

CCAS case study for inclusion in the Department Chairs Seminar

Faculty Recruitment and the Partner Accommodation Request

Abe Cedarian, Chair of the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Rural University (RU), is facing a dilemma. It is late March of his first year as Chair, a position he accepted following the retirement of his long-serving predecessor, and it has been a challenging nine months. His appointment coincided with serious budget cuts at RU, which have resulted in the elimination of the institution's travel budgets, implementation of furloughs, and substantial increases in average class sizes. Making matters worse, Mathematical Sciences, a baccalaureate-granting unit of ten full-time faculty members, is experiencing substantial faculty turnover. In addition to the former Chair's departure, the unit's only female full Professor, Sandra Scholar, abruptly retired, a surprise given that she was only in her mid-50s. While she didn't share the information with her colleagues, Cedarian heard through the grapevine that Scholar had accepted a full-time teaching position at a two-year institution located in the nearest city, some 40 miles away. As well, an Assistant Professor, on the heels of a weak pre-tenure review, announced her intention to leave RU at the end of the current year. Citing budget challenges, the Dean informed Cedarian that Mathematical Sciences would be approved to conduct just two tenure-track searches, leaving the third vacancy unfilled and potentially eliminated unless RU's fiscal challenges eased. Noting that the faculty separations had left the unit with only one continuing woman and no underrepresented minorities, the Dean also informed Cedarian of her expectation that recruitment efforts would be responsive to the department's need to enhance its diversity. Although Cedarian had pressed the Dean hard for the third search, he knew that certain members of the math faculty - chief among them, the unit's senior-most Professor, Rocky DeMeanor - faulted him for its lack of approval.

Despite the faculty's low morale and unhappiness at the possible loss of a line, the two searches, one in mathematics education and the other in general mathematics, had proceeded swimmingly...until now. The mathematics education search yielded three excellent finalists, including a Hispanic female and white female, although the search committee has recommended the white male candidate. Two of the three individuals interviewed in the general mathematics search were deemed acceptable, with the white female candidate receiving the faculty's unanimous endorsement over the Asian male candidate. Mindful of the Dean's expectations for diverse hires, Cedarian proceeded first with the general mathematics offer. The female candidate was thrilled to receive the offer, but surprised the Chair when she inquired about a hiring accommodation for or position-sharing arrangement with her lesbian partner, who had made the "long short list" in the same search but was not among the interviewees. The Dean demurred when Cedarian approached her about a second hire from the search, but she indicated interest in position-sharing and directed the Chair to consult the faculty to explore their support for the idea. On doing so, Professor DeMeanor immediately and vehemently registered his objection, stating that a candidate who would make such an unreasonable request did not merit further consideration. He urged withdrawal of the offer in favor of the Asian male candidate, a recommendation that Cedarian was dismayed to see gain traction with other senior faculty members. The Chair is intrigued by the position-sharing notion, which he thinks might be parlayed into a second hire down the road. He suspects that DeMeanor's reaction has more to do with his socially conservative views than concerns about the appropriateness of the candidate's inquiry, but sees no easy way to address those suspicions. The recruiting season is growing short, and Cedarian needs to bring the hiring deliberations to a conclusion. What options are available to him?

Questions:

1. Is there evidence in this case of gender-based or other climate issues in this department? If so, what is it?
2. The case is silent on the manner in which the Chair communicated to the math faculty the dean's expectations regarding diverse hiring, or whether he did so. Should he have shared this information, and if so, when and how?
3. Is there an approach that would enable the Chair to explore further the notion of position-sharing? If so, what is it? In your opinion, should he do so?
4. How should the Chair proceed in the general mathematics search?
5. How should the Chair proceed in the mathematics education search?

Acknowledgement of Support and Disclaimer

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0930138. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.