

# WINTHROP MODELS DIVERSITY EFFORTS FOR A SOUTHERN PUBLIC INSTITUTION

By Daniel F. Mahony

I believe organizations and their leaders have the best chance of creating lasting success when surrounded by those with diverse experiences and perspectives. Otherwise, they will be more likely to make mistakes due to the limitations that arise from receiving advice only from those with similar backgrounds.

As a college dean and now regional university president in South Carolina, I have made it a priority to focus on recruiting diverse faculty and administrators because of the immense value they bring to the campus. Exposing our students to a wide range of faculty and staff mentors will better prepare them for life after college. Learning to live and work with people of various cultures is critical for today's college students, and we have made that expectation an important part of the Winthrop experience.

With that in mind, Winthrop's strategic plan includes increasing the hiring of people of color in professional and managerial-level positions. Members of our Board of Trustees also support infusing diversity and inclusion efforts into every aspect of campus life.

A human resources administrator became our first chief diversity officer in 2016. She works with academic leaders on recruitment plans for all faculty/staff searches to attract more diverse candidates. In addition, she has provided implicit bias training for all executive-level search committees and for those who make tenure and promotion decisions. She has spearheaded finding diversity advocates for faculty searches and co-chairs the university's 18-member Diversity Council. Her co-chair on the Diversity Council is a student affairs leader. While this staff member's work focuses primarily on the student experience, the position is critical in creating a campus environment that is inclusive and supportive. That, in turn, makes Winthrop an even more appealing option for diverse candidates.

Recruiting diverse candidate pools is a top institutional priority. While this is largely driven by the work of our search committees and their increased outreach to potential candidates, recruitment is an area in

which I am also directly involved. For example, I have made it a priority to attend the annual Compact for Faculty Diversity Institute on Teaching and Mentoring Conference, which is sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board. It is the largest gathering in the country of minority Ph.D. candidates. I think it is important as president to attend this event to demonstrate my commitment, even though I am the only president to do so over the last four years. Speaking from experience, this personal commitment has paid off many times. I also have been more actively involved in senior-level searches to ensure we do not eliminate strong candidates before they reach the finalist stage.

We are already making progress. Winthrop has continually improved its achieved percentage of affirmative action hiring goals for women and minorities, as monitored by the state of South Carolina. Hires over the past two years include key professional positions such as the university's first African-American vice president, a department chair, executive director of sponsored programs and research, director of technology services, head women's basketball coach, associate athletic director for internal operations, and many more. Overall, the percentage of our faculty and managerial staff who are minorities increased from 14 to 18 percent in two years, reaching the stretch target goal in our strategic plan. Because only a limited number of positions are open each year, our hiring percentage has well exceeded this 18 percent target.

Winthrop prides itself on being an institution of choice for groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education and aims to become a national model for inclusive excellence. We take this goal seriously, and we are seeing positive results. **P**

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*Daniel F. Mahony became Winthrop University's 11<sup>th</sup> president on July 1, 2015.*

