Equity-minded Explorations at Recently-diversified Liberal Arts Colleges

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Jon Chenette, Dean of the Faculty, Vassar College

Introduction… listening to our students
The Cube… mobile recording booth.

● What was your first impression of Vassar?
● What was a time you felt affirmed or struggled at Vassar?
● Describe the place you would like Vassar to become.
Mary Walczak, Associate Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and Professor of Chemistry, St. Olaf College

Equity of engagement in high-impact educational practices

Undergraduate Research
Learning Communities
International / Off-campus Study
Access and Equity in Off-campus Studies

Female Participants
Female Students
FG/LI Students
FG/LI Participants

Access and Equity on Your Campus

Is there evidence that different groups of students do not participate to an equal extent in high-impact practices on your campus?

What barriers to participation exist?

What initiatives have you undertaken to address these disparities or barriers?

What can faculty, staff or administration do to promote equal participation by all students?
Empowering students, faculty and staff to work together to investigate and enhance inclusion in our own community through:

- Learning from diverse humans on their campus
- Academic inquiry grounded in literature
- Designing locally-effective tools drawing from research
- Leading community conversation and engagement
As both a woman and a student of color, I have (felt) loneliness and isolation in a field devoid of mentors who have gone through similar experiences and could support me in the challenge of taking on a STEM major. I felt compelled to write this letter because of my respect and love for the STEM field as well as the Amherst community.
Step 2. Validating

The faculty and staff in the Chemistry Department have been inspired by the courageous and moving testimony of our students during the events of Amherst Uprising. We are passionately committed to creating a safe and nurturing environment for every one of our students. We also understand that we have failed in this commitment in the past, and we promise to listen and respond to the concerns of every one of our students. We recommit ourselves to supporting the success of every one of our students, here at Amherst and beyond.
Step 3. Bridging the disconnect together: Being Human in STEM

**HSTEM 1.0**

Student-designed Research Projects
- Capturing STEM stories from > 40 diverse Amherst humans
- Mapping Amherst STEM resources
- Creating annotated bibliography on STEM/identity
- Researching effective STEM pedagogy practices and programs

**Student-designed Interventions**
- Inclusive curricular practices handbook for faculty
- Tip sheet for introductory STEM students
- Workshop for introductory STEM classes on Diversity in STEM

**HSTEM 2.0-4.0**
Impact of Being Human in STEM at Amherst
HSTEM 4.0 student project interviewing “HSTEM pioneers” and faculty implementing practices from HSTEM-designed “Inclusive curricular practices handbook”
HSTEM Model: **student-driven course** as backbone to catalyze cycle between learning, designing locally-effective interventions, continuing the campus conversation, and connecting across campuses to effect national change

www.BeingHumaninSTEM.com

AND YOU!
Being Human on Your Campus

Is there evidence that different groups of students do not feel like they belong and/or can thrive in academics?

What opportunities are there currently for faculty/staff/administrators to engage with students around these topics?

What interventions are in place to support inclusion and success of all students, how were they decided upon, whose voices were involved?

Can you look to the HSTEM model for inspiration of new ways to support those conversations and work together to develop locally effective interventions?
Carlos Alamo, Associate Dean of Faculty & Academic Resources and

and

Rachel Pereira, Director of Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Title IX Coordinator, Vassar College

- Transitions
- Framing/Language
- Equity Advisors
“Purple is the color of royalty and we, Transitions students are royal, fierce, resilient, and so much more.”

Jamily Duarte ‘16
"I went to office hours, and I was like, ‘Could you help me with this problem set?...I’ve never seen this before.’ The professor was just like, ‘Can you not read English?’ At that point I was on the verge of tears like, "Oh my goodness." How is that an appropriate thing to say? Also, just why would you think that I couldn’t speak English? I was on the verge of tears, and I remember just having to leave immediately, and then broke down in the staircase. [There were] so many embarrassing experiences [with] those professors my freshmen year. It was, why do people think of me this way?" (In Search of Belonging, 21)
Benefits of Diverse Faculty

- More likely to enrich academic inquiry by helping to ensure that different perspectives and paradigms are represented and pursued.

- A more diverse administration.

- Multicultural competence is an ethical imperative.

- Discrimination remains a concern.
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<th>PROACTIVE</th>
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<td>With the search committee chair, maintaining relevant documentation at all stages of search</td>
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<td>Preparing the committee for the search through training, review of process, and discussion about what constitutes diversity generally and with specific respect to the particular department and search</td>
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<td>Engaging with the committee during the search</td>
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<td>Assessing and coordinating actions taken by the committee</td>
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The Equity Advisor is **NOT** tasked with:

- Controlling the outcome of the search
- Replicating the role of the search committee chair
- Assuming an understanding of others’ motives, goals, or objectives.
"Interrupting the Usual: Successful Strategies for Hiring Diverse Faculty" (2004)

—Smith, et.al

The conclusion apparent from this analysis is that intentional hires in the form of diversity indicators or interventions do make a difference. Regular searches in fields unrelated to diversity will not yield diverse hires. Moreover, it was clear from the data, that departments often used
“My first semester was actually my ORGO professor. I didn’t do very well in her class, but I just really appreciated her because on the first day, she talked a lot about herself and not only why she’s an ORGO teacher and why she loves it, but how she comes from a Latinx background and being a woman of Latinx descent, a woman of color in science. Just that entire experience and how much it means to her, and why she wants us to all do well in ORGO and be able to pursue what we want despite challenges. I think it was just the first couple of days of class where she really reiterated that, put me in a very good place. Going forth, it was just easier to go talk to her and seek help, especially since I wasn’t doing well.” (In Search of Belonging, 22)
Being Human on Your Campus

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Case Study on Equity Advisors and Faculty Searches

Professor X, recently tenured in the Department of Political Science, is serving as an equity advisor on a tenure track search for the English Department. The search is for a specialist on canonical twentieth century American literature. The English department generally welcomes the idea of having an equity advisor and consistently shares their views that diversity is important and an ideal to which they adhere in their faculty searches. The English department believes that increased diversity in the faculty ranks better serves students. In all, the department receives more than two hundred applications. Of these, less than ten percent of applicants address any aspect related to diversity.

During a committee meeting, Professor X identifies an applicant who in addition to having published more than a dozen peer reviewed articles and one book has also served as a mentor to several students of color in their current institution, created a center that is devoted to increasing the numbers of students of color as English majors. This applicant graduated from Howard University Graduate School and studies the evolution of the English language as hip hop is embraced in mainstream culture. The department reviewed the dossier materials and collectively agree that the applicant could bring strong diversity attributes to serve the student body, and that their research is interesting. However, the chair of the Department confirms that they are seeking someone who has a concentration in more “traditional” American literature. They also suggest that the applicant might do guest lectures or serve as a visiting professor for the department but that they are not the right departmental fit. Professor X perceives this reluctance and depiction of the work as “interesting” as being in tension with the College’s commitment to diversity and equity.
Break-out Group Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the ways in which the equity advisor might assist the search committee in this situation?

2. What kind(s) of evaluation instrument(s) might the search committee develop and employ before and during the search to be prepared for a fair evaluation of a candidate like the one identified by Professor X?

3. What institutional policies should be in place in advance to help guide the equity advisor, Professor X, and the search committee?
Closing Discussion Questions

Based on what you have heard, discussed, and conceived today, what new equity-minded exploration might you pilot at your campus upon your return?

What is the first thing you should do to get the project going once you’re back on your campus?