



Sharing the Work: Using Diversity Advocates to Develop Inclusive Excellence

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Accepted: 14 February 2024
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Abstract

Administrators and faculty at many colleges and universities are dedicated to making the faculty hiring process fair and equitable. One program that has shown promise is to train and appoint a Diversity Advocate (DA) to serve on each faculty search and screen committee. In this study, we created and examined the early stages of a DA program at a single institution. After undergoing special training, the DA works on the search committee to encourage best practices and to discourage schemas and stereotypes from interfering with the process. Our DA program differs from some in that efforts are made to train DAs who are demographically in the majority, work in the area where the search is taking place, and have earned tenure or promotion. Training those who are demographically in the majority helps meet our goal of broadening the responsibility for evidence-based and equitable hiring practices across faculty members. While reliable data on hiring outcomes is not yet available, we developed a survey to evaluate the DA training and conducted focus groups to understand the DA experience better. Our results highlight how DAs intervened in the search process to make it more equitable. The interventions included encouraging the use of best practices, such as leading the committee in creating a rubric for evaluating candidates and intervening when bias was present. Our study provides evidence that a DA program is one way to expand the pool of faculty committed to inclusive excellence.

Keywords Inclusive excellence · Diversity advocates · Equity · Inclusion · Faculty development · Faculty hiring

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Introduction

Over the past half-century, administrators and faculty at many American colleges and universities have begun to recognize the benefits of a diverse faculty. As Stewart and Valian (2018) explain, the benefits include: “embracing innovation and creativity, welcoming challenges to received wisdom or traditional knowledge, increasing the visibility of our dedication to the free pursuit of knowledge, inspiring students to have high aspirations and to explore new ideas, and so on” (p. 14). With such end goals in mind, an array of programs designed to improve faculty recruitment and retention have been implemented across higher education. However, a growing body of evidence suggests that even with training and goodwill, faculty often continue to privilege the status quo (Henry, 2015; Schick, 2000; Stewart & Valian, 2018). Bonilla-Silva (2012) explains that the formal and informal policies guiding faculty hiring often protect Whiteness. Some typical moves hiring committees employ include “the so-called objective scrutiny of applicant CVs, the discourse of ‘fit,’ the token committee member, the additive nature of diversity-related questions, and the acceptability of candidate ignorance on issues of race/gender” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 559). Disrupting these systematic norms and practices requires a new approach to training search and screen personnel.

Missing the Mark? Justice or Diversity

Once considered a promising way to advance justice, scholars have criticized diversity initiatives due to the lack of evidence showing that increasing representation translates into the development of inclusive and just workspaces (Petts & Garza, 2021; Rodgers & Liera, 2023; Thomas, 2018). In *The Enigma of Diversity*, Berrey (2015) outlines how the fight for equality is now a “celebration of cultural difference as a competitive advantage” (p. 7). She argues that organizations are driven by self-interest, wanting to reap the benefits of being seen as diverse. The problem with this is that the focus on diversity works to eliminate justice-inspired initiatives focused on redistributing power, resources, and opportunities (Berrey, 2015; Thomas, 2018). Such practices embody the paradox women faculty and faculty of color face, where they are sought out during hiring to meet the university’s ideal for diversity and then, once hired, are frequently devalued through (a) efforts to delegitimize nonmainstream research (Settles et al., 2021), (b) the overloading of diverse hires with service and teaching (Turner et al., 2008), and (c) a norm of seeking representation without a focused effort toward change-oriented inclusion (Rodgers & Liera, 2023). As a result, universities benefit from hiring diverse faculty while still maintaining the status quo (Rodgers & Liera, 2023).

Notwithstanding the concerns discussed above, one well-known program designed to improve the search and screen process, Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence (STRIDE), involves training on best practices to mitigate biases in faculty searches. Originally developed at the University of Michigan (<https://advance.umich.edu/stride/>), this training was adopted at Florida International University (FIU) in 2011 as part of an ADVANCE Adaptation grant funded

by the National Science Foundation (NSF). Before spring 2020, STRIDE training at FIU entailed a two-hour in-person session, usually capped at 20 people, that blended research and case studies to encourage active participation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we pivoted from in-person to online training but held strong to our goal of active participation. In 2016, FIU was awarded an NSF ADVANCE Institutional Transformation (IT) Grant, which included the creation of the Office to Advance Women, Equity and Diversity (AWED) led by Dr. Rose. The overarching goal of this grant is to attract, recruit, retain, and promote women STEM faculty. The project team has taken an institutional approach focused on creating system-level changes, most notably regarding hiring, tenure and promotion, departmental climate, and policy change. This paper discusses one aspect of this work, the Diversity Advocate program. The program began with a small pilot in 2018–2019 designed to address the gaps, weaknesses, and opportunities we identified as we studied how STRIDE-trained faculty search and screen committees (SSC) conducted their work.

Diversity Advocate Program at FIU

Motivation

After twelve years of STRIDE training at FIU, 1300 faculty have been trained, and university policy now requires that every member of a faculty SSC must have completed the STRIDE training within the past three years. The STRIDE workshop has many strengths, including creating a shared experience and base set of knowledge for every SSC member about recruiting and objectively evaluating faculty. The STRIDE program at FIU appeared to be at least partly responsible for the increase of tenure ladder women in STEM from 11% in 2011 to about 20% in 2017. However, this progress leveled off in subsequent years. Through conversations with numerous committee members, we noticed that while every search member completed the training, there were concerns that many people viewed the responsibility to enact and uphold new policies and procedures as someone else's. As the social psychology theory of the *diffusion of responsibility* posits (Darley & Latané, 1968), there might be SSC members trained in STRIDE who notice moments of bias in which they could intervene, but they do not act because they are waiting for other committee members to act instead.

An approach that showed promise in addressing this and other potential gaps in the STRIDE training was the use of a specially trained “diversity advocate” (also known as equity or search advocate) on SCCs (Cahn et al., 2022; Liera, 2020a; Weak, 2022). The diversity advocate's role varies from university to university, but at its core, the goal of our program is to train one member of each SSC to take ownership to work towards a fair and equitable search and screen process. Doing so involves engaging in efforts above and beyond the best practices for recruiting and evaluating candidates presented in the STRIDE training and guiding the committee to mitigate bias. Diversity Advocates receive additional training beyond STRIDE to empower them to take responsibility for identifying when colleagues act in biased ways and determining how to engage in potentially difficult conversations that address the bias. For

example, if a colleague remarks, “This candidate is from a highly ranked graduate program, so they should be our top candidate,” the DA will recognize this as prestige bias (Wapman et al., 2022) or an attempt to favor a single criterion above others. Then, the DA can construct a response that challenges the bias in this statement.

While part of the motivation to create a Diversity Advocate Program was to build on and extend the work done through the STRIDE program, we were also motivated by a desire to change a long-established practice at FIU. When we created the Diversity Advocate Program, the then-current Faculty Search and Screen Handbook stated, “The hiring official should seek to ensure that women and minorities from within the department should be represented on all SSCs to offer diverse perspectives and different ideas that may enhance efforts to recruit and evaluate candidates” (Equal Opportunity Programs and Diversity, n.d., p. 6). In practice, the important goal of representing diverse perspectives and ideas often required that each SSC include at least one woman, one Black, one Asian, and one Hispanic faculty member. As a result, some women faculty, faculty of color, and especially women faculty of color were expected to serve repeatedly on SSCs. When no such faculty were available or faculty refused to serve on yet another committee, women faculty or faculty of color were selected from outside the department to fulfill this requirement. In addition, the assigned faculty were often either pre-tenured or in untenured positions, a function of the low numbers of tenured women faculty and faculty of color. Thomas (2018) describes such policies as attempts by university officials to deploy people of color in the name of diversity. He found, as did we, that people of color were *cognizant and critical* of being placed in this role.

Being included on a search committee primarily because of their gender or racial/ethnic identity tokenized these individuals and often increased their total service load, usually without commensurate recognition or compensation. These assignments take time away from research and other high-value work. Service work in general, and more specifically service work related to diversity efforts, is often devalued in academia (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) and thus does not positively impact decisions about tenure or raise your status among peers. Additionally, an assumption was made that the faculty selected would be interested in and qualified to advocate for diversity in recruitment and hiring, representing an identity-based assumption about faculty skills and interests. Marginalized faculty may feel silenced by institutional norms around issues of inequity (Villarreal et al., 2019) or may themselves hold beliefs damaging toward historically marginalized people (Jones & Palmer, 2011; Wood, 2015). Even in instances when the faculty were interested, qualified, and made a meaningful difference in SSCs, monitoring and intervening in a potentially biased process is difficult, time-consuming work that may come with unwanted consequences.

In practice, this well-intended effort to construct diverse SSCs exemplified the insufficiency of merely adding faculty of color to a process created and developed by the majority: it did not serve the goal of genuine diversity and inclusion. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) argue that such approaches “do not address the fundamental Whiteness of the university’s policies and practices” (p. 260). Furthermore, placing people on SSCs in the hopes of creating an equitable process without explaining or defining their role significantly impacts the effectiveness of their work. Liera (2020a)

reinforced this point by identifying the importance of *organizationally* defining the DA's role to give the advocate *institutional legitimacy* to carry out their work.

For these reasons, we set out to develop and institutionalize a Diversity Advocate program. Our program's primary goals were to (a) shift the burden for ensuring equitable searches from women faculty and faculty of color to all faculty, (b) define and legitimate the DA role, and (c) expand the number of faculty engaging in equity initiatives. While our long-term goal is to increase diversity in hiring, our immediate intention with this program was to undo a structurally unjust policy at the university. By institutionalizing the DA's role, we also sought to impart a broader sense of responsibility for building a diverse and inclusive university.

In 2019, Dr. Simpson assumed responsibility for the DA program. After training fifty DAs and piloting the DA program for two years, she began meeting regularly with representatives connected with Human Resources who were responsible for Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) oversight and faculty hiring procedures. In 2021, the relevant university parties agreed that having a trained DA serve on each committee would satisfy EEO requirements to the relief of women faculty, faculty of color, and especially women faculty of color, who had previously been oversampled for the sake of creating diverse search committees.

The Selection Process

Currently, at FIU, in most cases, members of the SSC are provisionally identified according to department policy. The number of faculty searches at FIU typically falls between 60 and 80 searches annually. The names of committee members are submitted for approval by various units, including AWED. A potential DA is identified by AWED from among the committee members. If no members of the proposed committee are willing and suitable to take on that role, the committee is reconstructed to add someone who is. Efforts are made to select faculty who express a desire to serve as DA. We intentionally select faculty who want to serve because our ultimate goal is cultural change. The theory of *diffusion of innovations* (Rogers, 2003) posits that an individual's decision to adopt an innovation is based on the proportion of people who have already adopted it. Some have argued that once 40% of people adopt the innovation, others begin to accept the change is happening (Tolbert et al., 1995). To that end, we select faculty willing to spearhead a cultural shift in the search and screen process.

To maximize the DA's efficacy, all efforts are made to follow these guidelines in identifying a DA: (a) select a person of the appropriate rank, a person with tenure, for tenure-line searches; (b) appoint someone from a group well represented in the discipline, in many but not all cases, this individual also has racial, ethnic, and/or gender privilege within American society; (c) avoid selecting someone who has previously served as a DA; and (d) select a person with expertise in the area for which the search is taking place or at the least someone in the same department or program. The reason for these guidelines is to share the work of inclusive excellence among faculty members, avoid overburdening women faculty and faculty of color, and select a person who can speak with authority on the committee. The DA then undergoes a special two-hour training to prepare them for the work. All DAs also take the STRIDE training in the same year or one of the previous two years. It is worth noting that women

faculty and faculty of color will continue to serve on SSCs in their areas of expertise. Sometimes, asking them if they are willing to serve as a DA may be necessary. Past experiences may also prompt faculty of color to volunteer for this role. In addition, any member of an SSC is welcome to attend the DA training and use what they learned during their service.

The Role of the Diversity Advocate

The role of the Diversity Advocate is to work on two fronts to try to promote inclusive excellence in the process of recruiting and selecting faculty job candidates. One front focuses on preventing individual-level factors such as schemas, stereotypes, and prejudices from interfering with the search process. Diversity Advocates need to be on the lookout for committee members who are implicitly or explicitly influenced by schemas or biases irrelevant to the job they seek to fill. DAs also must be willing to bring attention to these schemas and biases. For example, a committee member may hold an institutional bias that causes them to favor the university a candidate attended at the expense of other valuable pieces of evidence. The DA's role would involve redirecting the committee's attention to suggest a need to focus on the complete evaluation criteria for the position.

The other front focuses on structural-level factors such as policies, procedures, and practices (both formal and informal) that might lead to an inequitable search process. For example, imagine that a teaching statement is required in the job ad, but some committee members ignore this piece of evidence in their evaluations. The DA can bring this omission to the committee's attention, and a new procedure can be agreed upon. Essentially, the role of the DA is to remind the committee of the moments when bias is especially likely to enter the process and consistently encourage best practices. By taking on this role, the DA supports the committee in making equitable decisions throughout the complex hiring process.

Developing the Training

As we considered how to develop our training, we examined the literature on creating equitable search processes. The original training emphasized best search practices derived from Stewart and Valian's (2018) landmark book, *An Inclusive Academy Achieving Diversity and Excellence*. Stewart and Valian highlight the importance of focusing on the earliest steps in the search and screen process: defining the position, recruiting the applicant pool, and setting up the procedures to be followed for evaluating the applications. Often taken for granted, these steps may follow formal or informal guidelines passed down from search to search without assessing their utility or effectiveness. At FIU, it had been typical to define the position narrowly and advertise in the few 'usual' places, including a few venues focused nationally on diverse groups. As a result, the early steps in the process were often completed without concerted effort to *actively* recruit a diverse group of candidates. Although this approach led to candidate pools that satisfied the minimum standards under our institution's affirmative action plan, it became clear that meeting this standard was insufficient for the goal of diversifying the faculty. Training SSC members to use

multiple active search techniques instead of simply conducting a fair screening of candidates who arrive in the pool represented one key goal for the DA program.

Stewart and Valian (2018) also identify multiple solutions to common problems impeding the equitable evaluation of job candidates, several of which we emphasize in our training workshops for hiring committees. For example, we have adopted their recommendation that committees create and use an evaluation tool (p. 225) to encourage consistent evaluations while prioritizing applicants' evidence-based, job-specific qualifications. Also, in keeping with Stewart and Valian's work, our training emphasizes providing similar opportunities for each candidate during the interview stages. In 2022, we distilled the best practices in both our STRIDE and DA training to five main points:

1. Write a good job ad to attract good and diverse candidates.
2. Search actively to get a deep diverse pool.
3. Decide on written evaluation criteria prior to review.
4. Decide the review process to be used prior to review.
5. Treat all job candidates equitably.

More current versions of the presentation reflect the evolving political context in our state, where recent state legislation redefined identity-based discrimination and constrained diversity-based programming in higher education. After repeated consultation with university administrators, we have made minor modifications that preserve the core of our training while avoiding vocabulary proscribed by current law, such as "critical race theory" or "implicit bias."

The training includes leading participants through a series of case studies (see examples in Table 1) to help give participants experiences like those they might encounter while serving as a DA. Each case study is based on actual events reported from previous searches, changed to provide anonymity. The case studies help bring to life the recommendations made in the training and help DAs (a) identify SSC behaviors that might indicate the use of criteria that are not germane to the candidates' ability to succeed in the job as defined by the department, college, and university and (b) develop ways to promote evidence-based, non-biased recruitment and evaluation practices. The goal is to help them apply the principles to real-life scenarios and to practice having difficult conversations with their colleagues while preserving effective working relationships.

Equity Work in an Evolving Political Context

During the writing of this paper, some states adopted or are considering new legislation banning funding for many higher-education diversity programs. For example, Florida law now restricts programs that support or use words such as diversity and equity. However, federal law (e.g., EEOC, Title VII) continues to require universities to provide equal employment opportunities. As federal contractors (if they accept federal grants), most universities must also have Affirmative Action plans and demonstrate efforts to meet those hiring goals. Therefore, universities must show compliance with federal laws by attracting a demographically diverse pool of candidates and

Table 1 Examples of case studies used in the diversity advocate workshop

Case Study 1

One of your search committee colleagues is very assertive in stating that he knows excellence when he sees it and is not about to hire someone just to increase diversity. He also believes that sexism is a thing of the past – women actually have better opportunities to get hired in engineering than men because they are so much in demand.

Case Study 2

Last year one department had a woman candidate that was their top-rated candidate, but they moved her to second choice because she made mention of her husband in the interview. They figured that her husband might not come, and they didn't want to lose out on getting their next choice by giving her an offer and waiting for her to turn it down. This year, the department has a male candidate they want to hire. One of the search committee members remarked that they might have a two-body problem again, but they expect that the guy will convince his wife to come so they gave him the offer.

Case Study 3

Only one woman and one (presumably) Black man have applied for the open position in your department. There is a lot of discussion in your department about whether to include the woman and the black man on the shortlist to appease the dean. The decision is to put them as the 4th and 5th ranked candidates and ask the dean to pay for two additional interviews.

following best practices in equitable hiring. To meet this goal, we will continue to have an advocate on each SSC under our newly named program, Search Advocates. The training encourages a broad outreach to different populations and educates the search advocates about strategies to ensure applicants are reviewed and treated fairly during the evaluation process. In addition, the new training encourages advocates and, through them, search committee members to be self-reflective and, when necessary, to revise their accustomed procedures to create broad and excellent talent pools throughout the search process. Our work thus suggests the importance of creating flexible workshops that nurture faculty's awareness of their own agentic responsibility for creating a departmental climate.

Method

Participants

By the 2020–2021 academic year, the DA program was deployed across the university. To understand whether the program was meeting our goal of broadening responsibility for promoting evidence-based and equitable hiring practices, we compared key demographic characteristics of all faculty with those who served as DAs for the 2021–22 academic year (see Table 2). 45% of all faculty were women, while 37.5% of those who served as DAs were women. In the STEM and SBS fields, only 23.1% of DAs were women. At least some of the burden of ensuring equitable, diverse hires has shifted from an underrepresented group (women) to an equally or over-repre-

Table 2 Demographics for all faculty, all DAs, and all STEM and SBS DAs in 2021-22, and faculty DAs from STEM and SBS who participated in the focus group interviews

	All Faculty	All DAs	STEM and SBS DAs	Focus Group Participants
	N= 1638	N=64	N=26	N=11
Gender				
Women	45.0%	37.5%	23.1%	36.4%
Men	55.0%	62.5%	76.9%	63.6%
Race/Ethnicity				
Black	7.4%	4.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Hispanic, Non-White	1.4%	10.9%	11.5%	0.0%
Hispanic, White	22.6%	15.6%	15.4%	9.1%
Asian	16.2%	12.5%	15.4%	18.2%
More than 1 Race	0.9%	3.1%	3.9%	0.0%
White, Non-Hispanic	51.5%	53.1%	53.9%	72.7%
Promotion Status				
Non-tenured/non-promoted	47.3%	26.6%	26.9%	18.2%
Tenured/promoted	52.7%	73.4%	73.1%	81.8%
Country of Origin				
Non-USA Born	45.3%	34.4%	42.3%	36.4%
USA Born	54.7%	65.6%	57.7%	63.6%

sented group (men). Looking next at race/ethnicity, the redistribution of labor is less clear. Compared to the full sample, there was a slightly lower percentage (ranging from 2.7 – 6.9%) of DAs who identified as Black, Hispanic (White), and Asian, and the same pattern held for DAs within STEM and SBS, suggesting a slight easing of the SSC service burden on this population. However, a significantly higher proportion of Hispanic faculty of color served as DAs (10.9%) than are represented in the faculty as a whole (1.4%). While the reasons for this overrepresentation are complex, we note that the SSCs are still significantly more diverse than the faculty as a whole despite the restructuring of HR requirements. The intersection of Black and Hispanic identity, in particular, likely creates disproportionate exposure to SSC service and, thus, to DA service as well. Next, we looked at the country of origin for faculty and noticed that a higher percentage of DAs were born in the United States than the total faculty sample. Overall, 53% of the DAs were from the White, non-Hispanic racial/ethnic group, and 63% were male. The previous policy had implicitly assigned the responsibility of ensuring equitable searches to people from historically underrepresented and minoritized identity groups. In contrast, the demographic pattern among DAs suggests that we have made inroads in shifting that responsibility to those in the majority.

Another priority of the DA program is to have faculty who have earned tenure or been promoted if on a non-tenure track line serve as DAs when possible. We wanted the faculty who served as DAs (particularly on tenure-line searches) to be tenured so that pre-tenured faculty were less likely to be in a position to challenge tenured faculty. We accomplished this goal in roughly three out of every four searches: 73.4% of those serving as DAs have earned tenure or been promoted, compared to 52.7% of all faculty.

Overall, these data are consistent with our goal of decreasing our dependency on using women faculty and faculty of color and demonstrate a shift to develop a vast group of faculty who share the responsibility for equitable search and screen processes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative Survey Data

In addition to demographic information, this study captured two additional types of data: post-training evaluation data and focus group interview data. After the DA training, each attendee was sent a survey designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. The survey asked a combination of Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions (see Table 3). The authors created the questions to determine how effective the training was for each of our four main goals and to measure the overall usefulness of the training. To analyze the surveys, we found the percentage of each answer given on the Likert-scale questions. These results show the effectiveness/usefulness of the training overall and on the aspects described in Table 3.

Next, we looked at the responses to the open-ended questions to look for patterns in the responses. The goal was to find the most common themes associated with the open-ended questions. So, Dr. King began by reading all the responses to a single question. Next, she reread each response and coded the response based on the main idea presented. For example, when asked how the workshop could be improved, the

Table 3 Survey items: diversity advocate training evaluations

Likert-Scale Questions	
<i>5-pt Effectiveness Scale</i> (<i>Very Effective, Somewhat Effective, Neutral, Not Very Effective, and Not at all Effective</i>)	
Q1	The benefits of a more diverse faculty.
Q2	How schemas/stereotypes affect the careers of women and URM?
Q3	The solution: What can we do?
Q4	The format, i.e., the combination of presentation and small group discussion.
<i>5-pt Usefulness Scale</i> (<i>Very Useful, Somewhat Useful, Neutral, Not Very Useful, and Not at all Useful</i>)	
Q5	Overall, how useful was the workshop to you?
Open-Ended Questions	
Q6	Overall, what was most effective about the workshop?
Q7	How could the workshop be improved or adapted to better meet your needs (e.g., more or less discussion of particular topics, discussion of other topics, etc.)?
Q8	How/do you think you are likely to use this information on your search committee?

most common codes included: opportunities to roleplay and other improvements to case studies (33%), overlap with STRIDE or need to update materials (29%), and no suggested improvements or good as it is (25%). The number of times each code appeared was tallied, and these results were used to identify the most common themes in the data. The process was repeated for the other two open-ended questions. The emerging themes helped us understand what the sample of DAs found effective in the training, how the training could be improved, and what information they expected to use during the search.

Focus Group Interview Data

As STEM and SBS faculty are the focus of the ADVANCE IT grant, we invited DAs from these areas to participate in a focus group interview. We sent email invitations to all 26 STEM and SBS faculty serving as DAs in 2021–2022 and offered a \$30 e-gift card as an incentive. The focus group was 63.6% men, 72.7% White, 63.6% USA-born, and 81.8% were tenured or had been promoted. Women, Asian, Non-Hispanic White, USA-born, and tenured or promoted advocates were overrepresented in the focus groups compared to the population of STEM and SBS DAs (see Table 2).

We held two focus group interviews, with three faculty attending the first session and eight attending the second. We used a focus group methodology instead of other data to allow participants to openly explore their experience as a DA and use the conversation to clarify their views (Kitzinger, 1994). We believed the group interaction would provide an exciting opportunity to see what aspects of the DA experience were significant to the participants.

Dr. Farhangi moderated the two focus groups. She informed participants of the purpose of the research during the informed consent process and again at the start of the interview. Before the focus groups met, two authors developed an interview protocol based on their goals for the focus groups. The protocol was shared with other team members, and the team made changes before the final version was complete. The protocol included seven questions divided into two parts. In the first part of the discussion, the moderator shared with the participants the best practices discussed in the DA training and asked them to reflect on and discuss their use of these practices during the search process. In the second part, the moderator asked questions to solicit the participants' experiences and challenges. The moderator was mindful of taking a peripheral role during the focus groups to keep the conversation flowing between participants (Kitzinger, 1994).

The focus groups were conducted over Zoom and were video recorded. The interviews were transcribed with the help of the Zoom transcription feature. The analysis of the transcribed interviews by Dr. King consisted of a systemic review using content analysis techniques (Lune & Berg, 2017; Morgan, 1997). After reading and rereading the transcripts, initial coding began, which involved creating numerous category codes. In the coding, only emergent codes were used (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The second stage involved focused coding, where the researcher looked at examples of each code, merged similar codes, deleted infrequent codes, and developed a definition for each code. During this stage, the researcher looked for recurring ideas across the focus groups and identified themes (Krueger, 1994). Eventually, two broad cat-

egories emerged: what was effective and what forms of resistance were present. We use these two categories and the themes within them to describe our results.

Results

Post-Workshop Survey

First, we will discuss the results from the evaluation administered at the end of the Diversity Advocate Training. 39% of the 64 faculty trained in 2021-22 returned the survey ($N=25$). Of those submitting the survey, 64% were male, and 80% were tenured or had been promoted. The results in Fig. 1 show the percentage of respondents providing each response on the Likert-Scale for questions 1–5 on the survey (see Table 3 for the questions). For each question, the most common response was very effective or very useful, with 48–76% of respondents answering with the highest value. On the other hand, only 4–8% of respondents indicated the training was not very effective/useful, and no respondents answered that the training was not at all effective/useful on any measure.

The question “The solution: What can we do?” received the lowest number of ‘very effective’ responses, suggesting room for improvement in this area. To help understand this result more clearly, we examined the responses to the open-ended question about how the workshop could be improved. We identified two main themes from the open-ended responses for improving the training: (a) roleplaying and other improvements to the case studies and (b) updating material and eliminating background information that is covered in the original STRIDE training. 33% of respondents suggested a stronger focus on the case studies or having opportunities to discuss or roleplay how to handle difficult conversations would be helpful. For example,

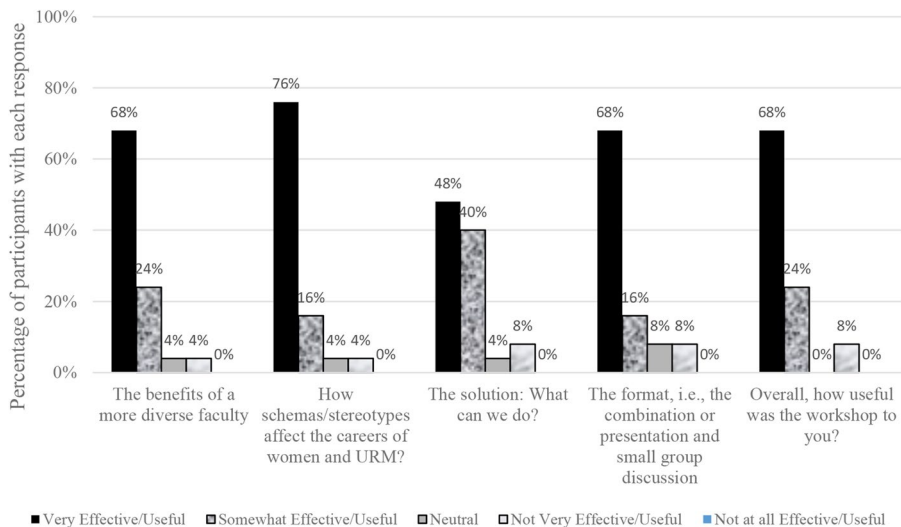


Fig. 1 Mean ratings of evaluation items of training effectiveness

Frank (all names used are pseudonyms) suggested we show “video scenarios,” and Nancy suggested we use “more subtle case studies after the more obvious ones that were presented.” In addition, Vera wanted more opportunities to discuss “cases we see from our own committee experiences.” As these examples demonstrate, the participants wanted additional scenarios to think about, practice responding to scenarios, and discussions on how to address the situations that might arise during the search and screen process.

The participants’ desire for more scenarios was reiterated in their responses to the open-ended question, “What was most effective about the workshop?” Over 50% of respondents answered this question by explaining the most effective part of the workshop was the case studies and the discussions about them. For example, Aria wrote, “The fact that the case studies were real cases from FIU made us think harder and relate to them.” These results showed that the case studies worked, and the faculty wanted more of them.

Focus Groups: Effective Strategies

As we analyzed the focus group data from 11 STEM and SBS faculty, we identified two consistently discussed areas: effective strategies used during the search and screen process and resistance faced during the process. As participants discussed effective strategies, two broad categories emerged: (1) implementing best practices and (2) the DA identifying and challenging bias. Below, we discuss the themes within each category.

Implementing Best Practices in the Search and Screen Process

Looking first at the best practices that were most frequently discussed during the focus group, three themes emerged: (a) describing the search criteria broadly in the job announcement, (b) actively searching for applicants, and (c) developing specific criteria for evaluating applicants. When DAs discussed *describing the search criteria broadly*, their descriptions of implementing this best practice focused entirely on changing the criteria from a narrow sub-field to be more inclusive of other areas of study in the hopes that this would encourage a more diverse group of applicants. For example, Adam explained, “We wrote something like [department name] and related fields, including interdisciplinary” in the job announcement. Then, Adam explained the motivation for this wording was that it might lead to “more diversity in terms of gender and race/ethnicity” in the applicant pool. After seeing the resultant candidate pool, Adam reported it had the diversity they sought.

Another best practice discussed during the focus groups was *actively searching for candidates*. The DAs described implementing different procedures that made the search active. One method DAs used was to contact diversity sections of professional organizations. For example, Maria declared, “We actively networked with diversity sections in our profession.” Likewise, Julia commented, “We did spend quite a bit of time trying to find diversity sections of scientific associations.” Adam described looking for applicants through the Hispanic Association linked with his field and the Twitter account of the African American Association for Disabilities. Not every-

one reported advertising through diversity sections but instead mentioned recruiting “promising doctoral students” and “current assistant professors.” From the discussion, it appeared that most DAs were able to discuss at least one additional recruitment method to add to the traditional job advertisement.

During the focus groups, there was also a significant discussion about *developing specific criteria for evaluating applicants*. It was apparent this was the area where the most dramatic change was created and the area where DAs were the most intentional about bringing about this change. One DA, Mathew, explained some of the frustration he felt on prior committees in dealing with how to evaluate candidates. He used these experiences and his knowledge from the training to do things differently this time. He explained, “I asked everybody at the first pre-meeting before we had any applications in to read the job call¹. Then, everybody agreed on what we actually need in a candidate and then put that into a rubric.” Mathew took on the challenge of asking the committee to determine specific, agreed-upon criteria to evaluate the candidates from the first meeting.

Another DA, Austin, described a similar experience:

[Developing specific criteria for evaluating applicants] is something that our committee took on. That was a benefit of my training through the program, I think, because when we came together as a committee in our first meeting to determine some of the criteria that we would use, we committed as a committee to read their presentation of themselves first you know, so their research statement and their diversity statements and so forth, and we all committed to reading the letters of recommendation last.

Reading documents written by the applicants before looking at ‘proxy’ documents written about them by others is one of the best practices recommended by Stewart and Valian (2018) and discussed in the STRIDE and DA training. Austin and Mathew each described discussing the criteria for evaluation and creating a shared process for evaluating applicants at the first meeting. In contrast, Edward missed the opportunity to discuss the evaluation criteria at the first meeting but indicated his desire to guide the committee in creating a process. He explained, “When the committee met to actually discuss the files, we had not already established a rubric to do that, so we did do that at my behest, and then we reviewed the files and evaluated them.” While the process might not have been as smooth as Edward wished, he demonstrated his commitment to this best practice by stopping the discussion and creating a process in the moment.

There is clear evidence that the DAs worked to implement some of the best practices identified in the DA workshop. The most significant change reported was through the implementation of specific criteria to evaluate candidates.

¹ SSCs at FIU usually have had little input to the job call and possibly the ad, but the workflow is being changed to provide them the opportunity for more input.

Identifying and Challenging Biases in the Search and Screen Process

Another area in which DAs indicated making an impact was in identifying and challenging biases in the search and screen process, such as narrative building in which the reader fills in missing information. Austin described his work in this area in this way:

One thing that I found myself doing a lot was, like, fighting against storytelling, you know. What I mean by that is you know people are trying to explain phenomena in the CVs and things by creating stories about why that might be. So, I felt like I kept pulling people back from that and saying well there's nothing in any of these documents that indicate anything you're saying right now. You know, you're basically, like, trying to explain these elements by creating your own story about it. I felt like I kept pulling people back from that.

As explained here, part of the DAs' role requires them to challenge assumptions. This is exemplified by the statement, "there's nothing in any of these documents that indicate anything you're saying right now." Other DAs made similar statements. For example, Paola explained how some of her male colleagues were arguing a female candidate's presentation was not technical enough, so she intervened and said, "Look at the appendix – they're like millions of statistics and statistical analyses, but she presented it in a way that a broad audience could understand." Paola's willingness to stand up when she heard people express ideas that were not based on the evidence provided by the candidate helped make the search process more equitable.

To be able to do this kind of work, the DA needs to have a deep understanding of the candidate's file so that they can point others to the facts. Paola explained it this way, "you know [the file] by heart, so any statement like, 'we are worried that she doesn't have teaching experience because she comes from an international organization,' I could say, look, if you're looking at the diversity statement, she's talking about how she mentors research assistants and so on." So, being prepared and having knowledge about the candidates are essential aspects of doing the work of the DA.

Focus Groups: Resistance

Some DAs reported resistance as they attempted to carry out their work. We expected this since the role of the DA was created in part to encourage others to move from endorsing diversity and fairness to changing their own behavior and consistently adhering to the best practices for equitable searches. The resistance discussed during the focus groups came from three primary sources: committee members, administrators, and the department.

Resistance from Committee Members

During the focus groups, resistance from committee members centered around privileging some criteria and downplaying other criteria when evaluating candidates. As Mathew explained, "Some people, I think, just wanted to review CVs and talk about

who they knew.” Focusing the majority of one’s attention on proxies in the CV, such as the applicant’s doctoral institution or their co-authors, without giving weight to the candidate’s self-written statements contradicts the best practices outlined in STRIDE and DA training. Mathew identified another instance where a committee member advocated for an applicant by saying, “I know their advisor, so it’ll be, you know, like, they’ll be a great candidate.” Privileging a single evaluation criterion to promote a candidate can be averted by developing and using an evaluation rubric that focuses the committee members’ attention on job-relevant evidence from the candidates’ files.

While the examples above show instances where individuals privileged certain aspects of a candidate’s record, at other times key criteria received less attention. Some DAs admitted feeling conflicted when committee members wanted to consider candidates who were missing a requested document, such as the diversity statement. As Gaven explained, “So, that was a very tough discussion that I had internally. I think we actually ended up not requiring [that an application needed to include a diversity statement to be considered] because a lot of [applicants] they may not look at it closely, or they may not see that it is required, but they may be very qualified.” Julia explained the committee reviewed an application that was missing a reference letter and, to be consistent, also reviewed applications without diversity statements, stating, “In an abundance of caution, we just decided, oh, let’s just consider them all, even if they didn’t turn in these required documents.” Several DAs brought up this type of conflict during the interviews, showing the challenges that may arise when attempting to evaluate candidates using an agreed-upon set of criteria or review process.

Resistance from the Administration

While more time was spent discussing resistance from committee members during the focus group, DAs did indicate several instances where administrators interfered with their goals. Some DAs felt disadvantaged from the beginning because of the prolonged time it took to approve the committee and the job advertisement.² These DAs were concerned that the pool of candidates would be weakened due to the delay. Some administrators also made decisions that limited the DAs’ ability to implement the best practices. For example, “The Dean said, ‘I’m giving you a line to hire in this subfield,’ so that was out of our hands.” While such problems were not discussed frequently, there were times when what the DA wanted and what the administration wanted were at odds.

An issue that frequently arose in the STEM fields involved administrative pressure to select a candidate with large amounts of transferable grant funding. Mathew explained why this could be detrimental to their search process. “This [transferable funding] is just not a thing that a grad student can have, no matter how good they are ... So, we lose a lot of great candidates like, you know because we can’t make offers.” Elias indicated, “We were told that the amount of money the candidates can bring in is the [most important thing].” Even in institutions that have committed

² AWED is currently working with the administration to streamline and speed up the search approval and job posting processes.

significantly to diversity, college and university-level financial goals can adversely impact equitable search and screen processes.

Resistance from the Department

Before the 2023 revision of the Faculty Search and Screen Handbook at FIU, there was no discussion about selecting the final candidate except to say, “Once the Department has selected the final candidate an offer letter should be submitted to Academic Affairs for review and approval” (Equal Opportunity Programs and Diversity, *n.d.*, p. 16). As a result, how a department selected its final candidate varied from department to department, depending on its by-laws or precedent. In some cases, for example, the search committee decided without involving the department; in other cases, the whole department voted on whom to recommend. Both of these procedures can be problematic. Carlos pointed out, “There’s a lot of discomfort with how profoundly undemocratic the official system is of giving everything over entirely to a small committee.” In Austin’s department, all faculty routinely voted on the final candidate; he explained the problem with this procedure by saying, “Once we release all of the information about the candidates to the faculty, you open it up to the entire faculty who haven’t necessarily gone through any of the training for these searches.” The focus group uncovered an inherent tension that exists at FIU regarding the lack of procedures around selecting the final candidate. It revealed that challenges would likely exist regardless of the process.

In summary, the DAs who participated in the focus groups revealed three sources of resistance: committee members, administration, and the department. Some of the resistance, such as biased thinking from committee members, is just what the role of DA was designed to counter. Additionally, our work with the DAs has led to a revision of the Search and Screen Handbook, which includes a recommended procedure for choosing the finalist, which we hope will address some of these issues. However, some resistance, such as administrators requiring transferable funding, arises outside the DAs’ influence.

The effect of the DA program on hiring outcomes is hard to measure due to small numbers and lack of readily available data other than that tracked for the purposes of the ADVANCE grant, which was focused on increasing the number of women tenure-line (TT) faculty in STEM. Aggregating the STEM TT hires from the two years prior to the DA program (2016–2017 and 2017–2018) and comparing those to the numbers aggregated from two years after the DA program was well established (2020–2021 and 2021–2022), we find a 13% increase in the percentage of women hired (8/25 [32%] to 14/31 [45%]). We do not have race/ethnicity data for those hires, but we do have data for the total number of STEM TT faculty women of color at the institution. In Fall 2017, four out of 262 STEM TT faculty were WOC (1.5%); in Fall 2021, there were eight out of 286 (2.8%). These numbers are affected by attrition as well as hiring. We cannot prove that the DA program contributed to these hires, but we hope they reflect the long, slow process of cultural change in their respective departments and colleges. We need to see continued progress in hiring and tenure, promotion, and retention to determine whether this and other programs support a genuine redistribution of power and opportunity for faculty at our university.

Discussion

Ultimately, our goal in designing and implementing the Diversity Advocate Program is centered on changing the culture surrounding the search and screen process. Cultural change involves redefining policies and practices that have typically favored those in power. In this paper, we discussed our efforts to eliminate the policy that required at least one woman and at least one representative from each of the major racial/ethnic groups (Hispanic, Black/African American, and Asian) to serve on each SSC to “enhance efforts to recruit and evaluate candidates.” By creating the DA Program, we were able to alleviate some of the burden on women faculty and faculty of color who were required to serve on multiple search committees without being provided a defined role for the work in which they are supposed to engage. In his study of an Equity Advocate program, Liera (2020a) found that creating an organizationally defined position was central to developing more equitable processes. Because of the institutional support for the role and the clearly defined purpose, advocates felt empowered and emboldened to “tell fellow faculty search committee members that it was the equity advocates’ job to disrupt norms and practices” (Liera, 2020a, p. 25). Cahn et al. (2022) found a contentious relationship existed at times between the equity advisors in their study and the rest of the committee. The authors attributed this to a lack of understanding of the equity advisor’s role. This type of misunderstanding was present at FIU before the DA program began, leaving the marginalized faculty required to serve on committees and the other committee members to wonder what was expected of them. Our results in this study are promising, as there is evidence that defining the DA role has empowered DAs to disrupt norms and challenge biases.

These instances include efforts to change habits like using proxies to indicate performance (i.e., the prestige of a candidate’s graduate institution) or discussing how potential candidates will “fit” at our university (Stewart & Valian, 2018; White-Lewis, 2020). Research has shown that faculty search committee members tend to favor applicants with qualifications they themselves possess (Liera & Ching, 2019) and applicants with identities similar to theirs (Rivera, 2017; White-Lewis, 2020). Our data showed that DAs who participated in the focus groups challenged norms and practices, including instances when committee members used proxies or fit to guide their decision-making.

Implications

While there is evidence of improvements in policy and practice during this study, more must be done to create cultural change. Below, we discuss two implications based on our work. First, as we examined how DAs talked about implementing best practices, we noticed that many of the implemented changes remained superficial. As an example, when discussing their efforts to actively recruit a diverse group of candidates, the examples provided by DAs were along the lines of ‘we advertised in ...’ but missing from their discussions were the kind of thorough and extensive efforts to attract candidates from historically marginalized groups that are suggested by Stewart and Valian (2018). As we contemplated why DA descriptions fell short of

the ideal, we wondered if it was due to a desire to stay within the culture of niceness so often found in educational spaces (Castagno, 2019).

Many have argued that a culture of niceness exists in education whereby faculty feel they are unable to challenge or make peers uncomfortable for actions that preserve racial and gender inequity (Castagno, 2019; Roegman et al., 2017). This culture directly impacts the search and screen process and the work of the DA. Liera (2020b) argues this leads to “loose accountability for racially unequal actions, thus making it possible for educators to engage in equity work without explicitly talking about race” (p. 1958). A necessary next step in this work is to examine how the culture of niceness might impact how DAs pursue their work. A future study might involve observing committee work and analyzing when DAs do and do not intervene and the methods they use in their interventions.

The second implication of this work suggests having other like-minded individuals on the committee to reinforce the DA’s work. For example, during the focus group, Austin noted how important it was that other committee members had been through some form of diversity training. He explained, “I wasn’t alone, and you know, so, I felt like overall it went really well.” On the other hand, Paola described what it felt like to feel alone on the committee, “People say, of course, she’s going to say that. I mean, she’s a woman. She’s been complaining about women in the [field] for a long time.” Paola’s words here describe the powerlessness she feels because she is the only woman in her department; her all-male colleagues often dismiss her thoughts, and they tokenize her because of her gender. The importance of having support from the people around the DA was also addressed in other studies with search advocates. Liera (2020a) explained the importance of having two equity advocates on each search committee, and Cahn et al. (2022) noted that having only a single advocate per committee made the work harder.

As additional faculty are trained and serve as DAs, we hope each SSC will eventually have several members trained in this area. For this reason, we are happy to have people take the DA training voluntarily or complete the other related trainings we offer. Their support can give individuals the strength to speak up in the face of injustice. As Maria explained, “They become allies in speaking up on a particular issue related to diversity, and then, once one speaks up, the other will, and if you have four or five people that are understanding the situation and speaking up, that helps.” There is power in having multiple people trained and ready to act. As the DA Program continues to grow, we believe the benefits and impact will also grow.

Conclusion

In closing, our motivation for creating the DA program was twofold. First, we wanted to create a clearly defined role for one committee member to assume responsibility for leading the use of evidence-based and equitable hiring practices throughout the search and screen process. Second, we wanted this new role to be filled by faculty demographically in the majority as a way to lessen the burden previously placed on women faculty and faculty of color who were regularly enlisted to serve on SSCs in the name of diversity. We designed this study to better understand the DA experience

during training and while serving on the SSC. Our results indicate that the participants found the training useful but wanted more time to practice responding to various scenarios that might come up during their work. Additionally, the focus group participants described intervening in ways that encouraged the SSC to use equitable hiring practices. While our results indicate the DA program has made strides in implementing best practices for an equitable search and screen process, we acknowledge that more needs to be done. We want DAs to become more critical and proactive as they engage in their work. To make this a reality, having like-minded colleagues serving on the SSC can provide the support some DAs may need. As we extend the DA program to more and more faculty, we expect to see even greater movement toward cultural change.

Acknowledgements We wish to thank Kenneth G. Furton, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry, for his constant support of this project during his term as Provost at FIU.

Author Contribution Conceptualization: B.K., C.S., S.F., and S.R.; M.: S.F. and B.K.; Data Collection: S.F.; Data Analysis: B.K.; Writing – original draft preparation: B.K.; Writing – review and editing: C.S., S.R., and K.W. Funding acquisition: S.R. All authors approved of the version to be published; and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy and integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Funding This study was funded by the National Science Foundation ADVANCE Institutional Transformation grant No. 1629889.

Data Availability The demographic data, survey data, and focus group data are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Code Availability A code list for the qualitative data is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional review board. The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Florida International University (IRB Approval # IRB-16-0172-AM04).

Financial Interests The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Consent Informed Informed consent was obtained before collecting data through the focus groups.

Conflict of Interest The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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