SEARCHING FOR DIVERSITY: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

A. Preliminary Steps: As with all other aspects of increasing pools of diverse candidates, the commitment must come from the top administrator in the organization and the search committees.

1. **Begin by assessing the available pool, either nationally, regionally or locally.** Given the diverse pool of qualified individuals in Atlanta and the state of Georgia, local recruitment *along with* national recruitment creates many opportunities. Please review the Creating Opportunities handbook published by the Office of Affirmative Action. There may be discipline/area specific publications or professional organizations that would serve as viable sources for recruitment. Also use personal contacts when appropriate.

2. **Examine recruitment and selection procedures to be used by the search committee.** Sometimes committees develop informal recruitment procedures that serve as an obstacle or are not helpful in recruiting for diversity. Some questions you may want to discuss are: Will these procedures yield diversity? Will diverse candidates be successful in getting to the interview?

3. **Develop and contact diverse talent banks.** Many positions at GSU are filled nationally; while this is the case, consider the local pools of individuals within the metropolitan Atlanta area. Atlanta is rich with great talent given the diverse institutions of higher learning that are located in the metropolitan area. These institutions should not only be seen as recruitment sites, but may be used to assist in identifying quality diverse applicants from across the country.

4. **Translation of the University's mission of diverse pools must be done.** People involved in the recruitment and selection process need to know how to translate this institutional policy into a reality. This involves discussions of the search process, how credentials are evaluated, and what particular requirements are stipulated for various administrative positions. Committees can profit from discussions about how they will apply formal education requirements for a particular position, and which evaluation criteria are useful in judging diverse candidates. Affirmative Action Officers should be consulted on each search on how EEOC guidelines offer possibilities for assuring the fair and complete evaluation of diverse candidates, and for assisting them in all phases of the search.

B. Role of the Hiring Official: The hiring official generally makes the final hiring decision. Certainly, an administrator who is attempting to fill an administrative vacancy can use all the techniques recommended below for enlarging the pool, screening candidates, and increasing the chances of finding and hiring minority candidates. In addition, when working with a search committee, the following steps in the process and approaches are important to consider:
1. **The hiring official and human resources develops the job description.** While the job description may be modified by the committee in consultation with the hiring officials, he or she starts with this step. The educational and work experience requirements should form a clear job description.

2. **Presidents and hiring officials can exert pressure on committees to identify qualified diverse candidates.** Many searches that have resulted in the hiring of minority candidates are the result of the strong personal commitment of the hiring official. Administrators who have specified to the hiring official. Administrators who have specified to the search committee that a pool without minority representation or a short list without minority individuals will be unacceptable have usually gotten results. At one institution, the president insisted that all searches have a qualified minority or female candidate in the pool.

C. **Role of the Search Committee:** While not always necessary in the hiring process, most mid-level, and nearly all senior level appointments are made using search committees. The committee may play a variety of roles: screening only, searching and screening, or advising the hiring official about the recommended candidates. Whatever the role, the following practices are helpful.

1. **One individual---the chair or another person---has special responsibility for ensuring that the search identifies and seriously considers minority candidates.** That individual can serve as the “conscience” of the committee, whose responsibility is to keep recruiting minority candidates high on the committee’s agenda.

2. **One committee member is knowledgeable about federal and institutional guidelines for equal opportunity.** This person may be a representative of the affirmative action office, or a committee member who agrees to serve as an informed advocate. His or her role is to ensure that the committee’s actions and deliberations conform to institutional policies and legal requirements.

3. **The committee clarifies essential qualifications and broadly defines the skills and experiences needed.** It is helpful to use generic skills (e.g., “excellent written and oral communication skills”) rather than more specific, limiting ones (demonstrated ability to write promotional materials). The objective is not to make the qualifications vague, but rather to construct them in such a way that individuals who could succeed in the position are encourage to apply.

4. **It focuses on the tasks and responsibilities of the position in any advertisements.** Insisting on specific degrees, disciplines, and previous experience will narrow the pool.

5. **It weighs carefully the need for faculty rank and tenure as a qualification for an administrative position.** Clearly, most academic administrators do and should come from the faculty ranks. But it is not always essential. Positions within the academic
domain, with responsibility for budgetary or personal matters, do not necessarily require faculty experience. Also, positions in advancement, business, and student affairs are much less likely to require faculty experience.

6. **The committee considers the relative weights to be given to education, training, and experience.** It is useful for the committee members to discuss their preconceived notions of what qualifications the “most qualified” candidate should possess. What is the mixture of education, training, and experience in this “most qualified person?” Why?

D. **Enlarging the Pool:** Searching for minority talent is the same as searching for nonminority individuals. The key is to cast the net widely, use personal contacts, and tailor the effort to enlarge the pool to the particular administrative vacancy. An excellent reference on the search process is *The Search Committee Handbook*, described under *Programs and Practices* later in this chapter. Successful strategies to enlarge the pool include:

1. **Keeping track of prospective minority candidates, learning their career interests, and inviting them to apply for appropriate vacancies.** Personal networking and sponsorship typically work because they are based upon mutual trust and knowledge.

2. **Exhausting the possibilities for specialized advertising and direct mailings.** Resource guides and lists of minority professional groups are readily available. It is important to remember, however, that personal contacts are much more effective than such impersonal lists.

3. **Charging any consulting firm aiding in the search process to place high priority on the commitment to recruit minorities.** Consider retaining a firm that specializes in minority recruitment.

4. **Using a personal approach in contracting potential candidates.** The committee can begin by a brainstorming session for the names of possible resource persons, such as graduates, faculty, professional contacts, and community leaders. Knowledgeable individuals not on the committee should also be consulted. Each committee member can make a commitment to contact by telephone or in person a specific number of prospects each week, and report back to the committee.

5. **Cultivating prospective candidates’ interest in their institution.** Talented persons are often not looking actively for a new position. National and regional conferences, exchanges and consulting at institutions, and sustained contacts with recent minority graduates can help cultivate these prospects over the long term.

6. **Using professional conference placement center or preliminary interviews to expand the pool.** Attendance at minority professional conferences can often result in identifying candidates.
7. **Looking outside higher education.** One of the primary reasons why there is more promise in increasing minority participation in administration is the fact that the search effort can move easily beyond conventional academic pipelines. Committees can find out where minority administrators are, seeking contacts with federal, state, and local government, and school districts. They can recruit minorities from the private sector. For example, experience in public relations may be highly beneficial in institutional advancement or communications. Experience in social work may be related to many roles in student services. Committees can also use job referral services or agencies that work outside of higher education.

8. **Communicating with potential candidates.** Search committee members can informally convey encouragement and genuine interest in their candidacy. Much of the insight candidates need into the position is often provided informally.

9. **Communicating with minority candidates throughout the process.**

E. **Narrowing the Pool to the Short List:** Once the candidate pool is developed, it is time to narrow the group to a much shorter list. The process will vary here. Some institutions develop a list of about 20 individuals, and ask for letters of reference at this point. Others will identify a lesser number to bring to the campus or interview by phone or off-site. This is the stage where committees need to think broadly and open-mindedly about the skills and competencies needed for the job.

Once the short list of candidates is developed, those candidates are invited to campus for interviews. It is tempting at this point to seek clear-cut criteria to lessen the ambiguity inherent in the process. However, it is important to once again think broadly about the skills and competencies needed for the job. Institutions that are effective in hiring minority administrators use most of the following strategies:

1. **Address directly what qualifications the “most qualified” candidate will have.** Institutions determine what factors are most likely to predict success in the position. They also adhere to the original criteria established when the position was assessed and advertised.

2. **Consider the potential evident in a minority person’s record.** Committees can look beyond paper credentials and call for further information. They call references and gather sufficient information to make an informed decision before eliminating any minority from the pool.

3. **They acknowledge and fight the inclination to avoid risk by selecting “known quantities.”** They are careful when evaluating qualifications of individuals from lesser-known institutions. Members of the search committee may have had no experience with predominantly black institutions or community colleges, both of which are likely sources of minority graduates and administrators.

4. **Avoid conventional biases about what positions are “on the ladder” to the vacant position.** As a result of past hiring practices, many minority administrators have been
pigeonholed into special program areas such as development education or minority student programs. Successful committees think broadly about the skills and competencies gained from a position. The admissions counselor who focused on minority recruitment may have cultivated the essential skills directly applicable to a position in the development office. Recognizing transferable skills is particularly important when evaluating candidacies from outside higher education.

The Interview Process

At this point, the search committee usually brings between five and ten individuals to campus. These numbers vary considerably, especially if off-site interviews were conducted. At the end of this process committees usually submit three names to the hiring official. It is important that these names be unraked, and that assessments of the candidates’ strengths and weaknesses accompany the listing. Some points to remember.

1. **Be sure at least one minority candidate makes it to the interview stage.** This is not to suggest that the interview be a token gesture. If a qualified minority candidate has not been identified as a finalist, the hiring official should strongly consider reopening the search.

2. **Prepare for the interview by preparing a list of questions relevant to the position that will be asked of all candidates.** Examine the questions to determine whether any of them might have the effect of unfairly eliminating minority candidates. Search for any biases that may underline questions or concerns about individual candidates.

3. **Provide sufficient time for both the candidate and those involved in the hiring to gather the information necessary for informed decisions.** Arrange for both minority and majority candidates to meet with minority members of the community. This practice helps all candidates to understand the climate of the campus and surrounding community. It also provides an opportunity for minority administrators, staff, faculty, and students to form opinions about the candidate.

4. **Ask candidates if they would like to meet with particular individuals or groups or if they have particular questions that might best be answered by individuals not included in the formal interview process.** Do not make assumptions about the candidate’s interest in these contacts; rather, ask.

5. **“Courting” is just as important for minority candidates as nonminority candidates.** Candidates react positively to being pursued as a potential employee, even when content with their current jobs. Each institution has its own methods of courting candidates for jobs, whether academic or administrative. Minorities who are identified as good prospects should be invites to campus receptions and functions, introduced to senior administrators, keep formed of campus developments, and routinely assured that the institution has a strong interest in hiring them.
F. Making an Offer

At this point, the decision is in the hands of the hiring official. If the decision is made to offer the position to a minority candidate, the following are considerations:

1. **Market factors.** Institutions should be prepared to meet financially the market demand for minority administrators in a particular area. These considerations are analogous to the market considerations for faculty specialties in high demand.

2. **Family visits.** When a national search has been conducted, and the position is being filled by an individual who is not in the local community, the candidate may wish to bring his or her family to the campus before making a final decision. Schools, religion, and housing are important factors for all individuals considering a move and a new job. This is true for majority as well as minority candidates. Generally, the need is especially great for minority candidates coming to a predominantly white community.

3. **Spouse employment.** Again, this may be a factor for any candidate. Institutions should specify what help, if any, they can provide.

4. **Special institutional role for the minority administrator.** Often, minority administrators on predominantly white campuses have especially complex roles, and there are implicit, if not explicit, expectations of special relationships with the minority community and students beyond those stated in the job description. It is helpful to clarify and negotiate these prior to employment.