

THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION®

Diversifying Your Campus

**Key Insights
and Models
for Change**

share their experiences with the search-advocate model.

The search advocate is not there to criticize, judge, or steer committee members toward particular candidates, says Anne Gillies, director of Oregon State's search-advocate program. Rather, the advocate is there to help them test their thinking. Asking people why they value certain qualifications or how they will measure required skills, she says, can be a powerful tool.

When she ran her first search-advocacy workshop, in 2008, Gillies was greeted with suspicion: Was she training spies to report back to human resources? Since then the campus has warmed to the advocates' role, she and others say, particularly as the benefits of a diverse work force and an understanding of unconscious bias have entered into a national conversation.

Workshop participants are encouraged to take a series of online tests that measure implicit bias, to show that most of us absorb ideas that lead us to stereotype people based on the group they are in. Gillies segues into a discussion of two types of thinking: fast and slow. When committee members are stressed, tired, or short on time, they often default to the more emotional, less neutral forms of judgment found in fast thinking. The job of the search advocate is to slow everything down, she says.

Search advocates are usually placed on committees in departments outside their professional fields, allowing them the freedom to ask a lot of questions. What are the emerging fields in a particular discipline? That opens the door for candidates whose research and teaching reflect America's changing interests and demographics.

— *Beth McMurtrie*

AA version of this article appeared in the September 11, 2016 issue.

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL U.

Fighting bias in the tenure process

The drop-off in racial diversity at the associate- and full-professor levels — a trend that's held for years — suggests that, across higher education, not enough faculty of color are getting tenure. At Florida International University, faculty leaders are trying to ensure that qualified assistant professors don't get derailed.

FIU's tenure and promotion workshop, which became a requirement for all college-level tenure committees, department chairs, and deans in 2020, blends research showing how people's biases affect deci-

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL U.'S ACTIONS

- Mandated an anti-bias workshop for college-level tenure committees, deans, and chairs
- Tackled misconceptions and confusion about tenure standards and expectations
- Adopted a broad faculty-diversity strategy, including better hiring practices

KEY OUTCOME

- ✓ The share of Hispanic faculty members increased from 15 percent to 21 percent in 5 years.

sion-making, guidance on making fairer evaluations, and case studies based on actual FIU professors' experiences. It was developed by Suzanna Rose, associate provost of the Office to Advance Women, Equity, and Diversity and a professor of psychology and women's and gender studies, as one of the university's Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence, or Stride, workshops.

In 2017 FIU conducted the Coache survey

on faculty job satisfaction, administered by Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, and found that faculty members' top concern was a lack of clarity concerning tenure expectations and policies.

Racial equity is also top of mind for FIU, with 61 percent of its 54,000 students identifying as Hispanic. The professoriate, however, is 21-percent Hispanic.

One goal of mandating the tenure workshop is simply making sure faculty members understand what's actually in the university's tenure and promotion manual. At FIU, every faculty member has a designated balance of teaching, research, and service each year, known as their "assignment." That's how they're supposed to be evaluated.

But many tenure-committee members believe research should be the deciding factor, and don't take into account the "assignment" or the fact that many women and people of color take on more service obligations. Even at an R1 institution like FIU, the tenure manual doesn't say professors should be promoted solely based on the amount of research they do, says Caroline Simpson, a professor of physics and an associate director of the equity office.

The workshops also try to change mindsets. It's important for tenure committees to understand the way "cumulative advantage and disadvantage" influence how successful scholars are, says Kirsten Wood, associate professor of history and also an associate director of the equity office. Often, Wood says, the problem is "bias in favor of certain appearances of success" — like particular colleges, fellowships, and journal publications.

One case study asks faculty members to discuss the tenure denial of a Black man who was faulted for supposedly weak research and "poor teaching" based on a 10-minute evaluation by a colleague and "negative student comments," even though the professor's overall teaching rating was a 4.5 out of 5. (It's based on the experience of a real professor, who filed a complaint and had the denial reversed after a second review.)

The tenure workshop, first offered in 2016, is part of a broad faculty-diversity strategy supported by a National Science Foundation grant. Since 2016, the grant's first year, the number of Hispanic professors at FIU has increased by 6 percentage points. The university did the Coache faculty-satisfaction survey again in 2020, and preliminary results showed that Black and Hispanic faculty members were more satisfied than Black and Hispanic colleagues at other institutions that conducted the survey. FIU faculty members also felt better about the clarity of the tenure process than they did in 2017.

Some tenure-workshop participants are only there because it's mandatory. For the most part, though, tenure committees appreciate knowing how to do their jobs better and having evidence-based practices to follow, Simpson says.

The workshop isn't designed to make faculty members feel bad about themselves. "We're not haranguing people," Wood says. It's meant to help them see why people of color face barriers en route to tenure, and empower them to do something about it.

—Sarah Brown

THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION®

1255 Twenty-Third Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037
202 466 1000 | [Chronicle.com](https://www.chronicle.com)