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Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Academic and Senior Leadership Recruitment: Themes and Directions from the Literature

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Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Academic Recruitment: Principles and Practices

INTRODUCTION

Emphasis on EDI is accelerating across the postsecondary landscape where there is increasing attention to inequities and disparities as they relate to recruitment, retention, and advancement of academic faculty, students, and staff. Focus on EDI is also reflected in programs like Dimensions: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Canada Awards and the emphasis on meeting EDI goals within the context of Canada Research Chairs Program environment.

Here at the University of Alberta, the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Strategic Plan builds upon values and objectives described in For the Public Good and articulates our commitment to the principles and practices that engender EDI. This includes our commitment to identify, develop, and implement recruitment practices that support our values. Indeed, every recruitment activity provides an important opportunity to advance the principles and practice of equity, diversity, and inclusion. This document offers guidelines and signposts for those undertaking to model leadership in the realm of equity, diversity and inclusion. The importance of this is emphasized by Kang and Kaplan (2019) who observe that "The behavior of those at the head of a group have a powerful influence on the people further down the group" (p. 593), therefore shifting norms relating to diversity and inclusion are significantly affected by the ability of leadership to influence institutional culture (and practices).

Throughout the recruitment process it is important to remember that "excellence and equity, diversity, and inclusion are not oppositional categories" (Fine & Handelsman, 2012, p. 26). The intention to embed the principles of EDI will, in fact, expand the possibilities for recruiting to excellence.

In this document the following topic areas are reviewed, specifically as they relate to EDI.

- the selection committee
- the consultant
- the position profile
- identifying potential candidates
- the selection process

THE SELECTION COMMITTEE

One of the single most important factors in the recruitment process is the composition and preparation of the search committee (Vicker & Royer, 2006; Stewart & Valian, 2018; Harvard University, 2016; Fine and Handelsman, 2012). Diversity refers to a number of dimensions: racialized identities, genders, sexualities, abilities, positions within the university, and so forth. If the composition is not diverse then develop strategies to mitigate this, which might include presentations, and/or education (e.g. workshops, online training, and readings).

While necessary, diversity on the committee is not sufficient to ensure that EDI is foregrounded in the recruitment process. Fine and Handelsman (2012) remind us that an open and robust discussion about how to ensure intentionality as it related to EDI is also important as are conversations about and plans to address the inevitable biases that all humans bring to recruitment processes. According to Kang and Kaplan (2019) "clearly outlining the goal [of eliminating bias] within search committees" (p. 582) is an important step in ensuring equity in recruitment practices in that it concretizes abstract ideals. Bringing those aspirations to fruition will require reading and in-services that facilitate engagement with the everyday effects of bias and stereotypes, especially as they relate to evaluating candidate dossiers.

In addition to proficiency with respect to EDI, the committee can benefit from having a road map for conducting meetings, making decisions, navigating differences, and resolving conflict. This includes consideration for relations of power within the committee given that,

> Imbalances of power among committee members can silence some members while allowing for others to control too much of the search process. Dealing with these dynamics and the behavior of colleagues are some of the chair's primary responsibilities. It is helpful when other committee members draw colleagues into the discussion since it is the committee, not a single individual (or even pair of individuals), which is making all decisions (Harvard University, 2016, p. 5). A well-functioning selection committee will be better placed to engage with EDI issues as they relate to the recruitment process, including the final stages of decision making when the stakes can be high.

Finally, mindfulness throughout the process will help prevent searches that are "passive and routinized" and which will support a robust focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion (Freudenberger et al., 2009, p. 256).

SELECTING A CONSULTANT

A recruitment consultant that has knowledge and experience relating to EDI practices will increase the likelihood that the committee's aspirations in regards to EDI are realized. When inviting proposals and interviewing prospective consultants, current practice recommends the hiring committee requests specific information about the consultant's EDI track record (internally and relating to their executive search practices), including evidence that the firm has undertaken to develop its knowledge, skills, and practices relating to EDI signals both commitment to and proficiency in these areas.

Additionally, theoretical framework that guides the consultant's EDI practice is coherent with the University of Alberta's, which is outlined in the front matter of the EDI strategic plan document.

If there is a gap between the consultant's level of proficiency in and commitment to the principles and practices of EDI as it relates to recruitment, the committee can

1. provide the firm with rubrics and basic principles relating to the institution's vision for cultivating equitable, diverse, and inclusive learning environments to ensure the firm's search lens does not exclude promising (non-traditional) candidates.
2. establish expectations and timelines for the firm to remediate these gaps.

POSITION PROFILE

The position profile sends a powerful signal about what constitutes a successful candidate. Attention to the discursive weight of words will help to ensure correspondence between what is intended and what is perceived by prospective candidates. There is a growing body of research available to guide the development of position profiles using an EDI lens.

Crafting a vision for the position

Often the development of a position profile begins with a general vision for the position. This can help the committee maintain a clear focus on what is most salient. This includes the committee's aspirations for how this position will contribute to, and advance the university's ideals and strategic direction in regards to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Incorporating EDI into the vision, also helps to ensure that these values are embedded into all phases of the recruitment process and EDI becomes a 'must have' not a 'nice to have'. To these ends the committee might ask itself, "how does the U of A want to lead and innovate with respect to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and how will the individual in this position be called upon to contribute to that vision?"

Broaden position profile

Given the wording and intent of the position profile will affect who might envision themselves in the position, the literature on recruiting non-traditional candidates emphasizes the importance of broadening the position profile (Vicker & Royer 2005, Stewart & Valian 2018, Fine & Handelsman 2012). The profile, which is distinct from the position description, serves to describe a range of attributes, qualities and experiences that are desirable in the successful candidate (Vicker & Royer, 2005). To cast the widest net possible, from an EDI perspective, the position "should be described in the broadest terms that are accurate" (Stewart & Valian, p. 176). The more specific and specifically descriptive the desired attributes of the potential candidate, the more likely women and other historically excluded candidates will self-select out of the running. In part, this may be due to the phenomenon known as depressed entitlement in which women, visible minorities and others erroneously conclude they are not qualified for a position due to the narrowness of the profile.

One approach to ensuring the position description is sufficiently broad is to invite key stakeholders to provide reactions to, and feedback on, draft versions of the position profile (Vicker & Royer, 2005).

Embed EDI into the position profile

According to Coe et al. (2019) institutional success with respect to EDI is reflected in "… durable and sustainable cultural change [and] the driving principle must be widespread acceptance and pursuit of the hypothesis that an organization can and must become ever more equitable, diverse, and inclusive (p. 393). Institutional change is best served by what Stewart and Valian (2018) describe as "convergent bottom-up and top-down change" which requires self-aware leadership at all levels of the academy. The importance of leadership in the flourishing of EDI is unequivocal, but this is leadership of a particular kind (Coe et al. 2019, Stewart & Valian 2018, Brown-Glaude 2008, Brown-Glaude & Brown Glaude, Eds. 2009, Henry et al. 2017). Senior leaders who have been successful in cultivating equitable, diverse, and inclusive environments engage in thoughtful self-reflection regarding the presence and effects of their own biases, and encourage their colleagues to do so as well (Coe et al. 2019, p. 589). Moreover, they go beyond the production of mission and vision statements to announce, fund, and recognize EDI successes and efforts to remediate historical systemic inequities (Stewart & Valian, 2018). Crafting a profile that calls for these qualities in a leader not only signals the University's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, it demonstrates the importance for the successful candidate to possess the knowledge, skills, and experience to steer equity initiatives. It provides what Stewart and Valian call "cues of belonging" (p. 176), and increases the likelihood that non-traditional candidates and/or candidates committed to EDI, will apply.

A profile that embeds the principles of EDI might:

- make direct reference to the potential candidate's knowledge about and experience with successfully implementing strategic EDI initiatives
- include the expectation that potential candidates will provide "a statement about their past contributions to diversity and their anticipated contributions at the institution to which they are applying" (p. 185).
- use inclusive, unbiased, ungendered language such as "all genders" rather than stipulate "women and men," and use the pronoun "them" instead of "him" and/or "her."
- avoid prioritizing those traits and descriptions traditionally viewed as masculine (see https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/news/2017/01/17/your-job-listing-s-language- may- determine-whether.html for a discussion of the effects of gendered language on recruitment)

SHORTLISTING

Shortlisting is another critical moment in the recruitment process and one in which reliance on standard or default rubrics and proxies contribute to the exclusion of promising, non-traditional candidates. Over reliance on proxies is often due to time constraints and may disadvantage women and other historically excluded candidates

(Stewart & Valian, 2018). The selection committee has an opportunity, at this stage of the process, to re-evaluate and re-imagine non- traditional proxies for excellence. Planning for this process, by allocating sufficient time, will help ensure a better outcome.

Integrating an EDI lens into shortlisting processes and practices

The development and use of a rubric help to improve fairness and transparency in all stages of the recruitment process (from shortlisting through to the final stages of selection). Integral to the formulation of the overall rubric is the integration of an EDI lens. While hiring the best candidate is always central to any recruitment process, as Brown-Glaude observes, "...the language of an objective "best candidate" often serves as a proxy for hiring a candidate whose personal and professional choices most resemble those who are already faculty members, particularly senior faculty" (Ackelsberg, Hart, Miller, Queeney, & Van Dyne, 2009, p. 90).

One way to mitigate defaulting to traditional proxies is to, as previously discussed, ensure the committee is diverse and has some background and preparation in equity, diversity, and inclusive practices. Another way is for the committee to discuss, interrogate, and modify the proxies to meet the needs of the particular search they are undertaking. Historically, size of institution, number and type of academic publications, research record, absence of career interruptions, advancement through one or more Tier One or U15 institutions, are all viewed as proxies for desirability. But as Stewart and Valian (2018) remind us, "Relying on proxy information substitutes a history of other people's views of the candidate for one's own independent evaluation" (p. 212).

In service to EDI principles and goals, search committees are encouraged to develop additional criteria by which to evaluate prospective candidates on factors other than those given by traditional proxies for excellence. These should be discussed and established in advance of the review process to ensure fairness and equity and will provide a foundation for the development of other evaluation rubrics, like the interview questions. EDI indicators might include:

- salient accomplishments while in leadership positions (e.g. history of achieving or exceeding institution wide EDI goals and objectives or meeting international benchmarks for excellence, in previous institutional positions)
- demonstrates aptitudes associated with being an equity leader such as evidence of the candidate's ability to engender collegiality and collaboration.

Long shortlists and shortlists

Search committees are advised by Fine & Handelsman (2012) to initially develop a "long short-list" and to include in that list "all potentially strong applicants...not just applicants you personally may prefer" (p. 62) and thereby improves the chances of non-traditional candidates. Once compiled, the long shortlist should be reviewed for diversity. If the list does not include qualified non-traditional candidates then revisit the original process, including the rubric for assessing candidate strength and suitability, looking for evidence of bias (e.g. defaulting to traditional proxies for excellence, interpreting grindstone adjectives as signaling a deficit). This stage can be time consuming, so allocating sufficient time is essential to ensure thoroughness.

Remember to:

- consider all elements of the application package, do not privilege one element over another (such as letters of reference)
- watch for the effects of bias based on any of the protected grounds and attend more broadly to evidence of bias: see Henry et al.'s Dirty Dozen
- attend to grindstone adjectives v superlatives which may signal gendered or other forms of bias
- for example, women, visible and other minority groups are often described as helpful while men,especially white men are often described as ambitious. (Henry et al, 2017, p. 268)
- recognize non-traditional career trajectories and the effects on publications, presentations, access to research funding that may be affected by the candidate's subject position. (Stewart & Valian 2018, Henry et al. 2017).

During the final shortlisting process, it is helpful to revisit the committee's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion and to review one of the anti-bias resources to mitigate bias and to ensure that all suitable finalists have been considered and that none have been excluded through unrecognized bias. This is especially important if the shortlist does not contain any non-traditional candidates, nor candidates with a proven record of success and experience in and with leading EDI initiatives and strategies.

Interviews, Campus Visits and other Facets of the Selection Process

Within the context of equity, diversity, and inclusion there are three main considerations to attend to during these facets of the recruitment process:

- Ensure the interview rubric contains sufficient focus on EDI and scrupulously adheres to human rights guidelines
- Ensure the committee has an opportunity to review and discuss how they will mitigate the inevitable presence of bias, during and after the final stages of recruitment
- Be proactive with respect to ensuring the physical spaces that are being used conform as much as possible to best accessibility practices
- Be proactive in designing in person processes that allow for sufficient rest and nutrition breaks

It is important to think inclusively during all stages of the recruitment process and to imagine and plan for an accessible, inclusive, and equitable interview and site visit processes. For example, regardless of who you interview, hold all in person recruitment activities in a place that is fully accessible for all abilities and genders. Take into account auditory, visual, physical, and other accessibility issues and consult with subject matter experts in advance. The degree to which this is considered in advance will allow for the committee to include this in the posting, thus signaling the University's commitment to the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

IN SUMMARY

This overview highlights the degree to which post-secondary institutions are attending to and building upon their knowledge and practice of EDI in recruitment. One of the most common themes in the literature is the need for deliberation and intentionality in prioritizing EDI throughout all phases of the recruitment process. This consistency and focus help ensure that EDI is embedded in all decision-making rubrics and perspectives.

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