

Hiring and Talent Management

5 Trends Impacting Colleges



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- Better Onboarding
- Building Work-Life Balance
- A Culture of Coaching
- Multiple Mentors
- Professional Development for Faculty

Colleges spend significant amounts of time and money hiring new faculty members and administrators. So when these employees leave — or recruited candidates choose not to come at all — it means a loss of resources and knowledge for an institution. What's more, high turnover makes it difficult for a college to achieve its strategic, long-term goals.

On the other hand, satisfied employees who feel supported in their professional

and personal lives benefit a campus. When the majority of employees have positive experiences, institutions become known as good places to work.

Specific, targeted policies and programs, including some adopted from the corporate world, can help colleges attract the best employees and keep them. For institutions looking to stay competitive in hiring and retaining their professors and administrators, here are five trends gaining traction in higher education.

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Better Onboarding

Onboarding, the process of introducing new employees to their institution, is inconsistent across higher education. Some places give a brief orientation and leave employees to figure things out on their own, while others offer a longer and more thoughtful series of programs designed to ease a hire's transition.

There is a growing awareness of the benefits of onboarding. Creating a more thoughtful and thorough process for new faculty members or administrators can help these groups get up to speed quicker and give them a good first impression about their new institution and co-workers.

Colleges should spend as much time and attention helping new employees get settled as they do in courting them during recruitment, says November Prentiss, manager for faculty affairs in the University of Arizona's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Prentiss has developed an onboarding system in her college that includes a handbook with information and links to university and community resources; events at different points in time (for example, 30 days and 90 days after a new employee comes to campus) that help hires make connections across departments and schools; and "office hours" in the months between hiring and when the new employee arrives to answer questions or offer support needed to prepare for the job or relocation.

The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences measures its onboarding effectiveness by asking new hires to take a survey 30 days after they start. And the dean recognizes faculty members for going above and beyond to help a new colleague with a handwritten note.

Taking this onboarding approach universitywide — a proposal Prentiss is pitching at Arizona, including help for dual-career couples — could make a significant difference in faculty retention and perceptions of the university, she says. "Retention starts at recruitment," Prentiss notes.

Building Work-Life Balance

More colleges are recognizing that employees' personal lives have an effect on how well they can do their job, and are starting

support programs to help people during times of transition or challenge.

This can include services to help during a relocation (scouting housing options, for instance), and support for families caring for small children or elderly parents (such as funds to pay for care when a faculty member travels to a conference, or an option to stop the tenure clock for caregiving duties).

Dual-career support, where an institution helps a new employee's spouse find work (either in academe or outside of it), can help colleges stand out. This may be especially important if the institution is located in an area with limited employment options. Some universities have dedicated a staff position to this responsibility.

The University of California at Davis is using work-life benefits in its recruitment and retention goals, as well as to increase new employee productivity and loyalty. It offers a concierge-type service where someone will help new employees get situated by assisting with finding housing, schools, and other services they need. The university also has faculty work-life advisers — faculty members who have taken advantage of the university's policies on parental leave or child care — who can share their own experiences and give advice.

A Culture of Coaching

Another service that some colleges are offering their senior administrators is a coach who can assist them with the challenges of a high-pressure job.

Executive coaches can help college presidents and other top administrators with strategic thinking and making key decisions, as well as talking through the best ways to handle a crisis on campus, says Rob Kramer, a senior leadership consultant at the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Kramer, who also runs a leadership consulting business, says he has seen a large increase in people seeking out his coaching services.

Today's executive coaching is more proactive than in the past, Kramer says. Where once it was more common for presidents or other top administrators to get a coach if there was an identified problem to fix, now coaches are used from the beginning of an executive's

tenure, helping to work with strengths and weaknesses. He advises executives to negotiate for a coach as part of their hiring package.

The frequency of coaching sessions depends on the individual relationships, but can be every three to four weeks. During rougher times, say a campus emergency, the frequency can increase to every week.

Some colleges are trying to build a coaching culture for midlevel leaders, too, such as department chairs, Kramer says. That kind of coaching may come from in-house advisers. In contrast, coaching for top executives often comes from outside, so that presidents and other leaders can have an objective listener who is not an employee of the institution that executive runs.

Multiple Mentors

Another trend in helping employees do their job well is to match them with multiple mentors. This approach differs from the traditional mentor-mentee relationship in that a faculty member or administrator has more than one person who can answer questions about work and guide them to success.

This has several benefits. It offers a new employee a diverse range of expertise and experiences and also helps protect a new employee from missing out on knowledge and support if a one-one-one mentor match is not a good one.

Not all mentor pairings work out, says Allison M. Vaillancourt, vice president of business affairs and human resources at the University of Arizona. A team approach spreads out the demands and the responsibilities among mentors, so that one mentor does not feel solely responsible for the success or failure of a new employee.

This can take different forms at different

institutions. Some may offer a “launch committee,” peer mentors, or a group of mentors in-house; others may offer opportunities to connect with a coach or sponsor externally. For instance, a number of colleges are members of the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity, which runs a 12-week faculty-success program that includes small-group coaching.

Professional Development for Faculty

Another benefit that colleges are increasingly offering to their faculty members is structured professional-development opportunities. This helps with retention, but also with recruitment, as colleges can highlight these benefits in their offers.

Professional development can include on-campus workshops that demystify the tenure-and-promotion process or how to ascend to positions of leadership; writing groups that help faculty members set and meet publishing goals; and travel funds to attend conferences.

It can also include outside support, such as access to the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity, or funds to work with leaders in a particular discipline. For example, West Virginia University offers money to help faculty members in STEM who are from underrepresented groups connect with professors at other institutions to collaborate on a project and help expand their network.

Robust professional-development programs consider faculty members at all levels, not just junior faculty working toward tenure. This includes tailoring programs to tenured faculty who may be feeling stale in their work and looking for new challenges. Examples of this approach are midcareer grants or awards and leadership programs for faculty members or administrators looking to move into a job with more responsibilities.

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