EXAMINING AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO HIRING TENURE TRACK FACULTY

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ABSTRACT

Hiring tenure track faculty is one of the most important decisions in higher education. Hiring outcomes shape faculty careers, the process is costly and time consuming and, ultimately, hiring significantly impacts the character of academic departments and institutions. Despite its central importance, hiring is often driven by past practices with little regard for empirical data concerning "successful" hiring. The hiring process at California State University Channel Islands, a startup campus with an alternative approach to faculty hiring, may offer useful contrasts to traditional practices. This paper examines several years of experience using our alternative approach and suggests avenues for additional research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although they consume time and money with lasting impacts on the character and composition of academic organizations, processes for faculty recruitment and selection remain poorly understood. The processes employed to identify and hire faculty are shaped by tradition and past practice, rather than by careful analysis of empirical data. The limited data are surprising given the scope of the academic labor market, the significant costs and the high stakes associated with the hiring academic colleagues.

The lack of data is not from a lack of hiring experience within higher education. Each year, tens of thousands of candidates participate in the thousands of searches advertised in the Chronicle of Higher Education, in a wide range of journals and professional association bulletins and via online job listings. While these searches often produce many highly qualified candidates, institutions frequently struggle to identify good matches and to make "successful" hires. Out of these struggles has emerged a small, but useful, body of information about candidates, their qualifications, their experiences and the effectiveness of various phases of the hiring process.

There are a number of publications related to hiring in higher education. However, much of this literature offers "how-to" guidance for search committees (Heiberger & Vick), ratherthan empirical studies or critical analyses of prevailing practices. Many publications describe best practices and steps to comply with legal requirements while conducting individual searches. There are substantial writings that promote various types of diversity throughout the hiring process.

2. COMMON PRACTICES

Each institution has a standard set of processes for conducting faculty searches. Various departments within the institution may further refine the policies and practices. The hiring processes are shaped in part by legal or administrative requirements. Also, they often incorporate past practices within the institution, the discipline, and the experience of the search committee members. Processes may evolve from year-to-year, but tend to be based on previous practices. The generally established pattern for most searches can be summarized:

> A new position is advertised for about three months. A faculty search committee reviews applications and narrows the group of candidates for more detailed consideration by the entire faculty. Sometimes, telephone interviews or interviews at annual meetings ... are used to narrow the field. The committee then selects between two and four candidates for on-campus interviews. After all candidates have been interviewed on campus, the faculty vote on candidates and -depending on the particulars of the department - the

department head makes a decision as to which candidate is preferred. The department then forwards its decision to university administrators, who are usually responsible for the actual hiring decision. (Shively, Woodward and Stanley, p. 520)

Details of the process may vary from department to department within an institution, but tend to conform to norms established within the institution and the discipline of the academic department. These norms mandate conformance with the campus human resources practices and with state or federal guidelines.

There is limited data available about the effectiveness or efficiency of search processes. Much of the available information is based on first-hand accounts, particularly from candidates' perspectives. Such anecdotal data are often commentaries about personal experiences or advice for candidates on what to expect from the process (Broughton, & Conlogue; Shivley, Woodward, & Stanley). One author offered "six commandments of the academic job market," with three concerning the market's perceived capriciousness (Drezner). There are also offerings of advice, description, or reflection by selection committee participants (Nelson; Rifkin; Van der Vorm).

Surprisingly little quantitative data are available. In one case, a couple seeking positions in Political Science decided to collect and record data about their own experiences (Furlong and Furlong). A pair of studies from Psychology utilized surveys of search committee chairs to examine factors influencing hiring decisions (Landrum & Clump; Sheehan, McDevitt, & Ross). While each of these offers useful information for understanding academic searches, they are narrow in scope and examine a limited number of variables within relatively small populations.

3. AN ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE: HIRING AT A NEW CAMPUS

While empirical data about the faculty hiring process are limited, information concerning alternative hiring practices is practically nonexistent. There is an absence of serious discussion about selection processes that differ significantly from established patterns. New institutions offer opportunities to examine the utility of alternative approaches. In fall 2002 California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) opened as the 23rd campus in the California State University (CSU) system. CSUCI approaches tenure track hiring with a process that focuses on our institutional Mission - in addition to disciplinary criteria.

The CSUCI hiring process includes traditional elements, plus an emphasis on interdisciplinarity and other elements unique to the Mission and culture of our campus. Like many institutions, we utilize an on-line system to process the initial applications. When applicants use the CSUCI web site to view position announcements, they see our Mission Statement before coming to the disciplinary description or other information about tenure track positions. Our recruiting process is constructed around and guided by our Mission Statement:

> Placing students at the center of the educational experience, California State University Channel Islands provides undergraduate and graduate education that facilitates learning within and across disciplines through integrative approaches, emphasizes experiential and service learning, and graduates students with multicultural and international perspectives (CSUCI, 2003, p.9).

Our hiring process focuses on key elements of the University Mission: experiential learning, international perspectives, multicultural perspectives, and interdisciplinary approaches. The interdisciplinary approach receives the greatest emphasis. Search committees are formed by faculty from the discipline that is the focus of the search, but they must also include additional members from other disciplines. These interdisciplinary committees review applications and conduct phone interviews to narrow the pool to three candidates for campus interviews for each position.

Table 1: Sample Candidate Schedule for CSUCI Campus Interview Session

Time	Room 1602	Room 1642	Room 1424	Room 1422	Room 1684	Room 1494 (Hospitality Rm & Campus Tour)	Provost's Conf. (Interdisciplinary Discussions)	Dean's Conf. (Admin Meeting)
9:00-9:30	Welcome To Campus-Malibu Hall							
	Committee Interviews/Presentations							
9:45-10:35 Session 1	Physiology	Economics	Info Tech	Educ Found	Demography	Theatre / Library Systems / Political Science / Spanish / Nursing	Music / Library Instruction / History - World / Education Science / Sociology	Communication / Management / Education Literacy / History - US / Math
10:45-11:35 Session 2	Biology	Accounting	Comp Sci	Special Educ	Psychology	Physiology / Economics / Information Tech / Education Foundatio / Demography	Theatre / Library Systems / Political Science / Spanish / Nursing	Music / Library Instruction / History - World / Education Science / Sociology
11:50-12:45	Lunch-Malibu Hall							
1:00-1:50 Session 3	Comm	Management	History - US	Educ Literacy	Math	Biology / Accounting / Computer Science / Special Education / Psychology	Physiology / Economics / Information Tech / Education Foundation / Demography	Theatre / Library Systems / Political Science / Spanish / Nursing
2:00-2:50 Session 4	Music	Library Instr	History - Worl	Educ Science	Sociology	Communication / Management / Education Literacy / History - US / Math	Biology / Accounting / Computer Science / Special Education / Psychology	Physiology / Economics / Information Tech / Education Foundations / Demography
2:50-3:20	Break							
3:20-4:10 Session 5	Theatre	Library Sys	Political Sci	Spanish	Nursing	Music / Library Instruction / History - World / Education Science / Sociology	Communication / Management / Education Literacy / History - US / Math	Biology / Accounting / Computer Science / Special Education / Psychology
5:00-6:15	Dinner-Malibu Hall							

Candidates for campus interviews in one discipline are added to a larger candidate pool recommended by other search committees. From this larger pool, we invite groups of 15 to 25 candidates to visit our campus at the same time. These visits mix candidates throughout the five blocks of time set for campus visits (Table 1). The campus visits include traditional activities such as interviews with the committee, Dean, Provost and President. In addition, candidates take part in formal group activities with other candidates from a range of disciplines. They are encouraged to interact with non-committee members as part of the two-day process. All CSUCI tenure track faculty are encouraged to participate in the campus visit process whether or not they are part of a disciplinary search committee. There are formal processes for input to search committees from non-committee members. Anecdotal evidence from candidates indicates that both the search process and the campus interactions are highly effective at communicating the centrality of the campus Mission.

Table 2:
Comparison of Tenure Track Search Outcomes for CSUCI and CSU System: 2001-2006

Year	CSUCI Searches	Appli-cations	Hires	% Success	% CSU Successful Searches	Average applicants per search	CSU average applicants per search
2001	24	2,140	13	54.2%	74%	89	27
2002	29	4,287	17	58.6%	73.6%	148	31
2003	43	2,188	20	47%	64%	51	28
2004	0	0	0	n/a	55%	0	32
2005	29	1,356	12	41%	74%	47	36
2006	29	1,509	14	48.2%	*	52	*
2001-2006	154	11,480	76	49.3%	n/a	75	n/a

Source: California State University, Office of the Chancellor (2002, 2003, 2004, & 2005); California State University Channel Islands (2006); * system data not yet available for 2006

If an accepted offer of employment is the measure of "success," our process appears to produce only modest success compared to other CSU campuses (Table 2). This lower rate of hiring "success" occurred at CSUCI despite our having a significantly higher number of applicants per position than the rest of the CSU system. It is important to note that CSUCI is consistently above the system average in both salaries and relocation costs offered to new faculty each year (CSU 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005). The availability of below-market on-campus faculty housing and the opportunity to participate in developing a new campus further enhances the attractiveness of CSUCI.

Another perspective from which to view "success" may be faculty retention since retention can be an indicator of institutional "fit" for new hires. In 2001-2006, CSUCI hired 76 tenure track faculty members and only 6 have left the University.

4. ASSESSING THE RESULTS

The relatively low "success" rate in hiring (compared to other CSU campuses) suggests that our search process may focus higher levels of scrutiny on candidates resulting on increased selectivity. However, given the added pressures and workload inherent in a start-up environment, the retention of more than 90% of hires over a six year period is significant. This retention level suggests that, while it may not produce a greater number of hires, our alternative process may produce a high level of "fit" for faculty hires at CSUCI. It is unclear how much of the "fit" results from a) the elements of our alternative hiring process, b) the role of the salary differential (CSUCI pays higher average salaries than other CSU campuses), c) other tangible and intangible benefits offered by CSUCI as a startup university, and d) our strong emphasis on our institutional Mission leading to candidates' self-selection out of our hiring process. We believe that our hiring process contributes to building a campus culture with a central focus on our Mission. For faculty already on the campus, the hiring process provides an annual opportunity to reexamine and reconfirm aspects of our culture.

CSUCI is planning for rapid growth over the next five years. As the campus grows, our hiring process faces a number of challenges. The campus is already struggling with issues of scalability: how to adapt processes (including hiring) that function with fewer than 100 tenure track faculty to a growth pattern that includes doubling student enrollment in a few years. With a larger faculty group, it will not be possible to maintain the same level of participation in a shared search process because of the scale of the process and the time commitment required. It is also unclear whether the process will produce a sufficient number of "successful" hires to keep pace with our needs.

Other issues have emerged related to decision-making mechanisms and the timing of searches. Despite the campus focus on interdisciplinarity, as disciplines establish themselves, there are tensions between the disciplinary search committees and the larger faculty groups concerning final hiring recommendations. Another concern: different hiring cycles unique to specific disciplines -with some conducting annual meetings in fall and others in spring. (Some discipline search committees interview candidates on-site at their annual meetings - and then invited them to campus.) To date, campus visits have been in the spring semester, creating an increasing challenge for disciplines that have annual meetings at other times.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY AND PRACTICE

There is no comprehensive body of data about what happens within the faculty selection process or the results of this process. To evaluate higher education's hiring efforts, we should have information and quantitative data that more fully describes the process, the roles played by various participants, how committees work (and don't work), and the outcomes of the process. This information is needed both by discipline and by institutional type. Some data may already be

available from public systems (e.g., CSU system). These data identify campuses with high levels of success or failure in a given recruiting cycle. Similar data are often collected by national associations in various disciplines. After adjusting for budget, job market, institutional reputation, and other factors, it may be possible to analyze the characteristics of efficient and effective searches.

Since we consider hiring as the most important decision within all organizations, we recommend further study and analysis of current and potential hiring processes - with a goal of achieving greater hiring effectiveness.

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