

Girls, do I have a deal for you!
Hiring and Retaining Women in the Christian Academy

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ABSTRACT

Hiring and retaining excellent an faculty member is important, especially in disciplines where women are underrepresented, such as business. This paper reviews some of the current issues faced by administrators in Christian universities surrounding the role gender plays in faculty staffing, development, and retention. Practical ideas and solution are offered, which address the role of the program administrator, chair or dean, to affect change in hiring and training excellent female faculty members.

Introduction: Where are the women?

Over the past ten years, Christian colleges and universities have been faced with several hiring difficulties including, identifying candidates with advanced degrees, teaching experience, field know-how, and the willingness to teach a large class load for less compensation than their secular counterparts. The challenge is even greater when attempting to hire females.

A pole of 15 top Christian business schools reveals a small percentage (14%) of faculty are female revealing, "women's representation in the higher levels of education fall short of their overall representation" (Glazer-Raymo, 1999, Lomperis).¹

¹ Judith Glazer-Raymo, "Shattering the Myths, Women in Academe" English Internet Resource Computer File xv, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md, 1999

A.M. Turner Lomparis, "Are Women Changing the Nanture of the Academic Profession?" Journal of Higher Education, 61 (November/December), 1990, pp. 643-677

Further research indicates that only “8% of the tenured faculty at Business Week magazine’s Top 20 business schools are women” (Bongiorno, 1992).²

Why is female representation of such importance? With females making up as much as 50% of the business students, there is a need for faculty and industry role models. Additionally, family roles and values have changed uncovering opportunities and challenges bringing more women into the work force. Finally, the demand for qualified faculty continues to increase and women are attainable.

Research conducted by Hargens and Long³ specify that women have made up 20% of the new PhD’s for at least 35 years. Where are these women and how do we recruit them? Furthermore, how do we retain them after they are hired?

Scenario:

A female faculty member at a Christian university is asked by one of her colleagues how she will manage a job and family obligations. Another is questioned about her research commitment knowing she was teaching 10 classes in a year with four new preps.

Where are the female faculty?

Over the past four years, Azusa Pacific University has searched for female faculty via website advertising, database advertising, and word-of-mouth. National accreditation meetings offer opportunities to list job openings and complete first-round interviews on site. Universities graduating new PhD’s will often send vitas for consideration. Searching industry periodicals for prominent women in career change stages often supplies individuals who could bring a unique perspective to the curriculum. “Those schools without women may want to involve senior women from other departments in their targeting and recruitment of women.” (Carolfi, 1996)⁴

Creating the environment

The first solution rests with the commitment to hire female faculty in full-time positions. Administration must pledge to put aside a preconceived philosophy where women are a lesser hire than men, and adopt the idea they will add to a program and not just level the playing field. Evidence of promotional and administrative opportunities for women will increase the likelihood of being an “institution of choice” among viable candidates.

² Lori Bongiorno, “Where are all the B-School Profs?” Business Week, New York, Dec. 7, 1992, p.40.

³ Lowell L. Hargens, J. Scott Long, “Demographic Inertia and Women’s Representation Among Faculty in Higher Education,” The Journal of Higher Education, Columbus, July/August 2002, Vol.73, Iss.4; pp.494-518

⁴ Iris A. Carolfi, “The Hiring of Women in Accounting Academia,” Journal of Education for Business, Washington, January 1996, pp.151-159.

Furnish an atmosphere that celebrates differences of gender, culture and race bringing new opinions, talents and experiences benefiting the faculty and students as well.

Create an excellent environment in which to work. This may include adjusting schedules to facilitate child care or parent care. Commit to respecting family enough to alter behavior and expectations. Foster a Sabbath culture which rewards faculty for active participation in the local church instead of using the day to “catch up on uncompleted work.”

Provide leadership and stability and cultivate a cooperative climate between faculty and administration. Allow new faculty to adjust before appointing them to committee assignments. Offer a mentoring program for easy transition into the university culture. Acknowledge the importance for new faculty to understand their personal role as it is reflected in the university’s mission. Present an opportunity for the new faculty member to use unique talents immediately. Supply a blank slate from which to work.

Decide to institute a red carpet recruiting strategy. Resolve that every candidate will be treated as an honored guest. Plan a two-day stay with time for lunch and dinner including representation from administration, faculty, students and staff. Present each candidate with a small gift (APU gives a Leadership Bible). If necessary and available, offer a housing co-investment program to make a physical move financially viable.

Retaining Female Faculty

Retention begins with commitment to mentoring. Research has shown that the availability of appropriate mentors provides an important support system for female faculty members. Traditions learned from a tenured faculty regarding the traditions of the university will deeply affect how teaching roles should be shaped. Sharing of “tribal secrets” will promote a faster learning process. Focusing on development and success strategies will encourage retention.

Offer evidence of quality, through active scholarship programs, unique educational enrichment programs, quality assurance processes, and attention to documentation. Take into consideration the dilemma of a “double day.” Consider offering a half-time tenure track providing flexibility and work-at-home options (Wilson, 2002).⁵ Reconfiguring class and advising schedules could provide a three-day, on-campus work week with options to consult, research, or increase family involvement.

⁵ Robin Wilson, “Working Half Time on the Tenure Track,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Washington, Jan25, 2002, Vol.48, Iss.20, p.A.10.

Decrease isolation for women by forming discussion and reading groups. Create a warmer climate of acceptance by expanding awareness and visibility. Understand that not all Christian women are blessed with a husband as the primary bread winner. Some are widowed parents, single parents, sole survivors, or single and must provide for themselves and their families.

Offer discussion groups with male faculty and students to elevate women's voices and achievements. Students who have studied with a female faculty member will find common characteristics with a female manager or supervisor in industry.

Use grants and projects to elevate gender research and awareness. Name a project or grant "Female Faculty Retention Project," in order to raise awareness and visibility, and initiate interventions that are purposeful.

Rethink career philosophies by creating purposeful changes in commitment over a life time rather than a year. Consider the need for both child care and parent care. What type of family leave opportunities does your university currently offer?

Plan scholarship for years when faculty are less involved with day-to-day requirements. Determine the viability of 9-month, 10-month, 11-month, and 12-month contracts. Will half-time and three-quarter time over 12 months be an acceptable exchange for a full-time, 9-month contract?

Finally, be aware of the "wild amounts of overtime" required to fulfill a full-time contract. Are the required 40 hours really 60 or is it possible to work smarter, finding a happy medium between work and family? We need to move away from what Stewart D. Friedman, Wharton School of Business describes as "deep cultural taboos and norms about what success is supposed to look like what commitment is supposed to seem like, that inhibit people from doing anything that's going to be seen as diminishing their competitive advantage" and find a place to use our God-given gifts.

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