

Faculty Response To University's Initiative on Hiring Catholic Faculty

The 2007-2008 Faculty Senate of the University of Notre Dame

April 16th 2008

Discussion

The faculty of the University of Notre Dame is united around the unique aspiration of the University to enhance its Catholic character while moving into the first ranks of research institutions. The faculty recognizes that reaching these twin goals would be an unprecedented achievement, one that cannot occur without a careful balancing of priorities, resources, and incentives. To move ahead toward fulfilling this aspiration requires advancement in three areas: building world-class research units, furthering the interplay between Catholic teachings and academic research and pedagogy, and expanding the diversity of the faculty, staff, and students. We must forge ahead expeditiously on all three agendas if we wish to realize our goals within the rapidly changing landscape of world-renowned universities.

In order to speak for the entire faculty of the University of Notre Dame, the Faculty Senate has made the centerpiece of its 2007-2008 meetings a discussion of reaching these goals within the context of the administration's heightened effort to recruit Catholic faculty. To inform ourselves of faculty opinion, we have spoken with our individual departments and have created and administered an in-depth survey, completed by 500 of our colleagues. As a result of this extensive consultation, the Faculty Senate is confident that the faculty endorses the need for advancement in the three areas specified in the paragraph above. The Senate also learned that there is broad support for many of the mechanisms suggested by an earlier committee convened by the Provost to discover ways to enhance the recruitment of Catholic faculty. Less happily, the Senate also heard of widespread concern among the faculty that too narrow an emphasis upon Catholic hiring will seriously jeopardize our chances of achieving the other two goals: research excellence and diversity.

The contributions of the Catholic character of the University to its research and teaching agendas are manifold and salutary. The faculty as a whole voices support for the Catholic emphasis on ethics and social justice, and many faculty incorporate religion creatively into their research, teaching, and service. The number of Catholic faculty is a significant component, but not the primary determinant, of the Catholic character of the University.

Because faculty are on the front lines of hiring, they are sensitive to the ways the University is perceived by those outside it, especially prospective hires. The University's Catholic character can be a drawing card in recruiting prospective hires of the highest caliber. However, it can be an impediment if candidates (whether Catholic or not) infer that religious issues take precedence over academic excellence, imagine that they would feel unwelcome based on their own religious inclinations, or fear that academic freedom would be stifled.

There is widespread support among Notre Dame's faculty for the mission of the University and acknowledgement that a significant presence of Catholic intellectuals is essential to the maintenance of the Catholic identity. There is, however, concern over the goal of hiring greater than 50% Catholic faculty. Many disciplines deem the setting of

numerical targets to be dangerous. Several reasons are cited for this assessment: because of the small size of the Catholic pool in many disciplines, because setting numeric targets vitiates the attempt to enhance academic excellence, or because in some disciplines even inquiring about religious affiliation is considered unprofessional.

In addition, a significant number of faculty fear that an over-weighted emphasis upon Catholic faculty may cause unwanted biases in hiring and inequities in treatment of faculty during their entire careers at Notre Dame. Most alarmingly, a large number of faculty report being alienated by the Catholic hiring initiative: they feel that if they are not Catholic their contributions are valued less highly and that if they are Catholic their religion, rather than their achievement, is responsible for their hiring and advancement. Likewise, many worry that a “stained glass ceiling” impedes the ascension of non-Catholics into administration.

Faculty who remain at the University of Notre Dame do so because they are proud of the University’s mission and generally support the drive to enhance its research profile, its religious commitments, and its diversity. There is no reason why Notre Dame cannot become a great university while remaining a Catholic university. If Catholic identity is seen, though, to be the primary driving factor in the hiring process, then the University will fall back rather than advance further upon its goal of academic greatness and it may lose the services of many talented professors, both present and prospective. In response to these concerns, the Faculty Senate makes the following recommendations with regard to Catholic hiring:

Recommendations

- The University should not compromise its academic aspirations in its efforts to maintain its Catholic identity.
- In seeking strategies to maintain the University’s Catholic identity, the administration should not impose numerical targets for hiring Catholics. Numerical targets based on nominal religious identification may do little to advance the University’s goals and much to alienate faculty.
- The administration should observe the principle of subsidiarity, allowing the individual departments to use the best practices of their disciplines to find ways to maintain a significant Catholic presence among the faculty. Practices that are sensible in one discipline can be ineffective or counterproductive in another.
- The University should pursue its efforts to recruit Catholic faculty in a manner consistent with its commitment to racial, ethnic, gender, and religious diversity.
- The administration should provide a written statement to the faculty reaffirming its policy that religion plays no part in renewal, promotion, and tenure decisions.