

# Inclusion Initiatives

## DIVERSITY MATTERS:

*Promoting Workplace Diversity in Research Administration* By Natasha Williams

**O**n today's competitive globalized academic environment, recruiting, retaining, and promoting talent has become a business imperative for many colleges and universities, and each year more and more institutions of higher education launch hiring initiatives with the intention of diversifying their workplaces. New tools in the human resource recruitment process of the nation's top universities are enabling human resource departments to reach a wider audience and attract an increasingly diverse job candidate pool that has elevated inclusive hiring from a recruiting method to an overall strategic objective. This, in turn, has enabled them to differentiate themselves from their competitors by positioning their university as a "university of choice" for job seekers who value diversity in the academic workplace. Indeed, colleges and universities that successfully implement D&I initiatives realize a whole host of positive benefits including increased employee goodwill, improved hiring results, reduced employee turnover, better decision making, faster problem-solving, and increased creativity.

However, despite the known benefits that D&I initiatives bring to the workplace, many higher education institutions lag far behind their competitors in creating an inclusive environment. In fact, recent trends indicate that a substantial representation gap persists between the ethnic and racial makeup of university administrators and the ethnic and racial makeup of the country as a whole. Research conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) found that only 7% of higher education administrative positions were held by African-American staffers, 3% were held by Hispanic/Latino staffers, and a mere 2% were held by Asian staffers. The remaining 86% of higher education administrators were white. Although minority representation among higher education administrators has been rising, the increase is not enough to keep pace with the increases in the proportion of people in the U.S. who belong to a minority group, or with the increase in the growth among minority college graduates.

As it is in the academy at large, so it is in the field of research administration. Research conducted by Jennifer Shambrook and Thomas Roberts on the demographic profile of research administrators revealed that African-American research administrators comprise 6.3% of the workforce. Hispanic/Latino research administrators make up 4.9%, and Asian research administrators make up 3.6%. Similarly, to university administrators as a whole, 83% of research administrators are white. This, despite increasing efforts by colleges and universities to create diverse and inclusive workplace environments.

What, then, can we as research administrators do to attract more diverse candidates to the profession? First, we should work to ensure that supervisors and managers understand the importance of workplace diversity. As the primary points of employee connection to the university, managers and supervisors need to be aware of the ways that they can support all employees in developing a diverse workforce. A good first step is to examine recruitment,

evaluation, and promotion policies to more readily facilitate workplace diversity. For example, rather than limiting job postings to the university HR website, or industry specific ones such as [higheredjobs.com](http://higheredjobs.com) and/or NCURA. Job postings should be tailored to reach broader audiences, and disseminated to a wide variety of job fairs, community hiring offices, and outreach programs. As well, consider offering diverse opportunities for employee engagement. This can take the form of encouraging and recommending a diverse mix of employees from your office to sit on university-wide committees and task forces where they can participate in other environments, learn how other units address problems, and bring information back to their own teams.

Mentoring remains one of the key components of workplace diversity programs, and while most universities offer some sort of staff leadership development program, less structured development programs are an additional way to provide employees with a wide variety of opportunities to develop professionally. Connecting underrepresented employees with opportunities for continuing education, encouraging participation in professional organizations such as NCURA, and encouraging participation in executive training are but a few of the many ways you can supplement a formal mentoring program with informal mentoring opportunities.

Finally, conduct a personal self-evaluation to gauge your own role in creating an inclusive workplace. Do you consciously champion diversity but subconsciously reward conformity? Is your LinkedIn network an exhaustive list of people who look just like you? What are the unconscious attitudes and socialized behaviors that limit your ability to create a diverse and inclusive workplace? No matter how open-minded and judgement-free we believe we are, internal judgements about the people around us are often automatic and engrained because of life experiences. Becoming conscious of the lens through which we view others, whether that be race, gender, religion, age, or personality, can give you a window into your own behavior and provide a pathway for learning how to build internal mechanisms that raise awareness of your own implicit attitudes and how to embrace the tapestry of diversity that is the modern day workplace. ■

### References

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