



ACADEMIC SENATE  
for CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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# A Commitment to Success for All: Hiring Faculty to Serve the Needs of Our Diverse Students

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For many years, the diversity of the faculty has been a topic of discussion and concern in the California community colleges. Many researchers and others have noted the benefits of a more diverse faculty in terms of both the cultures of our institutions and, more importantly, student success<sup>[1]</sup>. Yet despite the many conversations that have taken place and the many calls for greater diversity in our hiring, little real progress has been made. According to data from the CCC Chancellor's Office, between 2005 and 2014, the percentage of non-whites among our student populations rose from approximately 54% to nearly 70%. In contrast, the percentage of non-whites among both full-time and part-time faculty rose only from the mid-twenties to around 30%.

This year community colleges in California have an unprecedented opportunity to move beyond conversations about faculty diversity and take real, concrete action. The California State Budget for 2015-16 included \$62.3 million for the hiring of full-time faculty. This funding could bring more than a thousand new full-time, tenure-track faculty members to the system. With this unusual hiring boom, institutions should take the opportunity to engage in critical reflection on how to make real progress towards faculty diversity.

Any effort to increase faculty diversity must be thoughtful and coordinated. Many of our institutions have recruitment processes, hiring processes, and job descriptions that have existed for many years and that do not lend themselves toward inclusion or toward attracting more diverse candidates. With so many colleges hiring so many new faculty, the environment will now be far more competitive than ever before. Colleges and interview committees cannot take the unusual attitude that the candidates should be happy to receive an interview. The candidates will have choices, with the most sought after likely receiving multiple job offers. Instead, the colleges will need to sell themselves to the candidates and make themselves more desirable places to work in order to attract and retain the

applicants that they most want to hire.

In order to make a more productive move from the long-standing conversations about faculty diversity to real, productive action, colleges that are considering revisions of their hiring processes would benefit from a change in emphasis. Many calls have been made to hire faculty who look more like our students or who more closely reflect the makeup of our student population, but a real solution that promotes student success is more complex. Simply looking like our students does not guarantee that an applicant understands the students, and neither looking like our students nor simply understanding them means one is dedicated to teaching our students or believes in the mission of our colleges. In addition, our system contains many examples of fine instructors who may not look like our students but who do an outstanding job of teaching them and understanding them. Rather than simply calling for hiring more diverse faculty, colleges should focus on hiring faculty who can serve the needs of a diverse student body, who are committed to teaching and advocating on behalf of all of our students with a genuine and demonstrated understanding of their needs and capacity. The emphasis should not be on what the candidate looks like or where he or she comes from, but rather on what the candidate can do and wants to do for our students and on a sense of a cultural competence. If colleges adopt such an emphasis in their hiring practices, then in all likelihood those candidates who have closer connection and dedication to our students will in many cases be those who have more in common with the students. Thus the desired increase in diversity will be achieved, but in a manner that promotes serving students and helping them succeed rather than concern with diversity statistics.

Colleges might consider several aspects of their hiring processes in order to attract and hire candidates who are best able to serve our diverse student populations. Some of the needed changes will take time and consideration, such as state-level projects for recruiting more diverse candidate pools. Others, including job announcements, hiring criteria, hiring workshops, interview questions, and other issues, can be refocused in the current hiring cycle to be more inclusive and to identify faculty with the qualities our diverse students need.

*Before the Interview: Job Announcement, Committee Composition, Setting the Criteria*

A job announcement should do more than state what the college is looking for in the position; it should also convince the applicant that the college is a desirable place to work. In order to attract a diverse body of candidates, the job announcement should reflect the institution's mission, priorities, and interest in inclusion and diversity. Colleges should look for every way possible to make all job announcement materials represent the institution's commitment to all students and to make them inviting to candidates of diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Colleges may also wish to reexamine the traditional criteria by which candidates have been evaluated. In many cases, candidates have been looked on more favorably for holding more advanced degrees or even because of where they obtained their degrees. However, doctoral degrees are not required for faculty in the community college system, and in fact doctoral training may in many cases have very little relevance to the work faculty do with community college students. In other instances, candidates have been given preference because of their many years of classroom teaching experience. While some level of experience in teaching in the community college system and working with its students may be desirable, one does not need five or ten years of experience to be qualified to teach. Colleges might also consider ways to translate and give value to a candidate's experience facilitating learning in spaces other than the formal classroom setting, especially if that experience is with populations similar to the students our colleges are having the most difficulty engaging with their learning. Finally, in some cases hiring committees have looked for very specific sub-discipline expertise that significantly narrows the field of candidates. Committees should keep in mind that community college faculty who are competent to teach in a discipline can continue to learn and grow in their own expertise, and thus an applicant who has the proper mindset can often acquire additional

instructional capabilities if they are truly needed.

In place of these often limiting aspects of the criteria used to make hiring decisions, committees should give fair consideration to all candidates who meet the minimum qualifications if those candidates exhibit sufficient discipline knowledge, the capacity and enthusiasm to acquire more skill or knowledge in both discipline expertise and pedagogical approaches, and a true commitment to the community college mission and students.

The composition and training of the hiring committee are very important, as the committee will make an impression on the interviewee that may be a factor in the decision of a candidate with multiple offers. No committee should ever sacrifice discipline expertise for the sake of a more diverse committee makeup; however, if the discipline expertise does not supply significant diversity for the committee, then the college may wish to supplement the discipline faculty with additional faculty representatives who can provide differing perspectives.

#### *In the Interview: Structure and Questions*

Most hiring committees are held to a specific set of pre-designed questions, and the interview invariably includes a “diversity question” that may often be so general as to give little real indication of the candidate’s commitment to teaching diverse students. Instead, committees may consider not a diversity question but rather integrating diversity and equity concerns throughout many, if not most, interview questions. For example, many interviews include a question, either direct or in terms of a hypothetical scenario, regarding student discipline. Such a question could easily be re-phrased to ask the candidate how his or her answer might vary depending on a student’s background. Such an approach would offer far more insight into the candidate’s understanding of student needs and appreciation for cultural and other differences among students. Many other standard questions, as well as teaching demonstrations, could be re-worded or re-structured to offer a similar opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate his or her understanding of and commitment to diverse students.

In order to give full and fair consideration to all candidates, committees might also consider the number of interviewees, the length of the interviews, and how much time they can devote to the process. In truth, one can hardly get a clear understanding of a candidate’s qualifications and priorities in a scripted forty-five minute interview, especially when it is the sixth interview of a very long day for the second day in a row. Giving equal and fair treatment to all candidates is difficult when the interview process involves extended sessions of back-to-back interviews with limited time and no meaningful interaction.

To address these issues, hiring committees need to make a commitment to spending more time on the process and on each interview, even if this decision means extending the process over several additional days in order to conduct fewer and perhaps longer interviews each day. Human resources departments must of course train committees to ensure against improper questions or questions that might create liability, but they can also help committees understand how to ask meaningful, appropriate follow-up questions that draw out the candidates’ answers and make the interviews more substantial

#### *After the Hire: Inclusion and Professional Development*

Once a candidate has accepted the position, the college should consider how to ensure that the candidate feels valued and included in his or her department as well as the institution as a whole. For this reason, cultural competency training is not only necessary for the hiring committee but should be expected for the entire college community. New faculty should be invited not only to become a part of the college and department cultures but also to contribute to it in meaningful ways, allowing them to feel accepted and to see that their perspectives and talents

are uniquely valued.

Ongoing professional development should be a commitment of the college for all faculty, both new and continuing. Before the new hires take place, the college should have a plan in place to provide any necessary pedagogical training or discipline expertise for those new faculty who may have less experience but more commitment and dedication to the students. All faculty should be brought together on a regular basis to exchange perspectives and discuss the ways in which they are serving their students, and new additions to the faculty should be encouraged to contribute their unique ideas and backgrounds and their more recently acquired experiences and observations to these discussions.

The task before community colleges is certainly a challenge, and change does not happen in a heartbeat. Yet with the augmented funding for hiring full-time faculty in the 2015-16 budget, a unique opportunity is current before the system. Students and colleges will benefit from hiring processes that promote inclusion and diversity. Such an effort will require additional commitment in terms of time and resources, but the results can only help to develop a stronger faculty with an enhanced ability to serve the diverse student population of the California Community Colleges System.

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[1] See, for example. "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black, It Helps to Have a Black Teacher" at <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/01/20/463190789/to-be-young-gifted-and-black-it-helps-to-have-a-black-teacher> (<http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/01/20/463190789/to-be-young-gifted-and-black-it-helps-to-have-a-black-teacher>).

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