University seeks professor who can do everything: recent changes to tenure-track job postings

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Introduction

Today's higher education landscape has changed dramatically with changes involving a multitude of stakeholders ranging from students, alumni, employers, society, and beyond. Key players in initiating these changes are the college faculty (Kezar, 2018). In specifically the school of business, these changes range from educational approaches (Wrigley & Straker, 2017), to technology use (Anderson, 2018), and to diversity initiatives (Sherbin & Rashid, 2017). Although it is sometimes falsely assumed that faculty remains static and unchanging in higher education, faculty plays a crucial role in advancing the positive outcomes for change within higher education (Jimenez et al, 2019).

A concern which has been around for many decades is whether or not the listing of desired qualifications on faculty job postings results in the hiring of faculty with the knowledge, skills, and attributes that are being sought (Marcus, 1977). Job ads reflect the nature of today's labor market (Carnevale et. al, 2014). The purpose of this explorative study is to review the changing patterns within business faculty job postings over a three-year period. More specifically:

> *RQ: To what extent have faculty job postings for business schools evolved during the last three years? How are these job postings evolving concerning experiential learning, learning modality (i.e., online/distance vs face-to-face learning), and diversity, equity, and inclusion?*

Theoretical Considerations

To explore this topic, the viewpoint found at the intersection of Institutional Change Theory and Issue Management Theory is used. From Institutional Change Theory (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) is drawn the impact of society to force organizations to change, often due to the pressure to change caused by the actions of other organizations. Given that higher education institutions are often susceptible to crises (Brennan & Stern, 2017), Issue Management Theory is also used due to its focus on the strategic decision making and communication needed to enact changes within the organization (Chase, 1976). These theories come together to explore how the job postings within higher education are reacting to societal changes and pressures.

Job Advertisements

Job ads are, in general, written documentation of the skills, knowledge, and attributes needed by the right candidate to fill the specific needs of an open position (Shafique, 2012). In academia, job ads play a critical role in the faculty search process (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010). Despite this, job ads in academia tend to be rather broad and generic in the desired competencies (Pitt & Mewburn, 2016)

Experiential Learning

The learning environment on the college campus is changing from traditional lecturing to a more student-centered learning approach (Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008). Due to accreditation agencies, pedagogical organizations, and data driven decision making, experiential learning has become one of the desired norms for classroom instruction (Wright et al, 2019). Though little research is found on this topic, what is available shows that the ability to teach with this competency becomes a focus after the faculty has joined the institution (Dean et al, 2020; Edelson et. al., 2019). Despite mandates to shift to more experiential modalities (Isaak et. al., 2018), faculty tend to express a resistance to change when it comes to experiential learning techniques (Wurdinger & Allison, 2017). Based on this, it stands reasonable that it would serve the institution better to recruit and hire faculty who already embrace experiential learning modalities, and thus further exploration of the job postings in this area is needed.

Delivery Methods

Due to the increase in online teaching over the past decade, the ability to teach in online formats is a necessary competency of the faculty at all levels (Martin et. al., 2020). These competencies include intermixing learning resources, using different technologies, and developing digital learning resources (Ally, 2019). A barrier to this competency is that faculty tend to think technology is below their academic experience (Vendruscolo & Behar, 2015) and that institutions fail to provide adequate technical training and support (Lao & Gonzales, 2005). Based on these challenges, it would seem appropriate to recruit faculty who already have these qualities, and thus a better understanding of how these competencies are communicated in job postings is warranted.

Diversity

While skills are necessary in the hiring process, so is the impact on the overall culture of the organization (Kim & Angnakoon, 2016). The phrase "equity, diversity, and inclusion" is often included in some manner in job postings as both a desired quality in the applicant and as a value of the organization as a whole (Thielen & Nesser, 2019). Applicants seek cues from the employment process as to the likelihood they will be a fit thus requiring organizations to be very thoughtful in the recruitment channel being used (Stephens et. al., 2020). While diversity itself is valued on campus, it is not a primary focus of most faculty hiring committees when narrowing applicant pools (Grier & Poole, 2020). While little research exists specifically toward business schools, there is evidence that business schools are not out of step in hiring practices from other areas of the campus (Moshiri & Cardon, 2016). Because the definition of diversity

itself can be rather muddy (Avery & Thomas, 2004; Bell et. al., 2009), further exploration of the actual language being used is appropriate.

Methodology

For our exploratory analysis of business school faculty recruitment, we followed previous research by only considering tenure track faculty (Finch et. al., 2016), and collected 559 unique data pieces in the form of business faculty job postings from the years 2019, 2020, and 2021 from two sources: HigherEdJobs and ChronicleVitae. For analysis, we utilized MAXQDA software to analyze the postings for content wording directly related to our research question. We specifically queried for the words: experiential, hybrid, online, face-to-face, diversity, and inclusion to assess the number of times these terms appeared in the postings.

Results

Following our data analysis, we observed the following trends. For the first category of experiential learning, there was a 2.3% increase in the use of "experiential" from 2019 to 2020 with a relatively small increase of .5% from 2020 to 2021. In regard to learning modality, the term "face-to-face" decreased 7% from 2019 to 2020 and then increased 6.3% from 2020 to 2021. The use of the term "Diversity" increased 102% from 2019 to 2020 and by 108% from 2020 to 2021; "Inclusion" increased by 32% and 60% in the same time periods.

Discussion

In consideration of these findings, it is important to recognize that predominately, faculty postings are done a year in advance which is important because it postpones the impact of the hire until well after the need was created (Tierney & Sallee, 2004). Remembering that the data in this study represents times in which two significant societal events occurred, the social unrest of 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic, in keeping with both Institutional Change Theory and Issues Management Theory, it was fully expected that changes would be seen in the data, in particular in relation to modality of teaching.

Our data indicated an increase in the need for faculty with the ability to facilitate experiential learning for positions which started in 2021 which means the job was posted in 2020 when schools were reopening from Covid-19 precaution measures. This need flatlined in 2021 indicating some sort of realization that experiential learning is not really necessary for business faculty as a whole but rather for very specific positions. The growth that was seen was spread evenly across business disciplines suggesting either that experiential learning has a place in all disciplines or that the term was being used without consideration for the subject matter.

It was not surprising to find that major increases were seen in both "diversity" and "inclusion" over the years presented; however, it was unclear how these concepts actually played into the hiring process. Again, returning to Institutional Change Theory, one could interpret the results as "diversity" and "inclusion" simply being used as buzz words rather than playing a specific role in identifying the ideal

candidate. In truth, most of the occurrences of these words appeared in the description of the institution and not in reference to the ideal candidate.

A counter finding to the social events was the drop in the use of "face-to-face" as a desired modality given that the 2020 jobs were posted well before the pandemic indicating schools were embracing more online teaching prior to that societal need. Conversely, this desired quality rose in 2021 which indicates a forward-thinking plan for students to return to campus. This data is not indicative of a reversal of thought on online learning but more in a need to clarify to potential faculty exactly what the expectations of the position were. By January of 2022, 61% of the American workforce who could work remotely were doing so (Parker et. al., 2022). Due to the shifts in the workforce, our data is most likely representative of the need to clarify that the faculty member would not be working 100% remotely and would need to have some physical presence on campus.

Recommendations

The findings of this study yield two recommendations. First, business schools should assess their current needs to determine and seek faculty who excel in one modality and not ask faculty to jump back and forth between face-to-face and online. If the intent, as suspected, is to require faculty to have some presence on campus, hiring committees would be better served to make campus presence a requirement of the position rather than attaching it to teaching modality. Second, better definition of what role the faculty member will play in regard to "diversity" and "inclusion" should be made. These terms are rather ubiquitous and the results of this study show that they are not being used in a way which assists in finding the idea candidate to embrace/further these qualities on campus.

Conclusion

Over the span of three years, trends were observed in the language used to recruit faculty members, with specific attention given to diversity, equity and inclusion, modality of teaching, and experiential learning. These trends are reflective of societal events and the institutional need to react to their environment and student needs. From a broader perspective, these changes can be viewed as reflective of changes in the academic labor market and the attention institutions should pay to their faculty recruitment efforts.

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