Best Practices in Faculty Search

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Sept. 6, 2017
Federal law vs. UNM policy and procedures

- U.S. Civil rights laws and educational amendments prohibit discrimination and require universities to be fair and to offer equal opportunities
- Universities decide what this means and how to put it into practice
- Evolving “best practices” (and “worst practices”) determine what the “law” means in each organization
Shift UNM procedures into conformity with national best practices

Examples include:
- Making pool as broad as possible
- Training for search committee chairs and members
- Diverse committees, and presence of a “diversity representative”
- Strategies to combat effects of unconscious bias
- Strategies to minimize influence of group dynamics on committee decisions
- Evaluation forms completed by everyone who meets the candidate
Phrasing matters!
- Narrow qualifications → people self select out of the pool
- Cues of belonging → people self select into the pool
Problem with path dependence

Most departments define academic positions in terms of the previous occupant, previous searches, or a very specific current teaching need. This practice emphasizes continuity in research emphasis and curricular needs. But an often unintended side effect is to reproduce the homogeneous demographics of the past (Stewart and Valian, forthcoming).

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→ Altering departmental composition requires some rejection of past practices and demands a fresh approach!
How to maximize the breadth of the pool

- Actively recruit candidates
  - All department members should treat this as a year-round activity
- Describe job in broadest possible terms
  - Open searches plus motivation to hire women have produced good results
- List range of potential courses to be taught, not just 2 or 3
- Avoid gendered language (dominant versus excellent)
- Include “cues of belonging” in ad, while upholding criteria of excellence to judge all candidates
  - “this is a family-friendly institution”
  - UNM has spousal hiring policy
  - ADVANCE at UNM is improving climate for all faculty, etc.
- Don’t assume people aren’t interested or won’t move!

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Next step: committee composition and practices

- Include a diverse range of background, experiences, perspectives
- Be seen as credible and legitimate
- Members should participate in training on evaluation biases
- Establish selection criteria and methods for screening and evaluating candidates ahead of time, before the files come in
- Collect and review data on composition of pool and how it compares to national benchmark
- Adopt procedures enabling quieter people and minority perspectives to speak
- Avoid evaluative language such as “intuition” and “fit”
  - Explain what you mean in terms accessible to everyone
Manual on Faculty Searches

- To be distributed soon to everyone on a search committee!
  - customized for varying attention spans
- Will cover all the stages of search
  - defining position description
  - composition and practices of search committees
  - how to evaluate applicants
  - conducting on-campus interviews