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## Our University – Hiring Integrity

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## Our University – Hiring Integrity

Fourth in a series on integrity

In organizations where merit thrives, and in some universities this is still the case, few things are more important to long-term quality than hiring practices. Lax standards for finding and developing faculty, staff and leaders produce a quality deficit, a weak reputation, and a decline in the university's ability to pursue its research and academic mission.

Such egregious situations occur when positions are filled through a search process designed only to give the impression of openness, transparency, and shared governance.

Such charades undermine the perceived value of real searches and, more troubling, the importance of attracting excellent people. Fulfillment of Affirmative Action requirements or meeting the hiring ratios sought by the Human Resources department do not provide a legitimate foundation for a search. Searches should be carried out to find the best person for a job. Only after a deep pool of qualified applicants is determined can the incorporation of Affirmative Action and HR policy provide a true benefit to the University and minority communities.

When rules become a substitute for substance, search integrity is compromised.

A professional associate suggested that “patronage systems are not all bad if you have smart friends.” By smart he did not mean political acumen or an elevated IQ. Rather, he meant that if you are looking for a car salesman, find somebody who is smart about cars. If you are looking for provost, a chancellor, a president, find someone who knows about universities. If you are looking for a butcher, get a person who can positively identify a cow.

Even with smart acquaintances, flimsy friend-finding processes represent a treacherous step onto a slippery slope.

The number of times this simple idea is overlooked is dumbfounding. A look at leadership hiring is instructive.

Universities sometimes hire leadership without a serious assessment of abilities or qualifications. In a recent case at a prominent Texas university, no rational explanation works for that outcome that a \$300,000 per year executive was not who or what he said he was. I bet he was somebody's friend.

Twisted political pretense was at play and the price was a significant hit to the institution's reputation.

However, not everyone unfamiliar with universities should be excluded from service.

Exceptions prove the rule.

Former Senator David Boren serves as the President of the University of Oklahoma, and has since 1994. He was a leader as a senator, and is a leader as a university president. While opinions of his fitness and performance are numerous and varied, he was an excellent student at Yale, an effective governor and senator, and is currently an excellent teacher; according to reports he teaches a freshman class regularly, and the University has thrived under his guidance.

Dwight Eisenhower was president of Columbia from 1948 until 1952. This was his first civilian job since 1911 when he entered West Point. Given the charged intellectual environment at Columbia and its reflective quality, and the military perspective that shaped President Eisenhower, and its active quality, it was not always a comfortable fit. Yet no one could argue his leadership capabilities.

According to Michael D. Cohen in *Leadership and Ambiguity*, 90% of university presidents earn academic tenure before or while seeking administrative posts, and bring with them a record of professorial success. Hiring in universities must first and foremost be driven by qualifications, experience and proven performance. Our students and communities rely on us to bring together the resources needed to successfully educate them, and hiring must reflect their best interests.

Without integrity a university has little of value for anyone. The marketplace will rigorously and relentlessly prove this rule.