

Affirmative action at Davidson: a long road ahead

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Editor Emerita

While the number of African American and other minority students is rising steadily each year, the number of minority professors is growing at a much slower pace.

The Minority Experience at Davidson

Davidson does not have an official affirmative action agreement with the United States government. The school operates "in the spirit" of affirmative action.

This means that the school is not legally obligated to hire minorities but makes an active effort to do so.

The guidelines

According to faculty search guidelines, a search is begun with

an advertisement in the "appropriate professional registers and publications."

This ad asks qualified applicants to submit resumes, writing samples, and references to the chair of the hiring department. The end of this ad reads, "Davidson College is an Equal Opportunity Employer; women and minorities are encouraged to apply."

According to Dean of Faculty Robert Williams, who oversees faculty hiring, the guidelines also encourage departmental chairs to especially consider minorities.

In the first section of the document, the school asks them to "keep in mind the college's desire to increase the candidate pool for four special categories: 1) minorities (black, American Indian, and Spanish surnamed Americans); 2) women; 3) alumni; 4) the handicapped."

Director of Human Resources Andy Brantley, who oversees all staff hiring, says that the process is

much the same in regards to hiring staff and administration.

"We are not an affirmative action employer, but we are in compliance with equal opportunity laws."

However, he says, "I think there is more that we could be doing."

Tactics

Searches may include as many as 200 people, but faculty members turn in a list of 10 that stand out to them.

"We encourage faculty to look at minorities and turn them in with their top 10," says Williams.

This is sometimes successful, he says, but can be a problem when the minority candidate is not one of the best. "It's bad when they are in the top ten but not the top three," Williams says. "Sometimes we interview them anyway to give them a fair shake."

The school also tries to open up positions in fields that are populated with more minorities.

Dr. Brenda Flanagan was hired

this year by the English Department in order to specialize in Caribbean literature.

Williams says departments are creating or reinventing positions like that in order to become more attractive to minorities.

In staff hiring, Brantley says the College does several things to go along with its "equal opportunity" status.

The Human Resources department posts employment opportunities around campus, considers a minimum of three candidates for each position, and makes those who hire new employees fill out a selection summary explaining why they chose that particular candidate.

Problems

Assistant Chaplain Brenda Tapia feels that recruiting is not at all on the upswing.

She says the numbers have changed little from when she came to Davidson in 1985. "I've never known Davidson to have more than [around five] African-American faculty members."

President John Kuykendall says the current situation is "not what we hoped for from my vantage. When we came here we broadly, not technically, set for ourselves a goal to recruit more racial/ethnic minorities.... [it] is hard won progress, it almost feels like you step forward two steps and step back one."

"We have had some success in recent years," says Williams, "but only with African American women [faculty]. We have had a terrible time finding African American males."

"Davidson has as many full-time African American faculty members as all of the other members of Leadership South combined," says Kuykendall. "Robert Williams has done a remarkable job at discovering people with true gifts and persuading them that Davidson is the place to be. But you look at that against the totality of the faculty population, and you see that African Americans are a minor minority, even more of a minority than among students."

"In all of our efforts, we could make a more concerted effort to seek diversity," says Brantley. "There is more we could be doing to reach out to the minority community, more efforts to advertise."

He says the "women and minorities encouraged to apply" label on recruiting ads is a good start.

Female faculty recruiting is no longer a major issue. Kuykendall says that "as things have progressed, [female recruiting] has really slipped into the background, because by the very nature of things, many of the people chosen are women just because of the way things turn out. And women are moving into seniority, in terms of faculty status, so many are now department chairs."

Williams agrees. "We don't really need to make extra efforts to attract women anymore, because it

turns out that they are at the anyway."

However, says Brantley, is an obvious dearth of female upper management. "As we turnover at the executive level," says, "[female recruiting] should be a consideration of the next president."

Why do we have so few minorities?

Williams says certain departments have more trouble than others. "Physics and mathematics are a hard time [with minority hiring] because the pool [of minorities within those fields] is so small." The small number of minorities competing for jobs is a reason for low numbers at schools like Davidson. However, there are other reasons as well.

Brantley points to low turnover as a reason for low minority staff. "Larger universities have more opportunities to minorities on an ongoing basis. Especially in the skilled trades, vacancies virtually never occur." He also points out location as a factor. Some recruits may see Davidson as too rural, "One challenge that we often have is the perception that Davidson is not a part of Charlotte."

Location may be a factor in other ways as well. "One thing we should be looking at is the environment created for minorities. The perception of the climate here at Davidson is not a good one."

Tapia thinks the climate at Davidson and the town is not a good issue. "The community does have a lot to offer African Americans, but I don't think that we keep anyone from coming here," she says. "Charlotte is not far from Atlanta is only four hours away."

Instead, she says the College would have more minority faculty members if it offered more attractive packages to minorities.

"One thing that I have always seen in the 47 years that I have been familiar with the College is anything Davidson wants, Davidson gets," she says. "There is no obstacle there to recruit minorities."

She feels that Davidson is losing out. "It's their loss. Looking down the road, I'm wondering it will do for the College."

Slow progress

When comparing us to other schools, Williams feels Davidson is about average in regard to minority recruiting.

"We are probably more diverse than many other schools in the South and we are definitely more diverse than we were ten years ago," says.

Kuykendall feels that the College will be working on this for many years to come. "I'm more gratified than satisfied that's to say, I feel like we have a long way to go. I can't see too many years down the road. It's one step at a time."

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