



Toolkit Resources: Campus Models & Case Studies



Photo courtesy of Florida International University

It Takes More than Goodwill: A Grassroots Effort to Increase Faculty Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

For the last decade, faculty at Florida International University (FIU) have spearheaded an interdisciplinary, grassroots effort to improve recruitment, tenure, and promotion processes for women and faculty of color.

Despite being a large Hispanic-serving and minority-serving research university in multicultural Miami, FIU has few Hispanic and Black faculty, and women are underrepresented in several disciplines.

Led by Suzanna Rose, founding vice provost of the Office to [Advance Women, Equity, & Diversity](#) (AWED), FIU has used two National Science Foundation ADVANCE Grants to develop a robust program of faculty development events, intensive mentoring, data collection, and departmental diversity, equity, and inclusion plans.

“It takes more than people of goodwill to really make progress on diversity, inclusion, and equity,” says Kirsten Wood, associate professor of history and an associate director of AWED. “There can be a lot of good intentions but not a lot of progress until you start coming up with systematic and regularly assessed processes for helping people turn their intentions into actions.”

AWED’s work is facilitated by a team of nineteen faculty representing nearly all of the university’s colleges. Meeting together every two weeks, they read deeply into social sciences materials on race and institutional improvement, plan and discuss their programs, and help colleagues across their colleges as they hire and support women faculty and faculty of color. The facilitation team also provides faculty with leadership experience that acts as a direct pipeline to future administrative roles.

“It’s intellectually interesting; it’s interdisciplinary,” Rose says. “We’re really working faculty to faculty in a grassroots endeavor, talking about the things that affect us and coming up with strategies to fix them.”

Strategies and Tactics to Increase Diversity and Excellence

Since 2011, the centerpiece of FIU’s work to transform the culture of hiring, tenure, and promotion has been the [Strategies and Tactics for Recruitment to Increase Diversity and Excellence \(STRIDE\)](#) professional development workshop first developed at the University of Michigan. FIU adapted STRIDE into a series of workshops through two National Science Foundation ADVANCE grants—one in 2011 that accelerated the hiring of women faculty in STEM and a second in 2016 that is working to improve hiring, tenure, and promotion processes for faculty of color across every discipline.

Drawing from decades of research presented in Abigail Stewart and Virginia Valian’s *An Inclusive Academy: Achieving Diversity and Excellence*, STRIDE seeks to reconfigure the processes and biases that affect faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion committees.

Throughout the year, STRIDE offers mandatory workshops for every member of a faculty hiring committee, tenure and promotion board, and committee working to hire deans or higher-level administrators. In 2018, STRIDE also began offering additional training for one member of each hiring committee to become a diversity advocate who can guide committees as they seek to eliminate biases in their hiring process.

“Someone who’s been given the best opportunities all along is going to have an easier time getting even more opportunities in contrast to someone who’s been scrapping to get any opportunity in the first place,” says Wood, who served as a diversity advocate for a hiring committee in her

department. “How do you put those two on a more even playing field?”

Through their workshops, STRIDE offers several actionable best practices for any search committee:

- **Meet early and often.** As soon as a new faculty position is open, committees should meet to identify what they are looking for in a position, craft job postings using inclusive language, and plan recruitment efforts. Position descriptions can state a commitment to diversity and inclusion early in the text, encourage members of underrepresented minority groups to apply, and seek applicants from a wide range of fields and backgrounds.
- **Design a clear rubric.** These guides help committee members evaluate applicants and make the process easier, faster, and fairer. Rubrics can focus on a variety of metrics needed for a position, such as candidates’ ability to teach upper-level courses or bring in grant dollars.
- **Ask for detailed diversity statements from all applicants.** These statements can be an important indicator of an applicant’s overall strength while signaling the department’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Continually recruit and network with faculty.** Seek applicants from unexpected places by reaching out to invited speakers, conference presenters and attendees, graduate students, post-docs, and faculty teaching at smaller two- and four-year institutions.

“You can’t just put an ad out and hope,” says Caroline Simpson, professor of physics, an associate director in AWED, and an equity advisor for the College of Arts, Sciences, & Education. “Search is a verb. Every member of your department should be recruiting every year, all year, whether or not you have a potential hire on the horizon.”

AWED has begun to see the effects of their work. From 2011 to 2015, the first ADVANCE grant helped FIU raise the percentage of women faculty in STEM from 11 percent to 19 percent. Since 2016, when the focus turned to recruiting more faculty of color, the percentage of Hispanic faculty at FIU has increased by 6 percent. While Black faculty have not seen similar increases, Destination FIU, AWED’s newest project, is already increasing the number of Black faculty among the applicant pool for current searches.

“It’s very hard to change academic culture,” Simpson says. “It takes a long time, and it takes a lot of people. But the AWED programs are starting to make that impact.”

Using Data to Improve Faculty Experiences

Each new program AWED creates is informed by data collected from faculty across the university.

In 2011, poor results on the [COACHE \(Collaborate on Academic Careers in Higher Education\) survey](#) showed that many FIU faculty—especially women in STEM disciplines, where they are underrepresented—were dissatisfied with the mentorship and support they received after arriving on campus or preparing for tenure and promotion. Faculty from underrepresented minority groups were also less likely to be included in informal mentoring and information networks, affecting their retention and career success.

In response, AWED began carefully matching mentees with a volunteer mentor outside their department but in a related research area. More than two hundred faculty now participate annually. Mentors and mentees meet together over lunch, attend professional development events and workshops on topics such as curricular planning and grant writing, and discuss progress and plans for improvement.

“It is important for faculty to see people who look like them in terms of race and gender speak candidly about issues that affect promotion and tenure,” says Isaac Burt, an associate director in AWED and associate professor of counseling, recreation, and school psychology. “It is empowering.”

The COACHE survey examines twenty-five metrics of faculty satisfaction, and institutions can compare their data with peer colleges and universities across the country. Ranking within the top 30 percent of institutions for a single metric is considered an area of strength. From 2016 to 2020, FIU improved from five areas of strength to nineteen. Women and Black and Hispanic faculty have high ratings for twenty or more measures.

“We know that something we’re doing is making the faculty feel good about being at FIU,” Rose says. “We’re especially pleased with the high satisfaction of women and minority faculty—it is important to retain them.”

In 2016, AWED collected more data by conducting interviews and focus groups with faculty. These discussions helped them create case studies representing real struggles and experiences of FIU faculty.

These case studies have been turned into scripts used in the [Bystander Leadership](#) program. This full-day interactive experience encourages faculty to move from being a passive bystander when observing instances of race or gender bias to acting as a leader by intervening in the interaction. One faculty member uses the scripts to perform the role of a “bad actor”—a person (or policy) not working in the best interests of his or her department and colleagues. Taking turns, faculty try out different strategies to address the bad actor. In the process, they build a sense of belonging and teamwork while learning how unconscious biases about race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and sexuality can affect everyone on campus.

“People get out of their chairs. There’s a lot of laughter,” Wood says. “But it’s not about being perfect; it’s about identifying different strategies for intervention that directly address the source of the problems faculty are having in their college.”

In one scenario, the bad actor assumes that a White male candidate for third-year review is a superstar while dismissing a Black woman candidate as struggling, framing her scholarship on underrepresented communities as “niche,” and criticizing her for speaking up in meetings.

“This emphasis on racial biases is critical,” Burt says. “Many faculty of color encounter this phenomenon yet receive the message they are imagining things.”

Scaling Up Departmental Participation through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plans

As it seeks to scale up these efforts across campus, AWED is working with nearly every department—more than fifty this year alone—to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion plans. Before each academic year, department chairs choose from a list of sixty action items to improve faculty hiring and retention, departmental climate, postdoc and graduate student support, professional development, or an array of other equity issues.

“In my department, AWED was critical in advocating for the implementation of our diversity and inclusion plan, which helped to attain upper administration’s support for our ideas,” Burt says.

Each action has a specific goal—for example, having forty percent of the department’s faculty attend Bystander training or ensuring that two invited speakers are people of color. At the end of the year, each department assesses its programs and submits a brief report.

“There is a response to every plan,” Wood says, ensuring that it doesn’t become “a meaningless compliance exercise where you never get meaningful feedback.”

To facilitate the ongoing communication necessary to complete each plan, colleges designate an equity advisor who is trained as a liaison between AWED and the dean, individual department heads, and faculty.

“As an equity advisor in my college, I’m often a faculty member’s first resource,” Simpson says. She helps colleagues to guide everything from the implementation of equity plans to hiring and tenure and promotion committees.

After reports are submitted, AWED staff or equity advisors meet with department chairs and faculty to discuss their equity goals and progress.

“It took us a decade to get where we are today at FIU,” Rose says, “but our sustained efforts have led to results and created momentum. After all, a decade or two of making change is not that long when colleges and universities operated without women and minorities for centuries.”