



URBAN UNIVERSITIES FOR HEALTH

Urban Universities for HEALTH (Health Equity through Alignment, Leadership and Transformation of the Health Workforce) is a partnership effort of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU)/Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and the NIH National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). The project aims to improve evidence and the use of data that will help universities enhance and expand a culturally sensitive, diverse and prepared health workforce that will improve health and health equity in underserved urban communities.



THE COALITION OF URBAN SERVING UNIVERSITIES

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) is a president-led organization committed to escalating urban university engagement to increase prosperity and opportunity in the nation's cities, and to tackling key urban challenges. The USU includes 39 public urban research universities representing all U.S. geographic regions. The USU agenda focuses on creating a competitive workforce, building strong communities, and improving the health of a diverse population. The USU has partnered with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) to establish an Office of Urban Initiatives, housed at APLU, to jointly lead an urban agenda for the nation's public universities.



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The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is a research, policy, and advocacy organization representing 238 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations. Founded in 1887, APLU is North America's oldest higher education association with member institutions in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, four U.S. territories, Canada, and Mexico. Annually, its 196 U.S. member campuses enroll 3.9 million undergraduates and 1.2 million graduate students, award 1 million degrees, employ 1 million faculty and staff, and conduct \$40.2 billion in university-based research.



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The Association of American Medical Colleges is a not-for-profit association representing all 141 accredited U.S. and 17 accredited Canadian medical schools; nearly 400 major teaching hospitals and health systems, including 51 Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and nearly 90 academic and scientific societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC represents 148,000 faculty members, 83,000 medical students, and 115,000 resident physicians.

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Executive Summary

Many universities now recognize interdisciplinary research and collaboration as the means to address grand challenges facing our society. University leaders also recognize the value of diversity in higher education and have expanded their definitions of diversity to incorporate multiple perspectives, methodologies, and worldviews. An inclusive campus climate that values diversity is one of the determinants of institutional excellence, and leaders seek strategies to further develop and improve the climate at their institutions.

Faculty cluster hiring is an emerging practice in higher education and involves hiring faculty into multiple departments or colleges around interdisciplinary research topics, or “clusters.” Some cluster hiring programs also aim to increase faculty diversity or address other aspects of institutional vitality, including faculty career success, collaboration across disciplines, the teaching and learning environment, and community engagement.

The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU)/Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) Advisory Committee on Faculty Cluster Hiring is pleased to present this final report, the product of qualitative research conducted with cluster hiring program administrators and faculty at universities that have adopted this practice. This research study aimed to assess the impact of faculty cluster hiring programs on diversity and institutional climate, as well as to identify factors for success and problems to avoid. Based on the findings, the committee presents the following promising practices for university leaders to consider as they develop their own faculty cluster hiring programs:

1. Make diversity goals explicit and develop supporting strategies to achieve those goals;
2. Work to ensure early buy-in from deans and department heads;
3. Engage faculty early in the process and follow the lead of the faculty;
4. Establish and articulate expectations for cluster hires from the very beginning;
5. Give cluster hires credit for work they perform as part of the cluster in the tenure and promotion process;
6. Establish infrastructure to support interdisciplinary collaboration;
7. Communicate the value of the program to stakeholders across the institution; and
8. Develop a plan for sustaining the program throughout leadership changes.

Introduction

Universities drive discovery and produce groundbreaking solutions to many of our world's biggest challenges. Vast, complex problems such as finding a cure for cancer, ensuring food safety, and mitigating global climate change require talented researchers who think creatively and work across disciplines (Severin, 2013). The environment in these intellectual communities influences the development of students into scholars and global citizens. By harnessing the collective experiences and perspectives of the academy, students prepare themselves for success in higher education, the workplace, and society.

In order for all members of the university community to be successful, the institution must foster an inclusive climate in which collaboration and the open exchange of ideas are commonplace, and where individuals from various backgrounds can contribute and learn from each other. An important determinant of this climate is the institution's faculty: the human capital that executes the university's missions of teaching, research, service, and patient care. Faculty impact the intellectual development of students in the classroom and as advisors; they conduct cutting-edge research, engage with their communities, and define academic programs. In short, faculty are vital to achieving institutional excellence.

A successful institutional climate is inclusive, collaborative, and engaged, and enables faculty, staff, and students from all backgrounds to thrive. Hiring a diverse faculty body is the first step toward attaining a desirable climate, but it is not the end goal. Universities must also adapt existing policies and programs to achieve the full benefits of diversity. Although institutional climate is impacted by many variables, there are several core outcomes of interest to university leaders: 1) the academic success of faculty from all backgrounds, 2) an inclusive learning environment, as perceived by students, faculty, and staff, 3) collaboration among individuals from diverse backgrounds and across disciplines, and 4) community engagement.

Our study focuses on one emerging practice that was originally designed to expand interdisciplinary research but has also been known to impact diversity and institutional climate: hiring faculty into interdisciplinary clusters. Over the past 15 years, a number of institutions have piloted faculty cluster hiring programs and these efforts are now beginning to bear fruit. This study aims to identify how institutions have implemented faculty cluster hiring programs, factors for success, unintended consequences, and the programs' impact on diversity and climate outcomes. The findings demonstrate the potential of this practice to improve faculty diversity and institutional climate, as measured by the following four core outcomes: academic success of faculty, an inclusive learning environment, collaboration across disciplines, and community engagement.

Background

THE ROLE OF DIVERSITY AND CLIMATE IN INSTITUTIONAL EXCELLENCE

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift from diversity as a means to address inequities in higher education to a phenomenon that is core to the university's mission and vision (AAMC, 2013). Diversity is no longer simply a structural goal (i.e., hiring a critical mass of minority faculty), but has become a more systemic goal that includes achieving an inclusive climate (AAMC, 2013). Existing literature supports the role of diversity and climate in institutional excellence in the following four areas.

First, diversity and a favorable institutional climate impact faculty retention, which is a concern for many public universities. Discrimination, lack of support, lack of collegiality, and other climate-related factors were found to have a negative impact on faculty retention (O'Meara, Lounder, & Campbell, 2014), particularly among minority faculty where turnover is already high (Piercy et al., 2005; Price et al., 2005).

Second, empirical research has shown that a diverse faculty body improves the teaching and learning environment for all students (Piercy et al., 2005); minority and female faculty are also more likely to use active learning techniques and participatory teaching practices (Milem, 2003). As the "designated socializing agents" in higher education (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998), faculty play a role in exposing students to a wide variety of cultural perspectives that will expand their understanding of the world and help them develop critical thinking skills needed for success (AAMC, 2013).

Third, a growing body of evidence suggests that diverse teams produce higher-quality research outcomes and unique solutions to problems (Milem, 2001; National Institutes of Health [NIH], 2012). Collaboration among individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives is critical for developing novel solutions to emerging research problems (Van Hartesveldt & Giordan, 2008). This collaboration is more likely to occur with the interpersonal trust and support that an inclusive campus climate provides. Collaboration is also a key component of interdisciplinary research, which is desired by both universities and funding agencies for its role in fostering innovation (Van Hartesveldt & Giordan, 2008).

Four, diversity in higher education is associated with enhanced economic growth as universities graduate a workforce that is prepared to excel in a globalized

economy (Milem, 2003; Pugh, Dietz, Brief, & Wiley, 2008). This is particularly important in health and biomedical research fields, where lack of diversity among professionals may contribute to disparities in access to health care services (Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003) and biased outcomes in clinical trials where minorities are underrepresented (Ford et al., 2007).

THE NEED FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Despite efforts to diversify the pipeline, university faculty remain a homogeneous group and leaders must consider applying broader, institution-wide strategies to achieve results (Piercy et al., 2005; Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, & Richards, 2004). Furthermore, many efforts have focused on simply achieving a balanced mix of individuals in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. Limiting diversity efforts to demographics alone is insufficient and may trigger conflicts if structural barriers to success are not eliminated (Hurtado et al., 1998). To achieve the full benefits of diversity, universities must adjust policies and programs to ensure support for faculty from all backgrounds (Milem, 2003).

Improving institutional climate will require systemic effort as well. Traditionally, institutional excellence has been defined by the university's reputation compared to other universities, its selectivity, and the resources it has amassed (Milem, 2003). Expanding this widely accepted definition of excellence to incorporate climate-related factors such as an inclusive learning environment, interdisciplinary collaboration, and community engagement will require a concrete commitment at the highest levels of university leadership.

Although leadership commitment and strategic planning are necessary first steps, day-to-day processes must also change, particularly those that impact faculty retention and success. Current tenure and promotion guidelines are heavily weighted toward research activities and serve as disincentives to both interdisciplinary collaboration (IGERT, 2008) and pedagogical innovation (Milem, 2001). Prior research has also shown that bias and discrimination during the tenure process are closely linked to the diversity climate at the institution (McKay, Avery, Tonidandel, Morris, Hernandez, & Hebl, 2007; Price et al., 2005), enhancing the legal argument for change.

Faculty cluster hiring is a potential solution that may address many of these challenges. Although the practice was originally designed to expand interdisciplinary research, it also impacts both faculty diversity and components of institutional climate, including the learning environment, collaboration, community engagement, and success of faculty from all backgrounds. In addition, faculty cluster hiring programs have the potential to improve institutional excellence overall by breaking down silos, reallocating resources to benefit the whole institution, and attracting innovative, nontraditional scholars.

DEFINITION AND HISTORY OF CLUSTER HIRING PROGRAMS

Faculty cluster, or cohort, hiring is the practice of hiring faculty into multiple departments or schools around interdisciplinary research topics. In many cases, the clusters are framed as a mechanism to attract distinguished researchers, creating “peaks of excellence” (Sá, 2008). Because the cluster is superimposed across multiple disciplines, it transcends institutional barriers to collaboration and intellectual exchange that may be deeply ingrained at the university. Some cluster hiring programs also aim to increase faculty diversity, not just in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender, but also in terms of perspective, ideology, and methodology.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison pioneered the practice of faculty cluster hiring in the late 1990s. The Cluster Hiring Initiative (CHI) was designed “to help keep UW-Madison at the forefront of research and knowledge, to advance the state’s economy, and to deal with institutional barriers to interdisciplinarity” (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008). UW-Madison raised \$15 million in funds to support the CHI from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF), the University of Wisconsin Foundation (UWF), and the state of Wisconsin (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010). Since the program began, 149 new faculty lines were created and faculty were hired into 48 interdisciplinary clusters with topics ranging from African languages to zebrafish biology. The program was comprehensively evaluated twice (in 2003 and 2008) and has demonstrated strong outcomes (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008; University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003).

Since then, faculty cluster hiring programs have been implemented at other universities with many more in development. However, there have been significant departures from the University of Wisconsin-Madison model in terms of mission and goals, implementation processes, policy changes, infrastructure for collaborative activities, and sustainability. Some cluster hiring programs have been highly successful, while others have faltered; still others have failed to launch. Further research was needed to determine factors for success and solutions to common challenges.

Study Objectives

In 2013, a series of “action groups” were convened by the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU)/Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) to identify specific action steps for improving the diversity and cultural competence of the health workforce. One of the action steps that emerged, and that was prioritized by USU presidents, was to improve evidence around the emerging practice of faculty cluster hiring as a strategy for increasing diversity and strengthening institutional climate.

In order to move forward with this action item, APLU/USU commissioned a qualitative research study to investigate the practice across a number of APLU/USU institutions. An advisory group of provosts, vice provosts, and cluster hiring experts was convened to oversee the research. The study is part of a broader effort by the APLU/USU, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), and the National Institutes of Health¹ to improve evidence regarding university efforts that increase diversity and success of students for biomedical and health careers.

The study aimed to address three primary research questions:

- What are the factors for success with regard to improving diversity and institutional climate?
- What are the unintended consequences and potential pitfalls to avoid?
- What has been the impact of faculty cluster hiring programs on diversity and institutional climate?

1 Urban Universities for HEALTH (Health Equity through Alignment, Leadership and Transformation of the Health Workforce) is a partnership effort of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU)/Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), and the NIH National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). The project aims to improve evidence and the use of data that will help universities enhance and expand a culturally sensitive, diverse, and prepared health workforce that will improve health and health equity in underserved urban communities. For more information, please visit our website at: <http://www.urbanuniversitiesforhealth.org>

Method

The researchers constructed an interview tool consisting of open-ended questions in the following core areas of inquiry: 1) motivation and buy-in, 2) processes for implementation and maintenance of the program, 3) impact on diversity and institutional climate, and 4) successful practices and pitfalls to avoid. The interview tool was tested with a small number of advisory committee members. In addition to the interview questions, one week prior to the interview a pre-interview electronic survey designed to capture basic, descriptive information about the cluster hiring program was disseminated to key informants.

The advisory committee selected a geographically diverse group of 10 public research universities for inclusion in the study. Members of the advisory committee identified the first wave of key informants at their own institutions or within their professional networks. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by phone and were recorded with the informed consent of the participants.² Using the Peer Esteem Snowballing Technique (PEST) (Christopoulos, 2009), the researchers identified other individuals at the institution who should be interviewed (e.g., senior faculty hired through the cluster). Nineteen key informants were invited to interview, and 17 were interviewed, for a response rate of 89 percent. Results were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

² The researchers adhered to standard protocols for human subjects' research, and the method and interview questions were approved through APLU internal review processes.

Results

As expected, no two cluster hiring programs in the sample were alike, and they differed in terms of size, design, implementation, and funding. The oldest program has been in place since 1998, while the newest was developed in 2013. About half of the programs originated in the provost's office, and the other half in the president or chancellor's office. Table 1 provides a cross-sectional profile of the institutions studied, and the following section describes main themes that were observed across the sample of institutions.

OBJECTIVES AND BUY-IN

GOALS: Most institutions developed their cluster hiring programs with at least one of two goals in mind: 1) increasing faculty diversity and 2) building the university's capacity to conduct interdisciplinary research.

BUY-IN: Most programs obtained buy-in from senior leadership first before approaching deans and department heads later in the process. All interviewees reported that buy-in from deans was most important to secure, since those deans would be required to sign off on any new faculty member hired. Many interviewees also cited input from existing faculty at the university as critical for success.

"The initiative was generated through the diversity strategic planning process, but there is a link with interdisciplinary studies... Proposal writers had to declare whether or not it was a diversity proposal or an interdisciplinary proposal — most of them ended up being both. But the weighting was more toward diversity."

— University of Illinois at Chicago

IMPLEMENTATION

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION: The dominant implementation model was an open, campus-wide competition for proposals, which were reviewed and selected by a committee. Interviewees reported that this usually worked well, although Florida International University found that a wide-open competition with few parameters could result in colleges requesting cluster hires for positions that did not fit the institution's definition of a cluster in an effort to acquire additional faculty lines. Several institutions utilized a coalition-building approach

to implementation, developing an institution-wide council or task force with representatives from both senior leadership and faculty reviewing proposals.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CLUSTER HIRES: Most institutions hired at least some faculty into joint appointments across two departments or even two colleges. The choice to hire junior or senior faculty depended on the institution's goals for the cluster. Clusters that aimed to achieve research prominence (Arizona State University and Florida International University) leaned toward senior hires, while clusters that aimed to achieve diversity or increase interdisciplinary collaboration leaned toward junior hires or a mix of both.

MANAGEMENT OF THE CLUSTERS: Some institutions implemented formal collaborative activities to support the cluster, such as discussion groups, conferences, seminars, retreats, luncheons, professional development activities, and jointly taught courses. Often a cluster coordinator or dedicated faculty member was hired to lead these activities and ensure the cluster met its goals. Dedicated space was set aside so that the clusters would have a place to meet outside their home departments. However, other institutions provided very little structure to support the clusters, relying on expectations (explicit or implicit) that new hires collaborate as part of their job descriptions.

FUNDING MODELS: A surprising finding was the variation in funding models used to support the clusters. Funding models fell into three main categories:

1. a *shared cost model*, which sourced approximately 50 percent of funding from the provost or chancellor's office and the other 50 percent from colleges,
2. a *centralized funding model*, in which most costs were paid by the research office and provost, and
3. a *decentralized funding model*, in which colleges absorbed most or all of the costs.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison was an outlier, receiving 100 percent of its funding from three external sources. However, this university is transitioning from this funding model toward a more "ecological" model in which costs are shared initially and then gradually decentralized to the colleges over time (see Case Study #1). Across the sample, rough estimates of costs ranged from \$1.5 million to \$36 million.

Success Highlight

Florida International University made a great return on its investment in cluster hiring. From FY 2008–2014 cluster hires brought in \$47.5 million in new research funding, which exceeded expenditures for the cluster during the same period by more than \$10 million.

TABLE 1: CROSS-SECTIONAL PROFILE OF INSTITUTIONS, AS OF DECEMBER 2014

	GOALS	ORIGINATED FROM	YEAR ESTABLISHED	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS HIRED TO DATE	NUMBER OF CLUSTERS TO DATE	JUNIOR/ SENIOR FACULTY TO DATE	JOINT APPOINTMENTS TO DATE	DID FACULTY DIVERSITY INCREASE?	APPROXIMATE COSTS
Arizona State University	Research excellence	Provost	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	All senior	Many are joint	No	Depends on the hire
Florida International University	Research excellence	Provost	2007	17	9	Mostly senior	Many are joint	Yes	\$25 million
Fresno State	Address critical regional issues	Provost	2009	39	5	All junior	No	Yes	\$1.5 million
North Carolina State University	Interdisciplinary research; more tenure-track faculty	Chancellor	2011	35	12	65% senior, 35% junior	A few are joint	Yes	\$25 million
Purdue	Interdisciplinary research	Provost	2010	35	13	Varies	A few are joint	No	\$8.9 million recurring, \$27.1 million non-recurring
Rutgers	Diversity; academic excellence	President's Council on Institutional Diversity and Equity	2008	15	3	66% junior, 34% senior	Many are joint	Yes	No set budget; about \$1.4 million to date
University of Illinois at Chicago	Diversity; interdisciplinary research	Chancellor and provost	2012	8	7	61% senior, 39% junior	Almost all are joint	Yes	\$1.5 million annually
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa	Interdisciplinary research; more Native Hawaiian faculty	Chancellor	2011	16	4	All junior	Almost all are joint	Yes	\$1.2–\$1.4 million annually in salaries and \$295,000 one-time start-up expenses
University of Wisconsin-Madison	Interdisciplinary research	Chancellor	1998	154	49	69% junior, 31% senior	A few are joint	Yes	\$15 million, initially and ongoing
University of Tennessee	Address "grand challenges" interdisciplinarily	Dean for research office	2013	0 (intend to hire 5 or 6)	None yet	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$1.2 million (<i>estimated</i>)

MONITORING AND EVALUATION: Many interviewees reported that their institutions had not yet developed a comprehensive evaluation plan for the clusters. The most commonly used metrics were in-process metrics (e.g., “Did we hire the people we said we would hire?”). Some long-term metrics that institutions are developing include research dollars won by cluster hires, the number of new programs and research centers developed, promotion and tenure of cluster faculty, and number of publications. Some institutions have already conducted, or plan to conduct, in-depth qualitative assessments of the programs’ success and faculty satisfaction.

IMPACT ON DIVERSITY

COMPOSITION OF THE FACULTY: Most institutions reported that they hired into the cluster faculty who were more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. Diversity of perspective, methodology, and ideology were also cited by schools that could assess these qualities. All of the institutions that intended to increase diversity and listed it as a primary or secondary goal saw an increase in faculty diversity. For example, of the seven individuals hired into the Sustainability Cluster at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, five were women (three of whom were Native Hawaiian). One was the first female Native Hawaiian scholar to be hired into the College of Engineering in the university’s 150-year history. At Rutgers, interviewees reported that diversity had increased but did not have exact numbers available.

Some programs experienced diversity gains even without an explicit focus on diversity. For example, North Carolina State University increased the percentage of minority faculty from 16 percent to 18 percent, while Fresno State saw a 2 percent increase in Hispanic/Latino faculty, a 3 percent increase in female faculty, and a 20 percent increase in Hispanic/Latino senior administrative leaders. At Purdue University, 54 percent of faculty cluster hires were female.

Cluster hiring administrators used a variety of strategies to increase diversity (Table 2), and many of these strategies could be implemented outside the context of a cluster hiring program.

LEADERSHIP VIEW OF DIVERSITY: In some cases, the cluster hiring program influenced senior leadership’s view or value of diversity and led to the implementation of other diversity-related efforts at the institution. For example, the leadership of North Carolina State University saw that cluster search committees were being trained to address unconscious bias and then implemented this training across the institution. At the University of Illinois at Chicago, the cluster hiring program deepened leadership’s existing commitment to diversity.

“Beyond rhetorical commitment to diversity, there's a hiring program, there are resources...When people have to put resources behind a rhetorical commitment, it makes it real.”

– University of Illinois at Chicago

TABLE 2: STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING DIVERSITY

STRATEGY	NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS SAMPLED USING THIS STRATEGY
Providing diversity training to search committees	4
Forming clusters around specific disciplines which tend to be more diverse or diversity-related research topics (e.g., Latin American studies, health equity)	3
Investing in recruitment efforts (e.g., sending faculty to meetings to recruit peers, advertising in different publications, dual-career hiring programs)	2
Strengthening leadership commitment to diversity	1
Networking and leveraging existing relationships with scholars	1
Ensuring the search committee is diverse	1
Providing a greater percentage of central funding to support minority hires	1
Having women and diversity “allies” run the hiring process	1
Conducting an “open search”	1

IMPACT ON INSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE

INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION: Cluster hiring programs at all of the institutions were observed to have a positive impact on at least one element of campus climate (as defined for the purposes of this study). The most commonly cited area of impact was interdisciplinary collaboration, which the researchers expected because interdisciplinary research was a common goal of cluster hiring programs. Institutions reported more energy on campus, more collaboration, an increased willingness among faculty to think outside their disciplines, increased respect for diversity of perspectives, and the breaking down of traditional disciplinary silos.

“People are seeing things in a different light...it has had an impact on the way faculty interact with others across campus. People who started off in [the water resources cluster] are now talking about sustainability and green initiatives, and looking for funding in the community. They find people on campus who are interested in the same things.”

– California State University, Fresno

CASE STUDY #1: LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

University of Wisconsin-Madison

The University of Wisconsin-Madison developed its Cluster Hiring Initiative (CHI) in 1998 with the purpose of fostering interdisciplinary research and adding more faculty to the institution's ranks. As a key informant described,

"We were losing faculty and not hiring at the same pace that we wanted to. David Ward, the former chancellor,³ was thinking about how to garner support from the state as well as other constituents. We wanted to not just hire, but also think about the future and excel as a higher education institution. One of our goals was to make the interdisciplinary approach even more apparent as part of an effort to engage the legislature and the state."

The university succeeded in obtaining \$5 million apiece from the State of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF), and the University of Wisconsin Foundation (UWF), for a total of \$15 million annually. The \$5 million from the State of Wisconsin was a new budget allocation and became part of the ongoing university budget. The cluster hiring program was funded entirely from these three sources and the funding has remained stable over the years. New hires were made as faculty left the university or bought out their salaries with grant funding.

However, this funding model presented some challenges. As faculty were promoted and salaries increased, the costs began to overtake the funding that had been set aside, which led to a budget deficit and the suspension of the creation of additional clusters. A committee developed a solution in the form of a new "ecological" funding model. Under this model, which has been fully vetted by deans, colleges will take on a small portion of the costs for new hires for six years. After six years (plus a two-year transition period), colleges will assume full responsibility for funding those hires.

Although no new clusters will be approved until the ecological model is fully stabilized, colleges and schools at UW-Madison need to include cluster hires in their budgets. Now that colleges have some "skin in the game," the university hopes to deepen buy-in for new clusters around research topics with a broad base of support.

3 The time frame for this study was September 2014 through April 2015. Some of the individuals originally involved in cluster hiring programs have since transitioned to other positions.

FACULTY SUCCESS: Interviewees reported that faculty hired through clusters have been as productive, if not more so, than faculty hired through traditional methods. Improvements in faculty retention were observed at most campuses. The clusters developed new courses and programs, which were perceived positively by students. Research opportunities for both graduate and undergraduate students were enriched, and so were mentoring opportunities for students.

“Native Hawaiian faculty are now in high demand as mentors to undergraduates, and are frequently asked to serve on committees and do outreach. This is because their knowledge of place, historical and contemporary, as well as their particular disciplinary area provides insight, and because they are so connected to the community.”

– University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Success Highlight

At the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, part of former Chancellor Virginia Hinshaw’s vision for the clusters was to use them to embed Hawaiian knowledge and culture into all disciplines. All of the new hires in the program have background in Hawaiian knowledge, language, or ontological perspective, regardless of discipline.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Several clusters were developed to address topics with local significance and that would engage local community organizations. For example, Fresno State developed a cluster around water resources, and Rutgers developed a cluster to promote urban entrepreneurship (Newark campus). The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, North Carolina State University, Fresno State, and Rutgers all reported new collaborations with private industry, state government, and local government. Florida International University described their cluster program as a service center for the county.

CASE STUDY #2: INCENTIVIZING DIVERSITY HIRING

The University of Illinois at Chicago

The University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) is an urban-serving university in the heart of Chicago that serves an extraordinarily diverse population of students. The value of diversity has always been a core element of UIC's mission. As one interviewee described, "When we ask faculty members why they chose UIC, they identified with our mission and wanted to contribute to that mission." At the same time, the institution recognized that the diversity of its faculty was not representative of the student population. Then-Chancellor Paula Allen-Meares initiated the cluster hiring program specifically to address the lack of diversity in the faculty.

Diversity hiring was supported by the program's funding model. The ratio of cost sharing between the Provost's office and the college is dependent on the hire. If the new hire comes from an underrepresented background, the Provost pays 70 percent of the new hire's salary and the college pays 30 percent. Otherwise, the Provost pays 40 percent of the salary and the college 60 percent. The funding ratio applies for as long as the faculty member is employed at the university. Of the institutions included in this study, only UIC reported using this type of funding strategy.

Although it is too soon to tell how effective this strategy will be in increasing faculty diversity, it is expected to have an incentivizing effect. However, interviewees noted that the individual driving the hiring process may be a faculty member instead of a department head, and therefore may be insensitive to differences in cost. Consequently, the funding ratio is expected to complement other diversity efforts in place at the university (e.g., selecting a diverse search committee).

SUGGESTED BEST PRACTICES

Interviewees were asked directly about successful practices they would recommend to other institutions. There were three common themes that emerged from their responses:

1. Clear and consistent communication during all phases of development and implementation: The anticipated benefits of cluster hiring need to be emphasized during the buy-in phase, when marketing the program to deans. Those submitting proposals for clusters need clear guidelines in advance. New hires need to know what is expected of them, and how activities related to the cluster will be integrated into the tenure and promotion process.

2. Engaging faculty early on and following the lead of the faculty: If existing faculty are not excited about the research topics, they will be less likely to support or cooperate with the cluster. Allowing existing faculty to provide input into the design and implementation of cluster hiring programs was a strategy for

Success Highlight

Once cluster topics were selected at Rutgers, the university held one-day conferences around each topic, attracting leading scholars from across the country who could discuss future trends for the field. These one-day conferences stimulated intellectual conversations and cross-cultural interaction — but they also introduced Rutgers to potential new hires for the clusters.

success, even if administrative leaders ultimately had the final say.

3. Support from top leadership and a plan for weathering leadership changes:

Cluster hiring programs are particularly vulnerable to senior leadership changes because it may take many years for the program to achieve significant results. Each institution should think critically about developing a plan for weathering leadership changes. For example, placing the program in a unit that is stable and does not change

frequently (e.g., Vice President for Faculty Affairs) can help to further embed the program within the institution's structure.

UNANTICIPATED CONSEQUENCES

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES: Institutions reported a number of negative, unintended consequences in the areas of administration, faculty success, funding sustainability, and perceptions of the clusters. Many interviewees reported difficulty obtaining approval from deans or department heads who were not involved in the hiring process. Faculty who were hired into joint appointments reported being overworked. Similarly, some junior faculty who were hired to do interdisciplinary work were discouraged from doing so because their efforts would not count toward tenure in their home departments.

"I had not considered that the task I was hired to do was not going to be the task that I would be assessed on during my performance evaluation. That blindsided me. It happened to other people too."

– (Source wishes to remain anonymous)

Unexpected start-up costs (e.g., the cost of new labs or workspaces) burdened some programs in the short term. Others found it difficult to eliminate clusters that had become obsolete and needed to sunset in order for the program to remain financially viable. Programs aiming to achieve research excellence had trouble recruiting high-profile senior hires who had little incentive to move or who had received competing offers from other schools. Finally, marketing and communication problems hampered institutions' efforts to obtain buy-in for the

programs and in some cases resulted in strong negative perceptions of the clusters among faculty and administrative leaders.

POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES: Several institutions reported a “spillover” effect, in which new clusters were spontaneously created or additional faculty were hired through traditional means to work on projects that emerged from clusters. Others expressed surprise at the extent to which cluster hiring had succeeded at breaking down silos and improving the quality of intellectual life at the institution.

CASE STUDY #3: INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

North Carolina State University

North Carolina State University's cluster hiring program was imported by Chancellor Randy Woodson from Purdue University. The program enjoyed a broad base of support from the very beginning and utilized a bottom-up approach to implementation, soliciting proposals directly from the faculty. The first round of clusters has been so successful that North Carolina State University is launching a second round (expected Spring 2015).

What sets North Carolina State University's program apart from others is the extent to which it has developed infrastructure to support interdisciplinary collaboration. The core of this infrastructure is the option of an unusual tenure process that incentivizes this kind of work. In consultation with their department heads, cluster hires can choose to be reviewed by a departmental committee or an interdisciplinary committee. In addition to these fundamental changes, formal activities, mentoring, and events bring the cluster hires together regularly. The yearlong events schedule begins with a group orientation in August where new hires are presented with a statement of mutual expectations, a plan for review, and detailed information about how they will be evaluated. Dedicated space was set aside so that new hires could co-locate. Finally, university-wide events that are open to all (for example, an annual symposium) connect the faculty at large with the work of the clusters.

To the surprise of university leadership, new faculty needed very little time to settle and started reaching out to each other almost immediately. An “umbrella network” of connections developed across the institution and contributed to an overall culture change toward interdisciplinary collaboration. Program administrators expected new hires to cooperate within clusters, but they did not expect the level of exchange that began to occur *across* clusters. The culture change was so extensive that it was noticed by students at a rival university (UNC Chapel Hill) who wrote about the program in the school newspaper and demanded their own institution to provide opportunities for interdisciplinary education. Overall, the level of interdisciplinary engagement was striking and administrative leaders credit the program's success to the infrastructure developed in advance to support collaboration.

Discussion

Findings from the interviews suggest that cluster hiring is a successful strategy for increasing interdisciplinary collaboration. It may also be a successful strategy for increasing faculty diversity, depending on how it is implemented. The researchers noted that institutions intending to increase the diversity of their faculty usually succeeded in doing so if one or more of the following factors were present:

- Including diversity in the mission or goals of the cluster hiring program;
- Recruiting faculty in disciplines where diversity is more prevalent;
- Broadening recruitment efforts to include venues or publications not ordinarily targeted;
- Providing hiring committees with diversity training and training to eliminate unconscious bias; and
- Hiring more junior faculty than senior faculty.

The researchers also concluded that cluster hiring programs do have a positive impact on campus climate, even when that effect is unintended. Because clusters transcend disciplinary boundaries, they provide faculty with the freedom to collaborate and encourage unconventional thinking. At institutions where cluster activities were integrated into the tenure and promotion process, cluster hires were incentivized to create new courses or research opportunities for students and explore new community partnerships. Based on the research, cluster activities clearly benefit both intellectual life at the institution and the career success of faculty themselves.

However, it was observed that these positive outcomes were only achieved if institutions modified existing policies to accommodate the clusters. Expecting new hires to develop cluster activities from scratch resulted in hires feeling overwhelmed and unsupported. For joint hires in particular, workloads needed to be adjusted so that faculty were not expected to contribute twice as much or be considered underperformers by their colleagues. In addition, tenure and promotion guidelines needed to be updated to credit faculty for cluster activities and incentivize collaborative work, especially for junior hires. In a few unfortunate cases, faculty who participated fully in the cluster's activities and served as advisors for minority students were penalized later on because tenure and promotion guidelines had not changed. Some failed to achieve tenure and were let go or resigned to work for other institutions. Conversely, some faculty

who focused exclusively on achieving tenure were not incentivized to participate in cluster activities.

Communication emerged as an important factor for success. Effective programs were marketed in a positive manner, with emphasis on expected university-wide benefits (not just benefits for specific disciplines). Within the clusters, transparent policies and clear communication about what will be expected of hires, how they will get tenure, and how they will work with each other helped ensure faculty career success.

Obtaining buy-in from deans and department heads in advance was noted by interviewees as a factor for success, especially if joint placements are planned. Deans and department heads are the individuals most heavily influenced by costs and will need to sign off on any hires made, even if a scholar recruited by one college is ultimately placed in another. If deans viewed the program as a zero-sum game in which they could lose a faculty position, the program was less likely to succeed. On the other hand, deans who understood the program as providing value and adding to their department's efforts were more likely to support the program, even at institutions using decentralized funding models that relied heavily on colleges for financial support.

The researchers found that the type of funding model used to support the cluster hiring program (e.g., shared-cost, centralized, decentralized) had less influence than expected on the success of that particular program. Other factors were far more influential in ensuring the program's financial stability. Capping start-up funding for new labs and workspaces helped control cost overruns at some institutions. Obtaining a consistent source of external funding (as was the case at UW-Madison) may be helpful. Finally, career success of faculty could perhaps be the greatest determinant of long-term financial solvency, as faculty who were successful in bringing in new research funds were able to buy-out portions of their salaries.⁴

⁴ FIU found that cluster hires, when evaluated as a group, actually brought in more extramural funding than their peers outside of the clusters did.

Promising Practices

Based on the conclusions from this study, the following eight institutional practices are promising and could be considered by universities seeking to implement faculty cluster hiring programs to improve diversity and institutional climate:

1. Make diversity goals explicit and develop supporting strategies to achieve those goals.

These may include evidence-based strategies cited by the institutions in this study, such as expanding recruitment, providing diversity training to committees, hiring more junior faculty than senior faculty, and targeting specific disciplines where diversity is more prevalent.

2. Work to ensure early buy-in from deans and department heads.

Including deans early in the process ensures that new hires will be approved more quickly and will be supported once they come on board. In particular, deans should understand the potential benefits of the program for the whole institution, and the value it adds to their college or department.

3. Engage faculty early in the process and follow the lead of the faculty.

To be successful, the institution must have faculty who are enthusiastic about the research topics and disciplines under consideration for the cluster hiring program. If faculty are not consulted, the topics selected for clusters may not fit well with existing research foci among disciplines and silos may form.

4. Establish and articulate expectations for cluster hires from the very beginning.

Hires need to know up front how they will collaborate with their peers, how they will be evaluated for promotion and tenure, and what resources are available to them for support. Clearly written agreements that span all departments and colleges affected are especially important for joint hires in order to protect their time.

5. Give cluster hires credit for work they perform as part of the cluster in the tenure and promotion process.

Doing so influences faculty career success and provides an incentive for faculty to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration. Formally rewarding faculty for their efforts related to the cluster improves retention and ensures the long-term sustainability of the cluster hiring program.

6. Establish infrastructure to support interdisciplinary collaboration.

Promising strategies include hiring faculty in cohorts, holding regular events where informal social networking can occur, dedicating space for the cluster hires

to gather and interact, and dedicating staff or a faculty member to coordinate the cluster's activities.

7. Communicate the value of the program to stakeholders across the institution. Cluster hiring involves short-term financial sacrifices in exchange for long-term benefits. Shifting focus away from those short-term costs and toward longer-term benefits for everyone at the institution (e.g., eliminating silos, improving the teaching and learning environment, increasing community engagement) will encourage widespread support for the program.

8. Develop a plan for sustaining the program throughout leadership changes. Leaders should work within existing university policies to ensure program's sustainability. Promising strategies include embedding the program in a strategic plan, placing it in an office or unit that rarely experiences leadership changes, or obtaining external funding commitments.

Conclusion

Faculty cluster hiring is an emerging institutional practice that is gaining traction at universities across the United States but has been implemented in very different ways. As this study shows, cluster hiring has the potential to accelerate institutional excellence by adding diversity to the faculty, improving success of faculty from all backgrounds, and improving campus climate through interdisciplinary collaboration, an enriched teaching and learning environment, and community engagement. Most of the programs studied have been implemented relatively recently, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation is needed to determine their long-term viability. However, we hope that this study provides university leaders with some potential best practices for implementing faculty cluster hiring programs in a way that will help them advance their mission and achieve institutional goals.

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Appendix: Session Proceedings from the 2014 APLU Annual Meeting Session on Faculty Cluster Hiring

2014 APLU Annual Meeting

Improving Institutional Culture and Climate through Faculty Cluster Hiring

Monday, November 3, 2014

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Jackson Room, Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek

Orlando, Florida, USA

SESSION PROCEEDINGS

*Prepared by Urban Universities for HEALTH
December 2014*

OVERVIEW

Changing demographics in urban communities have elevated institutional climate as an area of priority for university leaders. Faculty and staff impact the development of an inclusive and innovative campus climate through their research and in their interactions with students. However, it is often challenging for universities to recruit faculty from diverse backgrounds who will enrich the teaching and learning environment. In addition, universities are looking for new ways to encourage collaborative, interdisciplinary research. This panel will highlight several universities that have developed faculty cluster, or cohort, hiring programs that have been particularly successful in diversifying the faculty and stimulating research on topics impacting institutional climate (e.g., health equity). Panelists will also discuss the potential impact of such programs on the development of minority faculty leaders and university partnerships with urban communities.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Learn about different models for faculty cluster hiring, using three institutions' programs as examples
- Discuss the impact of cluster hiring on faculty diversity and institutional climate and how institutions are measuring that impact
- Discuss lessons learned, unintended consequences or benefits, and ideas for sustainability and growth of faculty clusters

MODERATOR

Susan D. Phillips, Ph.D., Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, SUNY Downstate, and Vice President for Strategic Partnerships, University at Albany, SUNY

PANELISTS

Debasish (Deba) Dutta, Ph.D., Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Purdue University

Kenneth G. Furton, Ph.D., Provost and Executive Vice President, Florida International University

Laura R. Severin, Ph.D., Professor of English, Special Assistant to the Provost for Academic Planning, North Carolina State University

AUDIENCE

The audience consisted of senior leaders from public research universities, including presidents, chancellors, provosts, VPs of academic affairs, and deans. Thirty-three participants confirmed attendance.

OPENING REMARKS

Susan D. Phillips, Moderator

Faculty cluster (or cohort) hiring is the practice of hiring faculty into multiple departments or schools around interdisciplinary research topics. This panel will focus on the use of faculty cluster hiring to achieve greater faculty diversity and an inclusive institutional climate.

The practice was pioneered by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which implemented its Cluster Hiring Initiative (CHI) in 1998. Since then, a number of institutions have developed faculty cluster hiring programs as well. Most programs are managed by the office of the provost, president or chancellor.

In June 2013, the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) developed a series of action items aligned with the USU's strategic recommendations for its health agenda. One of these action items was to investigate the practice of faculty cluster hiring and evaluate its impact on diversity, campus climate, and interdisciplinary research related to health equity. The initial focus of the action item was on health disciplines, as diversity and cultural competence are urgently needed in the health professions.

The USU convened an advisory group of provosts, who will work this fall to interview key informants associated with faculty hiring programs at universities across the country. The product of this work will be a final report, identifying evidence-based practices that institutions may consider as they implement faculty cluster hiring programs. The report will draw upon the experiences of other institutions using a case study approach.

Prior research suggests that:

- Hiring a cohort of junior and senior faculty encourages mentoring and professional development among faculty while decreasing new faculty isolation.
- By focusing committees on hiring a diverse group rather than a “diverse” individual, faculty cluster hiring programs increase faculty diversity within the cluster, and may increase faculty diversity overall.
- The selection of interdisciplinary research topics may impact campus climate. For example, topics that align with the university's values and strategic priorities will make commitment in those areas more visible.

THEMES FROM PANEL DISCUSSION

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

- **Proposal process:**
 - If the cluster hiring program is perceived to be “bottom up,” chances of success are higher. Let faculty develop the proposals. Provide feedback to those whose proposals were rejected so that they can improve their proposals for the next round. Provide faculty with clear proposal parameters and guidelines, and be transparent about what the university is looking for in a proposal.
 - One of the audience members asked, “How do you know that ‘what’s hot’ today will still be hot tomorrow [with regard to interdisciplinary research topics]?” The panel suggested focusing on the local context and community impact. What is most important to the community? Chasing a hot topic incentivizes universities to poach star faculty and research dollars from

each other; it becomes a competition with winners and losers. Choosing topics that are tailored to the university's local context avoids this outcome.

- **Expanding faculty diversity:**
 - Diversity must become integral to hiring. Increasing diversity numbers is important, but it is also about changing hearts and minds. It is important for the success of faculty and students to look at diversity in a different way.
 - To improve diversity, address unconscious bias, especially within hiring committees. Be mindful of where you advertise open positions to make sure you are recruiting from a diverse pool. Invest in developing an inclusive campus climate, as many great scholars may be convinced to move to your institution if they feel welcomed and valued.
- **Ensuring sustainability:**
 - Pushback from faculty was mitigated by centrally funding interdisciplinary hires and giving raises to faculty across the board.
 - Cultivating a supportive environment ensured faculty were retained, and setting aside resources each fiscal year ensured financial sustainability.
 - Do not repeat hiring too frequently. Once you have established a successful group, let the group do its work for a while before bringing in others.

CHALLENGES

- **Sustainability:**
 - Clusters are vulnerable to leadership changes.
 - Perception of scarce resources leads to resistance among faculty and administrators.
 - Many faculty cluster hiring programs need additional spaces (e.g., new labs, gathering places for the cluster to meet). New spaces require a large up-front investment.
 - Colleges cannot handle all the start-up costs on their own. The central administration (e.g., provost, president) must provide some portion of the funds.
- **Obtaining buy-in:**
 - Cluster administrators and departments may disagree about the types of faculty they want to hire (or there may be disagreement among departments). For example, faculty specializing in theoretical approaches to scholarship may prefer like-minded hires over those specializing in applied approaches.

- **Maintaining interdisciplinary collaboration:**
 - The social aspects of collaborative work are tremendously important. You cannot put people in a group and expect them to work together automatically; these interactions must be facilitated. Strengthening informal social ties among faculty stimulates collaboration in research, teaching, and service.

POSITIVE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

- At Florida International University, the clusters drew more than \$47 million in new research funding from FY 2008–2014, which exceeded expenditures for the cluster during the same period by more than \$10 million. This suggests that if the clusters are successful in achieving their aims, they can be self-sustaining.
- At North Carolina State University, the first round of hiring increased faculty diversity even though diversity was not one of the cluster's initial goals.

EVALUATING IMPACT

- One metric for success is the establishment of an environment and infrastructure that supports collaborative work.
- Success can be measured quantitatively by looking at the average faculty dollar for awarded research for cluster faculty, compared to faculty overall. Success can also be measured qualitatively by asking cluster hires what they think they have accomplished (via interviews or surveys).

