for diversity criteria and considerations.

At the requisition stage, the composition of search committees is scrutinized to ensure they embody gender and racial diversity. In addition, the language of the position announcement is expected to go beyond the obligatory minimum and manifest commitment to enhancing diversity in faculty, student body, and curriculum; this helps to make diverse candidates feel welcome and encouraged to apply. To further attract diversity candidates, deans and department chairs are encouraged to formulate the nature of the open positions as related to a diversity facet within the discipline. Finally, search strategies are expected to be proactive and personal: they should go beyond letters and published advertisements, aiming to make
personal contact with prospects and informants. This initiative stimulates applications and cumulatively diversifies the networks of those aware of the positions available.

The second stage concerns the point at which search committees request permission from their dean and the Provost to invite in short-listed candidates (usually four or five). Here, the short list and applicant pool are reviewed for their diversity relative to availability estimates. If this relative diversity is found lacking, further discussions take place about prospects that might have been passed over. In addition, the search process is reviewed to ensure that it has been appropriately proactive in reaching out to a suitably diverse network.

In the Offer stage, requests for authorization to make offers are reviewed. This process checks that candidates receive equitable consideration; that strong prospects from the short-list have not been passed over inappropriately; that the terms of the offer are appropriate (e.g., with respect to years of credit towards tenure); and that dual career needs are taken into account where appropriate.

Perhaps the most distinctive and strategic change implemented was the creation of a series of checkpoints through which the search process was required to pass, and that these checkpoints were monitored and guided by a designated senior academic administrator. This approach builds on and extends the model of shared governance characteristic of modern universities. It protects the primacy of faculty decision-making while strengthening existing structures of communication and accountability. It also ensures that the voices of search committees, department chairs, and deans are heard at key stages in the search process. Further, this approach addresses the challenge of loose coupling. By creating structures and steps that monitor and hold accountable key players in the process, institutional goals are not neglected or lost sight of by those who may have other priorities. Thus, relatively discrete, quasi-autonomous pockets or sub-units are guided by overall institutional goals and values.

Finally, this approach embraces the notion of “learning organization” by gathering, analyzing and making data visible. This data goes beyond outcomes to consider concrete facets of processes or key steps towards the outcome, including search committee composition, advertisement language, search strategies and contact networks, and composition of the applicant pool and the short list. This approach to data usage, combined with the building of feedback loops into the decision process, helps to hold assorted units
accountable for the progress they make in processes as well as outcomes. This institutes a form of what might be called “process accountability.”

I close with a few final thoughts on where we need to go from here. Progress is being made in faculty diversification. Not only are the numbers improving, but there appears to be a growing commitment to diversification and a culture of hope and possibility that we can and are enhancing faculty diversity. However, the limited need for new faculty in relation to the availability of diverse prospects is a major limitation. Therefore, we can not simply adjust the makeup of faculty all at once. Instead, it is essential that we do not reproduce the limited diversity of the existing faculty composition. This can be prevented by building “pipelines” and pathways to prepare, recruit, and support more diversity at every level, from early on (reaching down into middle and high schools) through post-doctoral opportunities. Clearly, the challenges and barriers are considerable, but with proper attention and due efforts, together we shall overcome.