

National Viewpoint: The Importance of Hiring a Diverse Faculty

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ABSTRACT

In the current educational climate, our schools are increasing in diversity amongst students; however, the teachers are remaining the same. Many students are faced with the realization that their teachers “do not look like them” and therefore have a desire for their teachers to be as diverse as the student body. For many years the hiring of teachers with diverse backgrounds has been a concern. This article will examine the benefits of having a diverse faculty in an educational setting. Students receive the greatest benefit when their teachers come from diverse backgrounds.

Our educational system is ever-changing and as the years go by, the struggle to meet the needs of the system is becoming more challenging. With the change in education comes the realization that educational institutions are becoming more culturally diverse. The growth in the racial and ethnic diversity of the student population is steady, but we have not seen similar diversification among the faculty. There should

be more initiatives established to address the hiring of diverse faculty. Diversity among our faculty can and should go far beyond the historical contexts of color and ethnic backgrounds. Diversity includes customs, cultural and religious experiences, personal experiences, historical and political knowledge and much more (Williams, 2000). A diverse faculty will allow students to be exposed to a wide array of ideas, cultures, and individuals. In a diverse student population students need to be exposed to teachers who are like them. They need to see people who have an impact on their lives, look like them, sound like them, and have similar life experiences (Jan, 2006).

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of a diverse faculty; its benefits and its positive impact on students and education. Students receive many benefits when they are educated by faculty with diverse backgrounds. Students have an opportunity to be exposed to educators that are like themselves as well as educators with cultural backgrounds they may not be familiar with and can gain knowledge from their culture. In an attempt to diversify faculty, it is important that educational institutions are aware of laws relative to diversifying faculty, policies and procedures. We must take the necessary measure to recruit and hire faculty with diverse backgrounds.

Diversifying the Faculty Has Many Benefits

The United States is no longer a European, Anglo-Saxon America. It is comprised of many different people, from different places that are contributing to the improvement of the United States. This diversity trickles down from the government to our schools and communities. Due to these changing demographics, it is essential that students learn to live in a diverse world (Brown, 1998). Students must be prepared to live in a world that is racially and ethnically diverse. They must respect others, appreciate diversity, and value differences as positive keys to the academic, social, political, and economic stability of this country (Brown, 1998). As educators, it is important to create productive citizens. Students need to be exposed to different cultures. Students should be given the opportunity to relate to diverse individuals and connect with different walks of life. Students will learn to be more accepting of different races and cultures, thus making them more culturally aware. Diversifying the faculty has many benefits for students, limits discrimination claims, and limits *reverse discrimination* claims.

A diverse faculty benefits students in that it allows positive relationships to be built. Many times when students feel as though they have something in common with their teacher, this builds relationships. It gives students a sense of belonging as well as comfort. They need a comfortable learning environment and they need role models on

campus to show them that positions of knowledge and social and political importance can be achieved by anyone (Williams, 2000). Students can find security in knowing that there is someone at their school or on their campus that has their best interest in mind, that is looking out for them, and more importantly, someone who understands their culture and the different things about them.

Diversifying the faculty helps the student educationally. Many studies and longstanding research show that a diverse faculty and student body lead to great benefits in education for all students. A survey conducted by the Bernard Hodes Group on behalf of the PhD project, a corporate and academic-led effort to increase minority representation among business professors, revealed that diversity in front of the classroom enhances the educational experience for all. Ninety-three percent of all respondents feel that minority professors positively impact the education of minority students, whereas 84 percent of all respondents feel that minority professors are positively impacting the education of non-minority students. The survey disclosed that minority professors have significant influence on the education of both minority and non-minority students (2003). The more diverse the faculty, the greater diversity of course content and readings, curricular and teaching methods, and scholarly ideas presented to students. Faculty of diverse backgrounds brings a broad range of their own experiences to the classroom. The different backgrounds and ideas may improve the total achievement of the school. Overall, the different backgrounds will lead to a more effective school.

Diversifying the Faculty Reduces the Amount of Discrimination Lawsuits

In general, school systems want to stay clear of lawsuits. No educator should feel as though that have been discriminated against and discrimination claims are a big deal. A homogenous faculty not only fails to represent the diversity of views and experiences crucial to a broad education, but it leaves an institution vulnerable to damaging discrimination lawsuits (Springer, 2004). Diversifying the faculty reduces the amount of discrimination claims. If educators of different cultural backgrounds are aware that the educational institution openly hires those of diverse cultures, they are more apt to want to work for the institution and least likely to feel discriminated against. An easily observable commitment to diversity by the educational institution and the faculty in both policies and hires provides a strong defense to claims of discrimination. The institution is also less likely to engage in the kind of discrimination that creates legal liability for the institution.

The likelihood of being sued for hiring a diverse faculty is rare. Fears of *reverse discrimination* claims resulting from efforts to diversify are overrated (Springer, 2004). Most claims are those filed regarding discrimination against minorities. These claims usually occur when institutions fail to diversify. *Reverse discrimination* claims are a small percentage of complaints. Due to the different laws, the hiring process must be a careful process. When recruiting a diverse faculty, it is important not to *reverse*

discriminate and be sure to hire qualified individuals. “The operative work here is qualified. Teaching standards can not be compromised for the sake of diversity (Williams, 2000).

Institutions Must Be Aware of Laws on Diversifying Faculty

While diversifying faculty is definitely advantageous, institutions must be aware of laws on diversifying faculty. The law in this area is unsettled. Many factors must be considered in regards to the law. Factors like whether an institution is public or private, has a history of discrimination, and accepts federal funding all play a role. The Constitution does not permit discrimination on the basis of race or sex. Federal laws require employers to take explicit *affirmative action* to show how they will make their workplace free from discrimination. Therefore, employees have adopted diversification plans to create a more diverse workplace that have tangible proof of their non-discrimination efforts (Springer, 2004).

Civil Rights Act Prohibits Discrimination

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. ‘2000e et seq., makes it unlawful for an employer to fail to refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or nation origin. This statute applies to faculty members and other employees of college and universities, private and public (Springer, 2004). The Civil Rights Act also prohibits discrimination based on race and national origin by recipients of federal financial assistance. Since public schools are state funded, they are included in this law. Most colleges and universities accept federal financial aid and other federal money, so this applies to them as well.

14th Amendment to the Constitution Faculty Diversity Initiatives Should Be Approached Broadly

The 14th Amendment to the Constitution provides that no State shall make or enforce any law, which shall deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. Under the 14th Amendment, consideration of race or national origin in hiring or promotion decision is subject to *strict scrutiny*, which requires that policies be *narrowly tailored* to achieve a *compelling government interest* (Springer, 2004). So what exactly constitutes *compelling interest*? Compelling interests recognized

under the law have included remedying the present effects of past discrimination and the attainment of a diverse student body to further the *robust exchange of ideas* on campus. Based on the argument that a diverse faculty is an important part of the *robust exchange of ideas*, and that an institution, and the faculty who help run it, must be able to decide for itself on academic grounds, who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study (Springer, 2004). These factors must be considered in regards in hiring a diverse faculty. In endorsing diversity as a compelling state interest, the Court does not limit the use of race to remedial arguments, and recognized that other non-remedial arguments might pass strict scrutiny. Faculty diversity initiatives should be approached with a broad definition of diversity (Springer, 2004).

Specific Hiring Plans

One way to incorporate a diverse faculty is to provide incentives and resources for diversity hires. Such specific hiring programs should be carefully tied to any affirmative action plan, mission statement or particular educational need that is the basis for its existence. The program should be clearly written so that there is no room for ambiguity. Specific targets and numerical goals should be avoided. It is also important to final decisions on hiring are based primarily on qualifications for the positions, and not on race or national origin or gender (Springer, 2004). This will help to avoid any type of legal ramifications.

Legal Considerations

When diversifying faculty, there are many good legal approaches that institutions should implement. It is ideal to have a diversity policy in place that discusses the institution's strong commitment to using legal means to achieve diversity. Once policies and programs supporting diversity are in place, these policies then provide the basis for individual hires and the creation of new programs and policies.

Recruitment

Recruitment of diverse faculty requires institutions to publish and distribute vacant positions as widely as possible. This allows for the position to reach all possible potential candidates. Courts have found race conscious recruiting acceptable under all of the different standards. Vacancy announcements can also be sent to faculty members or

students at minority-serving institutions (Springer, 2004). The larger the applicant pool, the greater the possibility of attracting a diverse applicant to hire.

A diverse faculty benefits campuses by providing support to students from diverse backgrounds, serving as symbols of interest, creating a sense of comfort for culturally diverse students, broadening the range of what is taught and how it is taught, lending new ideas and collaboration in pedagogies and serving as role models to the students (Antonio, 2003).

Demographic Changes and Challenges

Student population of public school is changing significantly as years pass. “By the year 2020, approximately 39 percent of all school-age children will come from minority groups.” Twenty-five percent of our largest cities have school systems whose current student bodies are more than half minority. Demographic changes in this country will have a tremendous impact on college enrollment in the near future. In California, more than half the students entering college are from ethnic minority groups (Brown, 1998). Due to these changes, it is imperative that students learn to live in a diverse world as well as have leadership that exemplifies diversity. There must be individual there to bring enlightening experiences to the classroom as well as share some commonalities. As possible strategies are viewed to diversify faculty and retain a diverse faculty, we must keep in mind that the faculty and student worlds are not separate. Each one influences the other (Antonio, 2003).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, although many institutions endorse diversity initiatives, nothing is being done to enforce it. Teaching and encouraging diversity in the academic community will not be easy (Brown, 1998). Institutions have tried many different approaches to diversifying within the parameters of the law. However, institutions are faced with a legal tension: specific and open attempts to hire faculty of color are necessary to diversify the faculty, yet the more specifically race based programs are, the more likely they are to draw legal challenge as reverse discrimination (Springer, 2004). Many past efforts to diversify have had various successes at surviving legal challenges. In order to have a well-rounded world filled with individuals that accept those that are different from them and embrace those that *look like them* we must be aware of the cultural differences. Through awareness, the differences must be transformed into positive educational future that realizes that the need for a diverse faculty should be at the forefront of our educational system.

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