

A case study of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in hiring practices

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Abstract

The push to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into higher education spaces has changed hiring practices for universities. The team of HR professionals at a large flagship university in the United States developed a plan to help hiring managers increase diversity and equity during the job life cycle. An evaluation of the intervention includes interviews with both hiring managers and those hired in the last year. Findings include concerns about shrinking applicant pools, a lack of equity in job expectations and salaries, and the need for additional professional development opportunities.

Keywords: diversity; equity; hiring practices; inclusion; job life cycle

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion at large American institutions

In a changing higher education culture, increasing diversity, working towards equity, and prioritizing inclusion is imperative. Positioning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work as valuable by examining hiring practices with a critical lens while addressing burnout and reinforcing work boundaries can only be accomplished through managerial involvement (Creary et al., 2021). A large flagship university (University) in the United States implemented DEI practices during the job life cycle in the largest college on campus (College), including a focus on the hiring process.

As part of strategic initiatives for diversity, equity, and inclusion, the College developed a team to examine the job-life cycle for staff positions and

created the Building Great Teams initiative. The initiative consisted of a university-funded grant to pay for a graduate student researcher. The team included a Director for Administration and a Senior Human Resources Coordinator. At the onset, the team also included the Program Manager for Diversity and Student Programs, though that individual left the university in the second year of research.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are meaningful reflections of organizational values, and belonging improves performance in business and non-profit organizations alike (Witwer, 2021). The team in the College developed materials to support inclusive hiring specific to the needs of programs. Within the division we developed assessment tools including interviews with recent hires and hiring managers to measure the effectiveness of such efforts. Student-facing positions on college campuses play a significant role in the quality of the college experience, especially as it pertains to perceptions of diversity (Rankin & Reason, 2008). Increasing diversity in applicant pools for student-facing positions was a key goal of the initiative. Diverse applicant pools and improved candidate experience result in opportunities to reshape universities into more equitable and inclusive spaces (Murray, 2010).

This study seeks to understand the effectiveness of DEI initiatives for hiring diverse staff in the student division of the largest College in the University. This article addresses the following:

1. *What are the factors impacting recruitment and retention of diverse staff in the College?*
2. *How are the resources we've developed effective in increasing elements of diversity, equity, and inclusion in student-facing positions?*
3. *What additional factors inhibit DEI initiatives in the College and across the University?*

The institution

The University is a flagship research institution in a large state in the U.S. and serves a student population of more than 50,000. The majority of students at the University identify as white (38.9%), or Hispanic (23.4%). International students make up 10% of the population along with Asian (20.2%), Black (5.3%), Multiracial (2.7%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (0.1%), and Native or

Pacific Islander (0.1%; University of Texas at Austin, 2022). The College running the DEI initiative is the largest at the University, home to almost 25% of the entire student population. Staff positions supporting the College include academic advisors, deans, administrative assistants, and program administrators. This study focuses on academic advisors and administrative support positions that are all student-facing as well as those individuals in charge of hiring for those positions.

The College's initiative was funded by grants and required post-implementation evaluation. While developing tools for evaluation, the researchers decided to pursue a more rigorous study to better understand the state of DEI at the College and within the University. As the University's president is currently writing a new strategic plan that includes DEI concepts, the job-life cycle in the College is indicative of the University's overall status as an institution that values diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In 2020, the University announced a dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Metrics of success included recruiting and retaining more Black students, faculty, and staff on campus. They planned to expand programs that provide opportunities for future Black leaders. Their strategic plan also addressed historical context for the University and changing the names of several important campus buildings. As a university located in the southern United States, top administrators faced a call for addressing institutional racism. Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives were a natural by-product of their response.

Literature review

Defining diversity, equity, and inclusion

Diversity has several meanings in the context of higher education, including "diversity of difference" and "diversity for equity" (Owen, 2009). Owen explains that highlighting differences in lived experience and background can be leveraged to make equitable change in institutions. Diversity can be studied in expansive categories that include interpersonal relationships, representation, curriculum, and institutional structure (Swain, 2013). Diversity should not be confused with multiculturalism, even though it is an important part of a multicultural campus (Phillips, 2019). It is imperative that there are more empirical investigations as to what diversity means in higher education because we need a better understanding

of how diversity has changed over time and universities are good sites to test market claims of diversity's positive effects (Huisman et al., 2007).

In the context of the United States, equity policy frequently refers to racial equity in college admissions and hiring. It is difficult to merge diversity and inclusion with equitable practices, particularly for administrators and leaders in higher education (Cyr, 2018). Though racial and ethnic diversity has increased in the student population in higher education, there remains a gap for faculty and institutional diversity in hiring (Bhalla, 2019). Equity in higher education has shifted to a conversation around equal opportunity and access, considering that meritocratic structures still mean those with more wealth and social capital are closer to elite institutions (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). Equity practices are frequently framed using a deficit thinking model, placing ownership on ways to increase educational achievement on students as opposed to institutions and systems of oppression (Peña et al., 2006). Efforts to increase diversity lead to a false dichotomy between addressing equity and the ways merit and excellence are defined (Bhalla, 2019).

Inclusion efforts developed out of diversity initiatives, as practitioners in the business community saw mass turnover for people of color and women—concluding that “inviting people to the party” was not enough to ensure retention (Creary et al., 2021). Inclusion efforts only make a difference if they are systemic and protective of marginalized groups of people. Owen (2009) advocates for diversity leadership that focuses on increasing inclusivity and equity in an organization ‘by challenging and altering the policies, practices, and beliefs that form the organizational system’ (p. 194). As educational opportunities increase and access expands, university competition for students could increase inclusion at all levels (Arum et al., 2007). Though representation and diversity may increase as enrollment increases, that does not guarantee students will remain enrolled or benefit from expanded efforts. Issues of privilege frequently require students to play by the rules of someone in power (Lehan et al., 2020). True change comes from institutional recognition, measurable outcomes, and systems of accountability.

DEI initiatives in higher education

Strategic plans

Organizational change in higher education requires a direct tie to the university's strategic plan, initiatives to increase diversity, and an effective assessment strategy (Stanley et al., 2019). In the United States, strategic plans to address diversity, equity, and inclusion often refer solely to gender or racial gaps in hiring. There are 'hidden' DEI initiatives like religion (Razaki et al., 2022), disability (Edwards, 2022) and LGBTQ+ status (Rivera et al., 2022). Additional scrutiny on public institutions of higher education that are partially funded with taxes in the United States has created a push for explicit strategic plans.

Diversity efforts can result from student organizing, outside pressures, or the accreditation process (Office for Civil Rights, 2016). Accreditation has increased awareness around the necessary systemic approaches to creating meaningful change and impacted the ways institutions tie DEI efforts to their missions, strategic goals, and campus practices (Evans & Chun, 2007). Diversity crises resulting in protest by student organizations necessitate a reactive response by universities, too often the only time administrators and leaders choose to develop plans for institutional change (Williams, 2013). Isaac (2021) advocates for more comprehensive DEI plans that include input from all stakeholders at the university, personal investment from both the board and administration, and targeted accountability for individuals engaged in the work.

Hiring and staff

The ability to recruit and retain a diverse staff is the single most contributing factor to the competitiveness of universities and colleges (Evans & Chun, 2007). Unfortunately, the gap between multicultural student bodies and monocultural staff, faculty, and administrative bodies of universities, especially predominantly white institutions, continues to increase with each new retirement (Kayes, 2006). To increase diversity in staff and faculty on campuses, many institutions have implemented DEI plans focused on hiring.

One of the first steps in ensuring DEI in hiring is in the recruitment process and includes additional costs for posting positions in diverse or specialized places (Bailey, 2021; Fradella, 2018). Posting to job boards that reach a wide audience and recruit nationally can be prohibitively expensive. Writing inclusive job descriptions that do not include coded language biased against people based on

gender or race can both increase the possibility of hiring a diverse candidate and encourage more candidates to apply (Heisler, 2020). Training search committees and providing paid professional development for hiring managers in elements of recruiting diverse applicant pools is a critical best practice (Fradella, 2018). Finally, the influence of chairs and deans who interact with university staff and with faculty cannot be discounted. Buy-in from all groups with power and leverage in their departments is critical for enacting widespread, long-lasting change in hiring and recruitment practices (Marchiondo et al., 2023).

Assessment

Though many universities are attempting to implement DEI plans, they may not be acting on institutional climate data or engaging institutional leadership for accountability, leading to a lack of assessment using longitudinal data to measure institutional change (Stanley et al., 2019). There are many barriers to DEI initiatives and meaningful change on college campuses, including slow adaptations without dramatic environmental shifts, loose coupling that inhibits large scale change, and unpredictability in climate (Rankin & Reason, 2008). Merely hiring a Chief Diversity Officer without a plan for assessment or active participation from all stakeholders at a university does not result in meaningful change (Isaac, 2021). Assessments should be in place throughout the development of DEI plans because without historical data, leaders will struggle to understand the state of campus culture as well as the potential impacts of new initiatives (Williams, 2013, p. 209).

There are many sources on how to effectively assess and plan DEI efforts, and we will not belabor the process here—but it is critical that institutions create meaningful assessment plans that include all stakeholders and have accountability measures that actually impact change. Administrators, faculty, and staff report that even at institutions with entire departments dedicated to DEI initiatives, there are frequently missing measurable outcomes that reduce efforts to ‘lip service,’ ‘just a tagline,’ or ‘window dressing’ (Lehan et al., 2020, p. 170). Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs already taxed faced extreme efficacy tests during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

DEI initiatives and the COVID-19 pandemic

In the United States, universities' and colleges' vacant positions in universities and colleges were left unfilled during the pandemic and funding was frozen for new hires. Those new to the university and faculty without tenure faced the uncertainty of potential job loss—and all the anxiety that comes with it (Anwer, 2020). The pressures facing institutions can sometimes derail any initiatives not deemed critical, including those aiming for increased diversity, equity, and inclusion. Some institutions, like The University of Massachusetts, intensified efforts to promote equity during COVID-19, including public statements affirming the work of faculty and providing additional monetary support for child and eldercare (Clark et al., 2020). The inclusive hiring project outlined in this study began in the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown in the Spring 2021 semester. Though the University halted hiring in many departments, it was through a grant that the research team was able to begin new procedures for recruitment and retention in hiring. In the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities; because of the disproportionality, institutions must do a better job of recruiting and retaining minority communities on their campuses (Grubbs, 2020). Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are more important during times of crisis, as they highlight inequity and can bring about policy changes that cause undue burden to already struggling groups of people. It is critical that institutions develop comprehensive DEI plans as part of ongoing work and embed them within their COVID-19 response (Ryan, 2021). Diversity efforts in the College seek to be more inclusive of all people with varied lived experiences and equitable in hiring practices, specifically with the goal of eliminating biases that deny opportunities to historically underrepresented groups.

Data and methods

The interviewer and first author for the study identifies as a white cisgender female. She is a doctoral student at the University and studies in a department outside of the College. The researcher is a member of the LGBTQ+ community and is well-versed in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives overall, though has less institutional experience and knowledge than other members of the team. The Human Resources specialist identifies as a Latina cisgender female. She is a full-time staff member of the College and has worked in Human Resources positions for the University for 5 years. The administrator identifies as a white cisgender

female. She is a full-time staff member for the College and a graduate student at the University in a department outside of the College. Her work in both spaces focuses on supporting staff in the context of administration for academic programming.

Sample

A total of 19 respondents were interviewed as part of the evaluation of the DEI initiatives. The individuals are defined by the university as staff (academic advisors, senior leadership, administrative assistants, and program administrators). The researchers contacted participants via email following an introduction to the study from the Associate Dean encouraging staff participation. Of the respondents interviewed, 8 were hiring managers and 11 were recent hires (Spring 2020 to Fall 2021). It is important to note that two participants were asked questions for both hiring managers and recent hires, as they fit both categories. They are counted in the totals for recent hires and their duality is addressed throughout the paper.

Data collection

For each participant, we conducted one semi-structured interview session lasting 30 minutes (Patton, 1990). Interviews were recorded via Zoom and transcribed using the audio capture feature. Interview questions included descriptions of the hiring process, the presence of DEI in interview questions and job descriptions, and suggestions for additional resources or places for improvement. For hiring managers, we specifically focused on how DEI support systems did or did not impact hiring decisions or make the hiring process easier. Our interviews with recent hires focused on the process, including expediency and communication from hiring teams. Though COVID-19 impacts were not the focus of the interviews, the nature of recent hires occurring in Spring 2020 to Fall 2021 created dialogue that did include pandemic aspects. All participants were assigned pseudonyms following transcription.

At this university, COVID-19 closed campus from March 2020 until some in-person activity resumed in August 2020. Most staff members at the university worked from home during this time, and some offices continued a flexible work arrangement for the 2021/2022 academic year. As a result, staff were most comfortable using Zoom for interviews. Using Zoom instead of in-person interviews also allowed more flexibility in scheduling and may have had an impact on the amount of people that agreed to participate.

Analysis

Data analysis took place throughout three months in Fall 2021. Transcripts from each interview were cleaned each week. Original copies of transcripts were generated by the university Zoom system. Once interviews concluded and all transcripts were cleaned, the researchers began the coding process using a combination of the comment feature in Microsoft Word and color-coded organization in Microsoft Excel.

Data was coded using hybrid coding (Miles et al., 2014). The team developed deductive codes from broad themes about the recent hires and hiring managers' experiences with the hiring process overall (e.g., the *job description* family of codes included *DEI job descriptions* and *job posting language*; the *motivation* family of codes included *why the University* and *other jobs*; the *rejected offers* family of codes included *salary concerns* and *mobility*).

Grouping codes together helped the researchers understand how themes were connected to one another, especially around issues of equity in salary and workload across departments. Throughout the process, the team shared themes emerging from coding and grouped quotations to discuss patterns across departments and in the hiring process.

A qualitative matrix (Miles et al., 2014) was built in Excel to combine findings across all new hires and hiring managers to evaluate the effectiveness of DEI initiatives at the College and to identify areas for further development and research. Categories for the matrix were created from the themes identified during the coding and memoing stage and focused on the perceptions of participants on the hiring process. Analysis focused on the experiences of participants, their perceptions of DEI, and issues impacting employment across departments. The researchers did not track demographic information for participants directly and chose to focus on experiences, motivations, and hiring processes.

Following completion of the matrix, the researchers looked for patterns in recent hires and hiring managers. For example, reasons why recent hires accepted positions and why hiring managers faced rejected offers were examined and used to draw conclusions about candidates' motivations for accepting employment at the University. The researchers used themes where people described their experiences with the hiring process to identify areas of need for individual departments and for the College to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in employment.

Results

Attitudes toward DEI initiatives

Faculty and staff at universities frequently describe their perceptions of diversity initiatives and inclusion in mission statements as superficial or misleading (Lehan et al., 2020). It was refreshing, then, to hear from participants at University that DEI initiatives are largely taken seriously and have visibility in the job life cycle. The majority (n=6) of recent hires reported reading statements or language around diversity, equity, and inclusion in the job description for the position, and the majority of respondents (n=6) reported DEI related questions during the interview process. For Kate, there was a healthy sense of skepticism in the ways DEI language appeared that was alleviated only when she realized it was not just lip service: ‘You see, that (DEI) everywhere now. I do know that when those questions were followed up on in the interview. That made me aware that the College was taking those things seriously like they made it to the interview level.’ For Chloe, an external applicant who recently relocated, it was important to find an institution that upheld her personal values: ‘To be blunt, I was really interested in working for an institution that aligned itself visibly with the values that I think are really important, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion.’

Hiring managers were required to work through a job description rewrite in Spring 2021 and were trained by HR professionals to incorporate more DEI language into the descriptions. As part of the initiative, hiring managers were also required to meet with someone in human resources to review their descriptions before publication, with a specific focus on increasing diversity in the candidate pool. Though none of the managers had anything explicitly negative to say about the rewrite process or incorporating DEI language, there were fewer overtly positive statements (n=3) when compared recent hires’ perceptions. For Lillian, the process was helpful because it made space and time for looking at implicit bias: ‘Because it had been so incredibly helpful, the first time I had gone through the process right, so I learned a lot about myself and what some of my blind spots were.’ One goal of the DEI team was to broaden job descriptions to capture skills instead of specific qualifications. Lisa shared what was helpful:

We went through the process of talking through kind of expectations, especially making sure that we were looking at opportunities for making the position postings accessible and that process was really helpful. In the past,

I think we would look for somebody who, preferably already had [specific] experience.

Job description rewrite

One of the first steps in the Building Great Teams initiative was to examine job descriptions for all positions in each department. Supervisors were encouraged to meet with each member of their team and revise any job descriptions to ensure they matched expectations for the role. The process was revisited during the hiring process to increase inclusive language in the job posting.

Overall, the hiring managers found the process mostly positive. Kassandra describes, ‘We made some changes to it just to include more inclusive language... that was kind of cool just to be able to go through and update our job description.’ The position Lillian hired for was brand new, and she appreciated the job description rewrite process as a way to understand the creation of a new role. Alexandra shared the ways her team approached the rewrite, ‘Our focus was on putting some fresh eyes on position descriptions, ensuring we were capturing what people are really doing and making sure that our language is appropriately reflective of the current position.’ Where we may have expected frustration at additional tasks and reviews, we found that hiring managers generally appreciated the time and space to examine job descriptions. Some hiring managers (n=2) would like additional support on DEI practices. Augustine cited a lack of professional development as a barrier to effective hiring:

Honestly, just more training in DEI would be helpful, I feel we're supposed to be incorporating it and just so many parts of our jobs and our interview process and everything. And no one's really given us much training like suddenly it's like we had to rewrite all of our job descriptions and incorporate DEI, and we all understand what it is, but I think just more training in general about that would be helpful.

Kate’s work with the Building Great Teams group helped in rewriting job descriptions, ‘There were one or two things where she said this language, you may want to shift in these ways and gave some examples that might make it more inclusive.’ One reason Kate may have been more open to the rewrite process and the initiative as a whole is her participation as both a recent hire and a hiring

manager. Those with a long history at the University may have found the process less helpful, as it felt repetitive or unnecessary.

Because Sarah's job includes a DEI title, she has a lot of DEI experience and felt frustrated at the requirement to use the College's DEI statement in her job description: 'Quite frankly I thought that that was a little silly to instill in there, but I would rather write my own, not just put in somebody else's words.' Sarah also felt some DEI initiatives were not as effective as they could be. In her experience, DEI questions are more effective when they are directly connected to supporting groups of students.

Job posting and recruitment

Before posting positions on the University's HR management software, all hiring managers were required to meet for 30 minutes with a DEI specialist to discuss the job advertisement and recruiting strategies. More than half (n=6) of the hiring managers interviewed spoke about their experience discussing the job posting and making revisions. Kate described how helpful it was to meet with someone to review the posting, 'That ended up helping us to find language that will make the ad more inclusive and more on target with what we were actually trying to say. Really helpful and I would never have gone to HR and ask them.' Meeting with hiring managers is part of a larger effort to shift away from specific job requirements and look more for transferrable skills. Lisa shared how making the shift with someone else made it easier:

The DEI process was, you know really opening it up...breaking it down and looking specifically what we needed people to be able to do and what they could learn in the context of the job. And so I think it made a real difference in the way the job was posted, the way that we listed out the requirements versus the job, and then we could get a good mix of applicants.

Increasing the applicant pool was one goal of the DEI initiative and is high priority for hiring managers struggling to attract good pools during COVID-19. An additional concern is where jobs are posted and how they are advertised. Alexandra expressed a desire to better understand how positions are posted, 'I think right now we just kind of copy-paste the position description, but I think we have a lot of room there to better represent the positions for potential applicants and to highlight lots of the great things about the position.' Alexandra spoke with a desire to attract

candidates to jobs as opposed to a mindset that it is a privilege to work at the University, 'I would love to hear a little bit more about what our parameters there, how can we craft these descriptions, in a way that that hopefully will help us in the recruiting process a little bit.' A lack of posting positions to hire outside of the University was an overall concern, as external hires could lead to increased diversity because they come with unique experiences outside of the institution.

Most new hires were affiliated with or internal to the University (n=7/11). None of the respondents reported seeing the job listing outside of University job boards, listservs, or the University's HR management software. Noah was a student at the University and found the position through his master's degree listserv. Without access to internal job boards, he would not have applied for the position. Though the software was a valuable tool in advertising positions, it is difficult to know which candidates are missing jobs because of accessibility. Unless a candidate was specifically looking for a job at the University, they may not see postings in the public-facing version of the University's HR management software.

Of the job seekers hired externally (n=4), the majority (n=3) moved to the City because other family members moved for work. For Adam and Jim, experience in higher education led them to apply at colleges in the City. Even after an unsuccessful salary negotiation attempt, Adam took the position because he needed a job and because of the job description, 'I continued to understand it as being very aligned with my professional interests, the responsibilities of the role.' Like Adam, Jim applied to other positions at the University because of his experiences working in higher education. Categorized as an external hire because of time spent working at other institutions before returning to the University, Jim says: 'The opportunity to return as a staff member was exciting.' The climate of the University influenced many candidates, including Chloe. She moved to the City from a different state and sought an institution that she felt aligned with her moral values, 'Throughout this process, one of the reasons why I was like the University is my goal employer is because I was like I want to be part of something that's continuing to evolve and change and support people who need to be supported.' The reputation for diversity, equity, and inclusion was a key part of Chloe's decision to take a job at the University.

Applicant pool

The pool of applicants for positions in the College at the University shifted dramatically following COVID-19. All hiring managers cited smaller applicant

pools and trouble hiring. Hiring in what used to be very competitive positions on campus have resulted in applicant pools so small the position had to be closed and reopened to broaden the search (n=3). In some cases, small pools still contain viable candidates, as Kassandra shared, 'It was pretty bleak, I mean I've hired one of the best people I could possibly hire and I feel like it was luck, because I think we only interviewed two people.' Part of the challenge is transfer to different positions across campus. When Roy had to replace someone in his department who took a job elsewhere at the University, he faced a much smaller pool than he was used to, 'Last time I believe we had 85 applicants, we had five, this time, and two of those applicants, the applications were incomplete, so we couldn't consider them.'

Hiring managers have many theories about why applicant pools are so much smaller. Sometimes it is the nature of the position. For example, Ryan's most recent posting was for a very specific type of candidate, 'This was a position that we were offering as a one-year position, we were looking for someone who was maybe a recent graduate or someone who's looking for a gap year before going on to medical school or professional graduate school.' Ryan acknowledged that a small applicant pool may have been a result of a 'temporary' position.

Kate viewed smaller pools as a symptom of COVID-19 and a reluctance to 'invest in in-person visits.' She cited two problems:

In the long run, that creates two problems, one is that it encourages you to just hire the people who are already here, because you can actually talk to them and make that connection. And so you always just keep hiring in the same pool. The other is it makes me less likely to want to accept a position if you're not willing to bring me in. I want to bring people and get to know them and see if this is really a good match. And so again that limits your pool of people.

At the forefront for many hiring managers is frustration with salaries they are able to offer potential candidates. The cost of living in the City is high, and the University has not adjusted staff salaries to adjust to the additional cost of living. Alexandra spends time advocating for her department and acknowledges that it is an issue for the University, 'A lot of it is salary. And I know that is a university level conversation. The cost of living in the City has far surpassed what we are able to pay.' Many positions require advanced degrees and experience working with students, but hiring managers are not always able to offer what they feel candidates

should earn. Sarah felt frustrated, ‘I don't know what the answer is, but my goodness, it's disrespectful. We want you to have a master's in, yet we bring you in at that rate.’ One hiring manager described feeling ‘embarrassed’ when making salary offers to candidates.

In some cases, hiring managers lose candidates because they are not able to negotiate salary (n=2). Ryan lost a candidate that initially seemed very excited about the position, but turned down the job because of compensation, ‘As a college at the university that we have to figure out a way in which we can be competitive with our financial packages.’ Sarah’s candidate accepted the offer and ultimately turned it down because of salary, ‘Then they changed their mind. I mean the challenge particularly now at the university is, our pay is so low we're not competitive at all.’ The department hopes to increase transparency in hiring, especially by removing the *Salary* + component in the University’s HR management software that sometimes led applicants to believe they would be able to negotiate much higher salaries than caps allowed.

Interviews

Most recent hires (n=8) reported at least two rounds of interviews with different levels of team members and administrators. Entry-level positions in academic advising had the same level of rigorous interviews as senior and supervisor level positions. For Mya, an academic advisor, multiple rounds of interviews did not necessarily mean different questions, just different interviewers, ‘I did have a second interview with the person above my supervisor and she asked me kind of the same questions that they asked before.’ Despite being in the same College, interview questions varied widely by position and by organizational role. The focus on DEI efforts, however, was consistent as evidenced by the types of questions asked during the interview process.

Kate did not put much weight into the DEI initiative as an interviewee because she felt she saw those elements everywhere, and rarely implemented in an authentic way. She began to believe the dedication of the College, however, when they showed up in the interview process as well as the job description, ‘I think a lot about diversity and inclusion on a day-to-day basis.... when those questions were followed up on in the interview, that made me aware that the College was taking those things seriously—like they made it to the interview level.’ Interviewees were asked about working with diverse student populations and communicating with people of different backgrounds. For some candidates, it was more difficult to

describe how DEI shows up in their work than for others. Emily struggled because as someone not in a student-facing role, she did not have responsibility for interactions or for program design, ‘Specifically the question was how will you integrate an awareness to DEI in your job? That was something that stood out to me because my role doesn't scream diversity, equity, and inclusion.’ An additional complication to maintaining standards for DEI during the hiring process was the necessity to move online as an accommodation of COVID-19 protocols.

COVID-19 complications

University remote work complicated the interview and hiring process for both hiring managers and recent hires. As addressed previously, applicant pools were significantly smaller than previous years and most recent hires were internal to the University system or had already determined the University to be their ideal employer. COVID-19 closures impacted all aspects of hiring and recruitment, including the interview process and onboarding.

Recent hires found positive and negative results from interviewing entirely online through Zoom. Kate, who served as both a hiring manager and a recent hire, found interviewing via Zoom to be challenging, ‘We went around the table and each person asked a question, I would answer, and then we would move on. I realize that’s pretty much how interviews work, but I wanted to hear what they thought about whatever they just asked me.’ Kate’s lack of feeling a connection to others was reflected by hiring managers as well. Ryan’s team made special efforts to acknowledge that interviews on Zoom changed expectations:

We acknowledged we're all remote right now, and the challenges that come with that. I tried to lighten up by saying I’m at home, I have two young kids—there may be a kid that comes in, you may hear sounds... hopefully that doesn't throw you... I’m trying to make people feel good about it.

Not all teams worked to put candidates at ease. For Emily, the Zoom interview prevented collegiality during the process and increased pressure, ‘There were six of them and one of me...they had all their questions pre-planned, so it's just answer this question answer this question answer this question.’ Though she was hired anyway, Emily’s hiring manager asked her why she was such a poor interviewer. Emily, who spent years in industry and not in higher education, shared that previous interview processes were very different, ‘the interviews that I had were like if a

friend or someone in the company is asking you to come, and you're probably going to get the position or they wouldn't have asked you to come.'

Deal breakers, departures, and rejected offers

Hiring managers focused on personality and experience as primary factors for candidate dismissal. Many of the posted positions had specific levels of education and types of experience valued by hiring teams which served to weed out applicant pools before hiring managers made interview offers. During the interview process, hiring managers paid special attention to both responses to questions and applicant characteristics. When asked to describe a candidate that was interviewed but not ultimately hired, Kassandra cited a 'contentious personality.' Lisa focused on the ways personality communicates expectations to students, 'Her manner and demeanor, cover letter, and the way she responded to our questions was not very professional. Professionalism is one thing that we are trying to work with students on trying to teach them and that just wasn't present.' Roy cited 'attitude' as being important because of high stress and demands, 'We work hard, we work, really, really hard, but then at the end of the day, we will gather in the hallway and just sort of decompress from the day.' As much as climate and culture were important to recent hires, maintaining office climate when hiring was equally important to hiring managers. Their goals in hiring included making sure replacement candidates were a good fit.

There are many reasons why people leave positions at the University and within the College, but patterns emerged around promotion opportunities (or lack thereof), salary concerns, and changes in life circumstances. Several departments in the College lost people because of life changes like marriage, graduation, or a move. Hiring managers shared concerns about those who left because of salary and a lack of upward mobility in the College. Lillian, Lisa, Roy, and Minerva all described situations where salary was a primary factor for the departure of valued employees. Lillian expressed concern for both the University and higher education in general:

I think that like for our university, specifically, I think that these jobs are not as attractive as they used to be. They're not as competitive with pay, and I think that universities in general or education in general is understaffed and has been for quite a while. We've been running lean and understaffed, I think, for a long time, even before the pandemic. It's not as attractive—it's

probably a lot of work for not a lot of pay. I think that our college does a fine job compared to other colleges on campus. I don't think that we're doing anything differently, and maybe we are doing things better in some cases, but I think it's just in general, comparing it to other positions where they are not as attractive. I've worked at the university for a long time, so the reasoning that I chose that job is not valid anymore. Oh, it's great benefits work life balance and things like that? I just don't believe that's the case anymore.

When she interviewed for a hiring manager position, Kate asked blatantly why there was 'a revolving door in this position.' Though Kate got an answer she deemed sufficient, Minerva offered a different perspective when she spent time addressing a level of overwork without the possibility of promotion as a key factor in her predecessor's departure, 'They wouldn't do anything to retain him until he had another offer, and then they wanted to match it. But it came with absolutely no development or growth for him.' She describes a culture of low pay with little opportunity for advancement. After taking a supervisor's previous position via promotion, she was dismayed to find a reduction in the position salary. After sharing her concerns with supervisors, she let them know turnover would not decrease until major changes were made, 'I don't think it's a matter of if I think it's a matter of how many people you lose in a second wave of turnover.'

Salary continued to play a major role in the recruitment and retention process. While speed in hiring was one factor for rejected offers, salary remained the biggest contributor to why candidates did not take positions in the College. Augustine, Ryan, and Minerva all made offers to candidates that did not accept based on salary. Augustine describes, 'Salary is not super flexible or generous in our position,' and acknowledged that rejected offers were rare, but did happen. Ryan's candidate attempted to negotiate, but the lack of flexibility in what the College was able to offer forced him to decline. An additional hurdle was the way positions were posted, 'Say you know there's their salary range, and there's a plus sign. I don't really know what that plus goes to, and then people are shocked. Like the max is less than what I'm already making.' While the College is moving away from using a range or plus in their listings, salary continues to be a barrier for hiring.

Discussion

In the study, the researchers interviewed 8 hiring managers and 9 individuals hired in the last year. Two participants were both recently hired and became hiring managers. We wanted to better understand the job life cycle for staff in the largest college at a large research institution. The focus of this work stemmed from a recent diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative (DEI) that required hiring managers to work with HR to incorporate DEI standards into all stages of the hiring process including the job description, job posting, interview process, and onboarding. Hiring managers found the DEI conversations helpful and some requested additional support or training. Recent hires reported seeing DEI elements during all stages of the hiring process, though many recognized DEI initiatives as a national trend that does not always indicate efficacy in implementation (Lehan et al., 2020).

The team's results suggest that while the DEI initiative has been successful on the surface based on responses from recent hires and hiring managers, there is a lack of evidence that there has been a significant increase in diversity in hiring or in departments. It is difficult to evaluate the program without institutional data on several factors, a challenge increased by a lack of data collection outside race and gender. The University does not collect data on sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability, for example. Though the interviewees provided anecdotal evidence about the diversity of hiring committees, all observations were self-perceptive. Additionally, there were several instances where one person vetted potential candidates via resumes submitted online, creating an opportunity for implicit bias to impact the hiring process.

Though work was done by individual departments to rewrite job descriptions for inclusivity purposes, most job postings still had high levels of education and experience required that were not commensurate with job responsibilities or salary. As a result, recent hires were predominantly affiliated with the University or the College and took positions to remain on campus after graduation. Those outside hires (n=4) sought positions at the University specifically because of value systems, work experience, or relocation to the metropolitan area. Without the reputation of the University, the College would struggle to hire at current salary rates. This sentiment is reflected in responses from both recent hires and from hiring managers and appears throughout all aspects of the hiring process.

Hiring committees seem to be formed based on people with the bandwidth to participate. Hiring at the University can be a lengthy process that is labor-and-

time intensive. While many recent hires reported seeing students during the hiring process, it's clear that time of year or time of the semester impacted the ability to recruit students. Different hiring managers also placed different levels of value on recruiting hiring committees, and some merely wanted to find people who had the time to participate. One hiring manager reported she had been 'doing nothing but interviewing and hiring' based on high turnover rates and low salaries. Shrinking applicant pools coupled with higher than usual turnover rates have the potential to create mass shortages at the College and in the University system overall.

The struggle to hire and retain staff at the University follows national trends on "The Great Resignation" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021; Malmendier, 2021; Rosalsky, 2021). Disruptions to college enrollment, attendance, and lost funding threaten to change the landscape of higher education (NCES, 2021; NSC, 2021). COVID-19 related funding concerns may have stagnated growth in the College and impacted changes to roles and salaries, creating an impending downward spiral that could impact daily operations. Those with student-facing positions continue to have soaring caseloads that are not equitable to other Colleges on the campus. Many positions lack equity between departments within the College, in work expectations, remote work, caseloads, and pay. Increased transparency at the University and College levels as well as analysis of policies that create wildly different working environments could begin to address issues impacting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Implications and conclusions

Much focus is paid to inequity and representation for faculty in higher education, but large universities are staffed by thousands of people with varying levels of experience and education. Many positions, like academic advising, have real, tangible impacts on educational outcomes for students but remain at the lower end of university salaries (Lee & Metcalfe, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic and a national reckoning around issues of equity pushed many businesses to examine their practices and value systems and question their dedication to diversity and inclusion. A threat to the bottom line has forced universities to do the same. A workforce that better represents communities prompts innovation and understanding (Heisler, 2020). As bastions of propelling the public good,

universities have a responsibility to put DEI initiatives at the forefront of their strategic objectives.

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