

# **An Evaluation of the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Recruiting Outstanding Catholic Faculty<sup>1</sup>**

The 2007-8 Faculty Senate of the University of Notre Dame

*April 16<sup>th</sup> 2008*

Provost Thomas Burish constituted the Ad Hoc Committee on Recruiting Outstanding Catholic Faculty (CROCF) to assess ways in which to recruit outstanding Catholic faculty members. The committee issued its report in September of 2007, outlining strategies and best practices to be used in the process of hiring Catholic faculty. Provost Burish has requested comments on those strategies. The Faculty Senate reviewed the report with its members, spoke with faculty, held discussions, and conducted a survey of faculty responses. The CROCF report assumes the goal of maintaining a preponderance of Catholic faculty at Notre Dame and this document is a response to that report, not to the underlying assumption of the report. This report only addresses the specific strategies offered by the CROCF report to reach its stated goal. The Senate has responded to the larger question of Catholic hiring in a position paper<sup>2</sup>.

From our various outreach mechanisms, the faculty who communicated with us generally supported the strategies identified in the report. In fact, many of these strategies simply reflect current University hiring practice. However, the report does raise several important issues and concerns. Three of these issues were expressed by a large number of faculty, across all colleges.

- 1) All hires must be primarily based on a candidate's academic merit.
- 2) Hiring that highlights Catholic identity, as opposed to Catholic mission, runs the risk of alienating many non-Catholic faculty members who have supported and nurtured the mission of the University for many years and, therefore, must be handled delicately.
- 3) The resources and efforts put into Catholic hiring should also be utilized to increase the hiring of minorities and women.

## A. Proactive Strategies for Identifying Academically Appropriate Catholic Faculty

Most of the faculty support the use of the general strategies to tap existing contacts and develop new contacts outlined in this section of the report. In fact, many of these strategies seem to be a normal part of the current culture of hiring at Notre Dame. The strategies in this section

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<sup>1</sup> This report is confidential to the faculty of the University of Notre Dame as it addresses recommendations in a report declared confidential by the Provost.

<sup>2</sup> See "Faculty Reponse to University's Initiative to hire Catholic Faculty" at <http://facultysenate.nd.edu/documents/documents.shtml>

are good practices that could be employed to hire Catholic faculty, but also to increase our hiring of women and minorities. Having said this, it must be recognized that some of these strategies may work better in some colleges than in others. For instance, some question whether there are Catholic “feeder schools” in all disciplines. Overall the strategies seem to be uncontroversial and the faculty would support their use.

The specific strategy to track graduates or encourage alumni with terminal degrees with incentives to apply to Notre Dame outlined in this section received lukewarm support from the faculty. The idea of football tickets as an attractive incentive, for instance, was greeted with real derision. It is fair to say there is neither strong opposition, nor overwhelming support, to these suggested best practices. Two issues of concern were consistently expressed: 1) the strategies could create a kind of inbreeding that is not healthy for a vibrant, academic community and 2) these strategies, though not offensive, will not be an effective method of hiring more Catholic faculty.

Concerns were raised that these strategies have the potential for creating a kind of “good old boy” University that mirrors a certain old Notre Dame model. Such a practice will exacerbate our current problem with hiring women and minorities. This could happen, as many faculty commented, because many academics neither know, nor feel comfortable asking, the religion of their colleagues and students. This could also lead to the hiring of only certain kinds of Catholic and discourage the hiring of other kinds of Catholics. Care must, therefore, be taken to insure that these strategies are balanced against another stated goal of the University’s mission statement, to create a diverse community of scholars and students.

Other faculty support the enterprise of increasing Catholic hiring, but do not think tracking graduates of Notre Dame and other Catholic colleges will effectively reach the goal. For instance, one comment suggests that most Catholics do not get their degrees from Catholic universities and, as a result, recruiting from Catholic universities will not effectively increase Catholic hiring. Another concern is that most major universities do not hire back their own graduates, so tracking them is counterproductive. This opinion was supported by the vast number of faculty who communicated with the Senate. It is not in the culture of most disciplines to hire their own graduates.

The next set of suggested strategies recommends the scheduling of various academic events to bring Catholic scholars and to discuss issues related to the University’s mission. These ideas are strongly supported by the faculty. As with the previous suggestion, the support was tempered by some caution. One concern expressed is that if religious affiliation is perceived as overshadowing academic excellence, the overall status of the University could be diminished. In addition, there is some concern that certain fields will be elevated over others because some fields can facilitate discussion of Catholicism naturally, while others cannot. For instance, some faculty asked how a seminar in Catholic differential equations might look? In implementing this strategy, the University must be careful not to compromise the integrity of any discipline and must recognize that what works in one discipline may not work in another.

The final suggestion offered by this section, that the University employ indirect methods to locate Catholic hires, was overwhelmingly rejected by the faculty. We would strongly discourage the University from employing these techniques. The secretive nature of this strategy raised the most concerns. Several faculty members questioned how committed the University really was to hiring Catholics if it was trying to hide the question. Why not, it was suggested,

simply ask people up front if they are Catholic. Because so many respondents felt the indirect method amounted to spying, they also believed it would have a negative effect on hiring. As one comment pointed out, the problem with indirect information is that it is often inaccurate. Others suspected this would create a very bad public image for University. Candidates who discovered the University “sneaking around” and asking about their personal life might be uncomfortable coming to the University. Several faculty expressed the opinion that it was unethical behavior. The overall impression was that this strategy may discourage candidates, including Catholic candidates, from ever considering Notre Dame.

Despite the general dislike of the strategy, there was a small pocket of support for a limited use of indirect information, already in the public domain and from reliable sources. For instance, it seems logical that when trying to determine whether a prospective candidate is Catholic to consider a blog called “Why I am a Catholic” as possible evidence.

## B. Best Practices for Recruiting Catholic Faculty

The report identifies “best practices” to be used in faculty recruitment, beginning with the foregrounding of Notre Dame’s Catholic identity in recruiting. The response to whether the University should be foregrounding its Catholic character in advertisements showed widely divergent perceptions of the impact of such foregrounding. Many of the respondents noted that Notre Dame’s identity as a Catholic University was not in question; the world beyond our boundaries knows who and what we are.

There is wide confusion about the current practice of foregrounding the Catholic identity of the University in job interviews and advertisements. Faculty have strong feelings that “everyone” in the University is already required to do this and equally strong beliefs that “no one” in the University does this. By a slim majority, those who expressed an opinion to the Senate were against foregrounding the University’s desire to hire Catholic scholars. The concerns about foregrounding were somewhat dependent on the college of the respondent. While it is a common practice, for instance, in the law school to openly seek Catholic hires, it was deemed as a disastrous procedure by most in the colleges of Science and Engineering. Those who oppose this practice, express a fear that Notre Dame will be perceived as a parochial institution, the academic equivalent of Brigham Young or Bob Jones University, and that the perception would create a belief that Notre Dame values religious affiliation over intellectual quality. The University, as a result, would lose standing in the academy and drive away both non-Catholics and outstanding Catholic scholars. Many of these respondents argued that Notre Dame should first focus on becoming an outstanding research university and, by doing so, attract the quality of Catholic faculty needed to meet the university’s ambition of becoming a major Catholic research university.

Overall, it seems that foregrounding must be done carefully and with consideration of the culture of the college, discipline, or situation of the hire. A striking example of this can be illustrated by the experience of a department hiring in the field of Irish history. While this department routinely does foreground its desire for Catholic hires, when placing ads for the position in Ireland, where announcing a preference for a particular religious affiliation has

caused political unrest and violence, such foregrounding carries a very different meaning. In this case, foregrounding was counterproductive to hiring Catholics and non-Catholics alike. A significant majority of the faculty who shared their opinions with us believe that foregrounding the University's Catholic character in advertising has and will increase Catholic hiring. In light of the varying effects of such foregrounding, however, the University must not adopt a one size fits all policy, but should be careful to look at each hire for the unique opportunities it presents.

Next, the report explores whether Notre Dame should emphasize academic fields that are critical to its Catholic identity and mission. As with other issues that focus on the University's mission, as opposed to "identity," there is widespread support for this concept.

Closely related to this is the concept of resource flexibility to promote the recruitment of outstanding Catholic faculty . While again generally supported by the faculty, this concept raises some concerns. The faculty is concerned that a disproportionate allocation of resources could create division and divisiveness in the University. Pockets of "elite" units who can easily incorporate Catholic ideas into their teaching could become more privileged than other units where such discussions do not naturally fit. In addition, it is feared that the fields deemed relevant to Catholicism may be narrowly defined by a small minority of faculty who will, therefore, be molding the nature and definition of the University's Catholic mission and identity. The mission of the University cannot become the exclusive domain of small pockets of disciplines or faculty members. This could compromise both the general academic mission and the specific Catholic mission of the University.

### C. Hiring Process and Investment in Infrastructure

The CROCF report proposes the creation of structures for encouraging and facilitating the hiring of Catholic faculty. In addition, it recognizes the need to make Notre Dame an attractive place for all employees, Catholic or otherwise. The faculty supports these proposals.

Many faculty suggested ways to make the University attractive to prospective faculty. Several areas of concern were mentioned with such frequency as to require us to recommend the following:

- 1) The University needs to expand its day care program to include quality infant care. (ECDC is only available for children 2 or older).
- 2) The University needs to make a more committed effort to spousal hiring.
- 3) The University needs to acknowledge that, while the financial cost of living in South Bend is low compared to other parts of the country, the **cost** of living in South Bend is high. The city does not offer the quality schools, cultural events, and other amenities offered by other locations from which we are trying to lure faculty. The culture of lower salaries that has developed in response to the low cost of living here has made it difficult to recruit and retain faculty. Salaries must be brought back up to standards that make them competitive in the now,

global hiring market.

Faculty were less enthusiastic about the creation of either an Office of Recruitment or an Institute of Advanced Studies. The Office of Recruitment seems to duplicate functions better done by colleges and departments. Another bureaucracy is not welcome. However, the idea was better received if its mission was also to increase hiring of women and minorities. Therefore, while the faculty generally feels the functions of the Office of Recruitment are better performed at the departmental level, if such an office is to be created its mission should be broadly defined to include not just the hiring of Catholics, but also minorities and women.

There is no real opposition to the formation of an Institute for Advanced Studies. Some faculty suggested it duplicates functions already assigned to other units, specifically the Erasmus Institute. While the focus of the proposed Institute had support, the faculty seemed to prefer that the function be folded into existing structures.

#### D. Ensuring a Healthy Supply of Outstanding Catholics in the Long Term

This section of the report proposes two major strategies to increase the pool of potential Catholic scholars: (1) establish outreach with other colleges and universities that educate Notre Dame faculty via Catholic chaplaincies, parishes, and local Alumni Associations and (2) encourage Notre Dame and other Catholic college undergraduates to pursue academic careers.

As with previous recommendations, the faculty largely supports this initiative with some clarifications. While faculty support the idea of establishing contacts with Universities that train our faculty, most do not believe that contacts with chaplaincies or parishes would accomplish this goal. Like the suggestion that the University could use indirect means to identify Catholic faculty, this is seen as an intrusion into potential candidates' personal lives. In addition, clergy are most often not in the best position to gauge a candidate's academic qualifications or commitment to the University's mission. Such inquiries could lead to the mistaken belief that Notre Dame cares more about religious practice than either mission or academic merit. This may drive away candidates of all faiths and, therefore, is not supported.

No one should be surprised that academics support encouraging students to become academics. All students who have the academic ability should be encouraged to pursue advanced degrees, not just Catholic students. While this is seen as a good practice, it does not translate into a means by which we can increase the hiring pool of Catholics because it is not the practice in most disciplines to hire ones own graduates.

### Conclusion

The Faculty Senate supports most of the strategies offered in the CROCF report to increase Catholic hiring at the University, with the clarifications and suggestions offered throughout this report. We strongly recommend against the use of indirect methods, including guessing, to identify Catholic faculty. All other strategies need to be employed carefully, with

specific attention to the culture of the department, field, and/or college. Strategies should be evaluated over time to be certain they are having a positive effect and are not diminishing the academic reputation of the University. It has been a long journey for Notre Dame from its origins to its current position as a well-regarded academic institution. No strategy should be implemented that would tarnish that reputation or impede the desire to become a premier, Catholic research university.