



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

STRATEGIES FOR HIRING A DIVERSE FACULTY

Cascadia Community College (CCC), the newest community college in the state of Washington and a Vanguard College, opened its doors to students in 2000. Cascadia has been committed to creating an environment that supports student access, persistence, and success. The faculty are a significant force in the lives of students as they “set the stage” by engaging students in active learning and critical thinking. Wanting faculty to represent the diversity of our students and serve as representative role models, we decided to focus our energy on local recruitment. As a first-generation college graduate, I knew that in my job searches I had been most affected by individuals serving as mentors and by developing strong working relationships. I also knew that there was no one central place where individuals of diverse backgrounds would be congregating. So using my professional networks, I started meeting with individuals from various educational settings, and we shared ideas about how to attract individuals from diverse backgrounds (e.g., religious, ethnic) and with disabilities to teaching positions at a community college. From these dialogues came a number of strategies that Cascadia could use to broaden its faculty applicant pools.

Successful Strategies

One of the first ideas that we easily implemented was to work with the Center for Career Services at the University of Washington (UW), through its workshop series on teaching. I learned that there was going to be a panel presentation on teaching at community colleges and asked to send two of our faculty. As panel members, the faculty talked about Cascadia’s unique learner-centered model and collaborative environment. I was available after the presentation, with our faculty, to answer individual questions. The topic drew 30 graduate students.

Further contact with the UW Center for Career Services resulted in our being invited to the Diversity

Career Fair, which focused on employers from industry. CCC purchased a booth at the event and spoke to at least 50 graduate students. We provided students with job listings of tenure track and associate faculty positions, information on the college, and application materials. We collected individual information on each student (e.g., email addresses, discipline majors, degree levels, etc.) for follow-up correspondence.

A lesson we learned at the Career Fair was that almost every student who stopped to talk with us had never considered teaching at a community college. We saw this as a great opportunity to educate them about some of the “secrets.” In five minutes or so, we explained our focus on students and teaching, student diversity, typical teaching workload, salary and benefits, and tenure process. We were excited to see the students light up as they thought about the possibilities of becoming community college faculty.

We also used our time at the fair to advocate for teaching at any community and technical college in Washington. We shared our system’s website which lists job vacancies throughout the state. Five students submitted applications to the college, and one person was hired. The college will continue to correspond with these students and build stronger connections.

We contacted the University of Washington’s graduate school and learned that it sponsored day-long community college visits. Many graduate students and post-doctoral students cannot secure teaching positions at the university because of the limited number of positions. Yet, these students have a great passion for teaching. UW had implemented a program that provided campus visits for its graduate students to two Washington community colleges—Whatcom Community College and Highline Community College. When we offered to host their students at Cascadia, we received a resounding “yes.” The UW provided the students with transportation, and Cascadia provided college literature and two meals.

By involving faculty and staff in the day’s events, Cascadia gave the students a more realistic idea of what working at a community college is really like. The 39 students who attended began their day with a welcome



from the president, a continental breakfast, and a menu of available program activities.

Session A included two workshops and four classroom observation options. The first workshop, *Why Am I Teaching at A Community College?* brought together Cascadia faculty who had taught previously at four-year institutions to share why they preferred teaching in a community college. The second workshop, *Faculty Selection Process and Employee Benefits*, was presented by the deans and director of human resources who gave detailed explanations of Cascadia's recruitment and hiring procedures, the college's values, and what makes for a successful candidate.

Session B options included two workshops and five classroom observations. In *Cascadia's Culture and Values*, panel members gave faculty perspectives on Cascadia's being a learning college, creating a culture of student engagement and assessment, and supporting collegial faculty relationships. The second workshop was an informal *Questions and Answers with Faculty*.

The students enjoyed a networking lunch with faculty, students, deans, and the president. Near the conclusion of the meal, a Cascadia science faculty member spontaneously went to the microphone and offered to give interested students a quick tour of the college's 58 acres of restored Wetlands. Although it was a cold and gray day, 12 students accepted the invitation.

The afternoon's activities included two workshops and an optional campus tour. The *Students' Perspectives on Cascadia* panel was a popular session. Three students shared their perspectives about Cascadia's faculty, administration, and classroom environment. The final workshop was a *Last Chance Questions and Answers* with me, the Executive Vice President for Student Learning. I fielded questions about how to get into community college teaching if one had no teaching experience, skills the college was seeking, and disciplines most likely to be hiring faculty now. The students were asked to complete evaluation forms before boarding their vans. Having the graduate students on campus and visiting the classrooms created a "buzz" of excitement and pride.

Lessons Learned

We need to get out the message that teaching at a community college is rewarding, impacts students' lives, and leads to economic prosperity within our local communities. If each college employee recruits someone who is from a background different from his/her own, we will have faculty and staff reflecting the faces of our students.

Universities with graduate schools often welcome an opportunity to partner with community and technical colleges to host campus visits or attend career fairs.

Cascadia will continue to participate in these events whenever and wherever they occur.

There is a real hunger among graduate students for gathering more information, building self-confidence in learner-centered pedagogy, and increasing their skills. While debriefing the event with one of our tenured faculty, he presented the idea of establishing *Cascadia's Learning Institute*, to focus on skill development for graduate students and professionals in the field who have limited teaching experience. The idea was presented as part of CCC's budget planning process and received support for offering the *Institute* in summer 2009. More details will be available January 2009.

Jean Hernandez, Executive Vice President for Student Learning

For further information, contact the author at Cascadia Community College, 18345 Campus Way NE, Bothell, WA 98011. Email: jthernandz@msn.com