



Retaining Diverse Department Faculties

A GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENT HEADS

NC STATE
UNIVERSITY

Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity

Retaining a Diverse Faculty

A Guide for Department Heads

Faculty diversity has been found by research to correlate with enhanced perspective-taking and self-awareness by students, better cross-cultural and teamwork skills for students and faculty and greater self-perception and motivation for underrepresented minority students. Seeking out diverse faculty leads to greater access to the best talent available (1).



Most department heads and faculty members agree that having a diverse faculty is a desirable goal, but many departments have serious difficulties in moving towards it. In 2009, a program entitled *Developing Diverse Departments* was begun at NC State under a National Science Foundation grant administered by Marcia Gumpertz, Assistant Vice Provost for Faculty Diversity. In 2012, an evaluation team visited seven departments to find out what strategies they were using to recruit and retain a diverse faculty. The site visits included in-depth interviews with the department heads and small group meetings with faculty of all ranks. This brochure is a compilation of strategies for retaining a diverse faculty suggested by the site visits and discussions with many NC State department heads and faculty members. Ideas for recruiting a diverse faculty are outlined in Reference 2.



What is a diverse faculty?

NC State defines a diverse community as an inclusive community of people with varied human characteristics, ideas and world-views whose interactions make the community better (3). In this publication, diversity will mean having a mix of different racial and ethnic groups and genders represented on a department faculty.

Once a department recruits a more diverse faculty, how can it retain them?

In most fields at most universities including NC State, there are few underrepresented minority and (in STEM disciplines) women candidates for faculty positions, and many institutions are trying to hire the very best of them. As departments develop diverse faculty, they need to be conscious of not just recruiting but retaining them as successful faculty members. Faculty members' experiences with their departments are the primary source of their job satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) and their decisions to stay or leave (4). Improving experiences at the department level should consequently have a powerful impact on faculty retention.



What are NC State departments doing?

In the table on the facing page, we contrast retention strategies used by most NC State departments with those used by departments that have most successfully retained their diverse faculty members. For a strategy-by-strategy contrast, read the table horizontally and think about where your department practices fall. To get a more holistic look at both categories, read the table vertically and think about how the strategies may work synergistically.

What are departments at NC State doing to retain excellent faculty?

TYPICAL Departments	DIVERSE Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feedback on progress toward tenure and promotion is limited to annual evaluations by the department head and is often brief and lacking in meaningful detail.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The department head provides meaningful feedback annually as well as frequent informal feedback throughout the year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior faculty feedback rarely if ever occurs except at reappointment, depriving newer faculty members of constructive suggestions from the people who will ultimately vote on their tenure and/or promotion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior faculty provide periodic feedback in addition to that given at reappointment. Frequent informal feedback is also provided regularly by mentors or coaches and occasionally by other senior faculty.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New faculty members are mostly left on their own to ask for help as they start their teaching and research.• Many departments say that senior faculty regularly provide informal mentoring, but often such mentoring is almost nonexistent and may not come from the best sources.• Faculty from under-represented groups are often left out of informal mentoring arrangements that do occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All new faculty are routinely provided with structured mentoring. It may take the form of a single mentor for the first year, a teaching mentor and a research mentor, or a mentor coach who works with the faculty member throughout the pre-tenure period.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty from underrepresented groups are frequently assigned to more committees than their departmental colleagues serve on, and they are also sought out for more student mentoring. The result is an excessive service burden relative to the average departmental service load.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The department head and mentor help keep faculty from underrepresented groups from being overburdened with service responsibilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Associate professors find themselves on their own as they prepare to progress toward promotion, and frequently stall out at the associate level or take many years to become full professors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Associate professors are routinely provided guidance by the department head and senior colleagues as they progress toward promotion. Attention is paid to leadership development, goal clarification and facilitation of award nominations and other forms of recognition.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work/life events (e.g., welcoming a new baby, elder care and medical problems) are addressed by university policies, which are frequently inadequate to cover faculty members' needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department heads make explicit commitments to flexibility in accommodating work/life events, such as by adjusting teaching schedules, allowing work from home and limiting early morning or late afternoon faculty meetings.

Continued on next page.

TYPICAL Departments	DIVERSE Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Once a faculty member is hired, the department does not get involved with partner hiring.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When a faculty member is hired and a partner is also looking for a professional position, the department head and colleagues continue to assist the partner in finding a satisfactory position.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Climate (working environment for faculty and staff) is seldom or never discussed in the department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintaining a positive climate is an explicit part of the department's mission and is addressed by a standing task force or committee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The department head does not pay particular attention to climate and may do things that work against a positive one (e.g., making decisions without input or with the input of a select small group, not communicating regularly and effectively with faculty and allowing conflicts to fester).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The department head pays attention to climate by maintaining transparency in decision making, keeping strong lines of communication open with faculty and staff and helping to resolve conflicts as soon as they develop.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty members interact primarily in formal faculty meetings. Little opportunity is provided for informal social gatherings, and when social events are planned (e.g., holiday parties), few faculty members attend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Departments consciously seek to provide regular opportunities for faculty to interact both formally and informally (e.g., brown-bag lunches, social events that include families, weekly breakfasts with doughnuts, daily or weekly afternoon tea/coffee sessions and monthly birthday celebrations). Most faculty attend these events.

Successful Retention Strategies at NC State

Planned Mentoring and Feedback

Some STEM departments have formal mentoring programs in which they name one or two mentors (one for research, one for teaching) for each new assistant professor, and some provide for yearly detailed feedback on progress toward tenure from a committee of senior faculty as well as from the department head. While these approaches involve extra work for senior faculty, they eliminate surprises when the time comes for reappointment and tenure decisions and give all untenured faculty a reassuring sense that they know what they need to do to be successful. A much smaller number of departments formally provide feedback and mentoring to associate professors as they progress toward promotion to full professor.

Flexibility in Handling Work/Life Issues

Several STEM departments have specifically addressed work/life issues for faculty, seeking to provide as much flexibility as possible. The department heads see the university policies as a baseline for providing for faculty needs when there are personal changes or challenges. One department head said he makes it a practice after talking about policies such as family or medical leave or tenure clock extension to ask faculty what else they need and tries to provide it whenever possible, including things like adjusting teaching schedules to end by a certain time of day to facilitate child care and making sure there is a convenient private location for nursing mothers.

Regular Faculty Lunches

One STEM department works with an industry sponsor to provide casual lunches each week for the faculty. Class schedules are arranged so that everyone has a common time to eat together and most faculty attend unless they are traveling. Sometimes the lunches are just a time for informal social interaction; other times there are discussions of important topics facing the department (such as curriculum revision or strategic planning). Occasionally faculty members briefly present their research at the lunches, providing an excellent opportunity for their colleagues to learn what they are working on and fostering collaboration.

Brown-Bag Sessions with Department Head

One STEM department head holds monthly brown-bag lunches and invites anyone (faculty and staff) to come and chat informally. The lunches provide a forum for the department head to build relationships and hear about issues and concerns early enough for something to be done about them.

References

1. Research citations on opening page of NC State Faculty Search Toolbox (oied.ncsu.edu/faculty/faculty-search-toolbox).
2. Brent, R. (2013). Developing diverse department faculties: A guide for department heads. NC State Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity.
3. Definition of diversity from NC State's Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity (oied.ncsu.edu/diversity).
4. Winchell, Jessica. June 2009. "Issues and Trends in Department Climate Experiences: Evidence from WISELI's Department Climate Survey." wiseli.engr.wisc.edu/docs/EvalReport_Climate_2009.pdf.

Resources

NC State Department Head's Climate Resource Guide: ofd.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/NCSU-Department-Heads-Climate-Resource-Guide-2013.pdf

Regular workshops for department heads on enhancing climate offered by the Office of Faculty Development: ofd.ncsu.edu/other-resources/leadership-development-programs.

Assistant Professors' Community: oied.ncsu.edu/faculty/assistant-professors-community-apc

Associate Professors' Community: oied.ncsu.edu/faculty/associate-professors-community

NC State resource list for non-tenure track faculty: ofd.ncsu.edu/other-resources/non-tenure-track-faculty-resources

Faculty Retention Toolkit from the University of Washington: ofd.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Faculty-retention-Toolkit.pdf

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