# Recruiting Professionals into Careers in Post-Secondary Academic Faculty Positions

Susan Dana, JD
Black Hills State University

Carrie Stringham, DM
Purdue University Global

Susan Pettine, PhD
Purdue University Global

## ABSTRACT

Academia, in its quest to attract and hire qualified faculty, can capitalize on recent trends as reflected in career trajectories. One such trend includes practicing professionals, who make the decision to engage in a career pivot from industry into academia. Two recent shifts in academia highlight the importance of attracting practicing professionals into higher education: faculty shortages and the demand for more experiential learning in programs. To understand why practicing professionals might engage in a career pivot from industry into academia, research was conducted through a survey with recruitment for respondents taking place within a leading online university, an on-ground state university, a community college, and a LinkedIn group focused on education. By concentrating on the reasons why professionals pivot into academia, institutions of higher education can restructure their recruitment strategies to more effectively target professionals to create a bigger source pool that should lead to a more successful search and, ultimately, filling the faculty position.

Keywords: faculty recruitment, career paths, experiential learning

Career paths for professionals traditionally exhibit linear paths, with the practitioner staying in the lane of the industry or profession.  Still, some individuals may shift into an unexpected or varied path. One such example of this is when a professional transitions from practice into academia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Academia, in its quest to attract and hire qualified faculty, can capitalize on recent trends as reflected in career trajectories. One such trend includes practicing professionals, who make the decision to engage in a career pivot from industry into academia. Two recent shifts in academia highlight the importance of attracting practicing professionals into higher education: faculty shortages and the demand for more experiential learning in programs.

### Faculty Shortages

A dearth of faculty exists in many different academic areas. Nursing is a prime example where the lack of a sufficient number of faculty has been a major issue and is expected to increase (White and Maguire, 2021). This deficit has directly impacted the supply of nursing personnel in the healthcare field because, in some instances, qualified applicants to nursing programs were not accepted even though the programs had the infrastructure capacity for admitting the prospective students. The institution lacked the necessary nursing faculty (Kersey, 2012).

Another academic area where faculty insufficiencies are prevalent is business, with significant issues in the discipline of accounting (Kerler et al, 2022). The problem in accounting can, in part, be attributed due to the recent modifications to the accounting rules that require additional oversight and accountability, by accountants (Hunt & Jones, 2015). The demand for accountants has increased due to the need for rule compliance industry wide (Swartz et.al, 2007).

This increase in demand for accountants has not been effectively responded to by business programs. One explanation is the lack of qualified accounting faculty which can, in part, be attributed to the high standards for faculty qualifications as set by the accrediting body, Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business (AACSB) (Sheikh & Schneider, 2012).   Another factor is the salary disparity between those accountants who are currently working in the profession and those who are in academia, since the salaries for accounting faculty positions are simply not competitive with the profession (Swartz et.al, 2007).

There has been an increase in demand for more education in the area of forensic accounting. Grima et al. (2020) note that globalization has led to an increase in financial fraud and corruption. As such, the need for more student trained in forensic accounting is growing. Therefore, more accounting professionals will be needed to make the transition from their current careers into post-secondary academic faculty positions.

### Demand for Experiential Learning

Institutions of higher education are also faced with the challenge of meeting the demand for the infusion of experiential learning in the curriculum. Students recognize that certain skills and experiences gained from this additional component in their education could give them a

competitive advantage in the job market (Atkins, 2020). For example, students, described as Generation Z, value education and want to graduate with a certain skill set (Atkins, 2020).

The infusion of experiential learning into the curriculum, although in demand by potential employers and students, could prove difficult to execute with the existing faculty.  Some faculty are not particularly well suited to provide this type of learning, due in part, to their focus on research rather than practice skills. Some faculty are simply detached from practice (Finch et.al, 2015, p. 703).  As one observer noted about this gap in business, "...managers and scholars (are) speaking two different languages" (Finch et.al, 2015, p. 703).   Those practitioners who are transitioning into academia should possess the knowledge, skills, and experiences that are necessary for experiential learning to be successfully infused into business curricula (Swartz et.al, 2007). Such practitioners could contribute to the modification and enhancement of the quality of these programs.

## POSSIBLE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Institutions of higher education could certainly benefit from practitioners transitioning into academia by filling faculty positions where shortages exist and enhancing the infusion of experiential learning into curriculum. Considering these benefits, institutions of higher education should focus on generating new and innovative strategies for the recruitment of such professionals. In developing such strategies, institutions should incorporate the factors that might attract the practitioner away from industry and into academia.  A carefully crafted recruitment strategy could incorporate and highlight the benefits that a faculty position could provide. Such a strategy could effectively make a faculty position attractive to professionals and prompt a pivot in career trajectories.

Traditional recruitment methodologies for faculty are varied.  However, researchers have summarized a 13-step model which is the amalgamation of processes at several universities (Ahmady et.al, 2016). Although conventional methods can be effective, it is suggested to consider new approaches, and not "just replicate what other institutions do" (Baldo et.al, 2011, p. 85). For example, early in the recruitment process and after the position has been identified, the qualifications for the position must be defined.  To ensure that professionals are not excluded, researchers have suggested broadening the search criteria (Testy, 2011). Perhaps the inclusion of certain skills, knowledge, and experiences could be included so as to pique the interest of practitioners (Baldo et.al, 2011). Another expansion could be in the definition of qualifications (Wagner, 2020). For example, the institution could broaden the criteria for excellence in research by recognizing additional qualifying publishing output such as in trade or professional publications (Testy, 2011). It is also suggested to make the search as broad as possible.  For example, when searching for an entrepreneurship position, do not limit those who qualify to a specific educational degree (Sekaquaptewa & Takahashi, 2019). Broaden the required discipline to include general management as opposed to a narrower specialty of entrepreneurship (Finkle, 2001). Another example in business is to consider hiring individuals who have earned doctorates in education in a business discipline when filling the faculty position (Swartz et.al, 2007).

Once the position has been identified and a description has been crafted, it must be disseminated to solicit interest in the position.  The placement of such a description has historically been posted in publications such as the Chronicle of Higher Education. Although proven effective at reaching traditional academics; in order to reach the practitioner, a more diverse approach is needed. The dissemination of the posting should be expanded to include

placement in unconventional publications, such as trade journals, and certain industry websites.  Other strategies may include exploratory conversations with practitioners in the field (Cavanaugh & Green, 2020) since any means of networking and outreach in the industry may produce results (Sekaquaptewa & Takahashi, 2019, p. 192). The use of a business advisory council may be a source of such ongoing conversations and may serve as a source for faculty hires.

The foregoing suggestions included ideas on a micro level.  In order to sufficiently prepare for the future, institutions of higher education should engage in a seismic shift in the recruitment process.  This macro approach could start with creating a task force, the membership of which would be very diverse (Wagner 2017). The task force could include human resource and marketing faculty (Swartz et.al, 2007). These faculty would have specialized knowledge and could assist in generating ideas for recruitment. The task force could also include other faculty within the discipline, students, and practitioners from the industry.  By including input from these various vantage points, a new and innovative approach to recruitment can be developed to target practitioners.  Ideally, a pipeline could be created with names of potential faculty hires (Wagner, 2017).  Such a pipeline would also reflect the importance of developing a continuous effort for recruitment purposes. To illustrate, MBA programs could identify excellent students who could be groomed and trained for teaching opportunities (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010). The pipeline could also include the names of community members within a particular profession, who have been guest speakers in classrooms or have otherwise been involved on campus.

A study by Daly (2021) showed that accounting students were not well informed regarding a potential academic career. The study found that student interest in entering an academic career upon graduation was positively associated with an increased understanding with regard to the importance of performing research in this field. Therefore, more targeted communication towards students can be useful here.

**THE RESEARCH DATA**

In order to attract and recruit practicing professionals into higher education, data previously gathered by three of the authors of this article was revisited. The data was originally collected to explore career shifts of professionals that transitioned into careers in academic organizations who previously worked in non-academic organizations (Knapp et.al, 2022). A survey was conducted with recruitment for survey respondents taking place within a leading online university, an on-ground state university, a community college, and a LinkedIn group focused on education.

There were 336 individuals who responded to the survey. The survey respondents' genders broke down to 57.40% female and 42.60% male, while .6 respondents did not answer.  Respondents' age groups were .59% in the 20-29 age group, 10.00% in the 30-39 age group, 29.71% in the 40-49 age group, 39.71% in the 50-59 age group, 18.82% in the 60-69 age group, and 1.18% in the 70-79 age group.  From a generational perspective, the following ranges were used to describe the different generational groups the survey respondents divided into.  Baby Boomers (1946-1964) were 33.14% of the respondents.  Generation X members (1965-1980) were 56.21%. Millennials (1981-1996) were 10.65%.  Therefore, the largest survey respondent representation was in Generation X.  The survey respondents' ethnicity categories were 78.53% White, 7.35% Black, 1.47% Asian American, .29% Native

American, 3.23% Hispanic, 1.47% Biracial, 1.76% Preferred not to answer, and 2.65% selected Other. Additionally, 3.24% skipped this question (Knapp et.al, 2022, p. 11).

To better understand what prompted practicing professionals to make a shift into academia, those surveyed were asked, "If yes, did this have an external (job-related) or internal (personal reasons such as seeking more money or moving to a new city) prompt?". The responses showed that 40.97% of the respondents experienced an External (job-related) prompt and 59.03% of the respondents experienced an Internal (personal reason) prompt (Knapp et.al, 2022).

The breakdown of the respondents' external prompt reasons is indicated in Table 1 (Appendix). The responses do not total 100% because many respondents selected multiple prompts. "For those who indicated that they responded to internal prompts, some responses indicated multiple internal prompts for a single responder. When multiple responses were listed, an attempt was made to determine the most influential prompt based on the written response" (Knapp et.al, 2022, p. 13). The breakdown of the respondents' Internal Prompt reasons is indicated in Table 2 (Appendix).

**DISCUSSION OF DATA**

More of those surveyed experienced an internal prompt. The top two external prompts were a desire to pursue higher education and teach and a desire to give back. Those two prompts accounted for 84.39% of the responses. The top two internal prompts were a desire to teach and/or a passion for teaching, and flexibility and schedule. Those two prompts accounted for 52.80% of the responses. The top external and top internal prompts were remarkably similar. Both prompts focused on a desire to teach.

Both external and internal prompts provide higher education institutions with information about how they might best recruit practicing professionals. An emphasis on opportunities to give back would appeal to one of the top external prompts identified in the research. While it may prove to be more challenging to address other external prompts, conversations with candidates might provide recruiters with opportunities to address other external prompts.

Internal prompts may be more easily addressed. Work in academia, especially in faculty positions, tends to result in a much higher degree of flexibility when compared to traditional practicing professional workplaces. Recruiting campaigns could focus on increased flexibility and less schedule rigidity. A focus on more meaningful work might include student testimonies about their positive experiences with faculty and student success stories that can be tied to classroom and advising experiences.

For both external and internal prompts, recruiters can focus on the work itself and the opportunity to teach. These were popular reasons why those surveyed made the shift. Recruiters can also explain the increased emphasis on experiential learning, linking this emphasis directly to what the practicing professionals can bring to the classroom.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

A survey or focus group could build on this research and might include targeted questions about the recruitment process. A better understanding of how the practicing professional became aware of positions in academia and their experiences during the recruiting process could provide

higher education recruiters with valuable information. It may be useful to focus on one event or factor that caused practicing professionals to make a decision to finally move into academia.

As Baby Boomers continue to enter into retirement, there may be a shortage of experienced career professional available in the workforce; however, these Baby Boomers could be quite useful to target for a transition into teaching (Stanley, 2022. Therefore, being able to connect with targeted professional societies in areas where teaching needs may be great, such as accounting as previously noted, could prove beneficial. Being able to work within that professional society to administer surveys to gauge interest would be useful. Having a strong recruitment plan in place can be key to being able to tap into retiring Baby Boomers and their expertise (Pettine, 2007).

The career shifts of professionals into academia can be advantageous to both the practitioner and the institution of higher education. By concentrating on the reasons why professionals pivot into academia, institutions of higher education can restructure their recruitment strategies to more effectively target professionals to create a bigger source pool that should lead to a more successful search and, ultimately, filling the faculty position.

## REFERENCES

Ahmady, S., Tatari, F., Yazdani, S., & Hosseini, S. (2016). Human Resources Management Models for recruitment of faculty members: A critical review. *Biosciences, Biotechnology Research Asia*, *13*(1), 417–428. https://doi.org/10.13005/bbra/2049

Atkins, T. (2020). #fortheculture: Generation Z and the future of Legal Education. SSRN Electronic Journal. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3757200

Baldo, C. M., Wareham, J. D., & Richard Vail. (2020). Accredititis: More than 10 years of overzealous hiring practices for business faculty based on AACSB accreditation. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, *20*(14). https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v20i14.3852

Bilimoria, D., & Buch, K. K. (2010). The search is on: Engendering faculty diversity through more effective search and recruitment. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, *42*(4), 27–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2010.489022

Cavanaugh, C., & Green, K. (2020). Training Faculty Search Committees to improve racial and ethnic diversity in hiring. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, *72*(4), 263–274. https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000167

Daly, A. (2021). The accounting faculty shortage: Understanding masters of accounting students' interest in pursuing careers as accounting professors. *Journal of Education for Business, 96*(3), 167-175.

Finch, D., Deephouse, D. L., O'Reilly, N., Massie, T., & Hillenbrand, C. (2015). Follow the leaders? an analysis of convergence and innovation of faculty recruiting practices in US business schools. *Higher Education*, *71*(5), 699–717. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9931-5

Finkle, T. A., & Deeds, D. (2001). Trends in the market for Entrepreneurship Faculty. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *16*(6), 613–630.

Hunt, S. & Jones, K. (2015). Recruitment and Selection of Accounting Faculty in a Difficult Market, *Global Perspectives on Accounting Education* 12, 23-51

Kerler, W., Allport, C., Brandon, D., Parlier, J. (2022). From Practitioner to Professor. The CPA Journal, September/October 2022, https://www.cpajournal.com/2022/12/07/frompractitioner-to-professor-2/

Kersey, P. (2012). From the hospital room to the classroom: Recruiting and supporting new nursing faculty. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, *12*(2).

Pettine, S.B. (2007). *The relationship of leadership styles and recognition of retiring Boomers as potential volunteers: A study of nonprofit administrators* (Publication No. 3242152) [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Schneider, G.P., & Sheikh, A. (2012). Addressing the Shortage of Accounting Faculty: Using Non-Tenure-Track Positions. *The Academy of Educational Leadership Journal, 16(1)*, 2-3.

Sekaquaptewa, D., Takahashi, K., Malley, J., Herzog, K., & Bliss, S. (2019). An evidence-based faculty recruitment workshop influences Departmental Hiring Practice Perceptions among university faculty. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, *38*(2), 188–210. https://doi.org/10.1108/edi-11-2018-0215

Stanley, T.L. (2022). Baby Boomers: Why these employees matter. *Supervision, 83*(2), 6-8.

Swartz, J. E., Swartz, T. A., & Liang, P. (2007). Market meltdown: Recruiting qualified business faculty. *Journal of Education for Business*, *82*(6), 337–342. https://doi.org/10.3200/joeb.82.6.337-342

Testy, K. Y. (2011). Best Practices for Hiring and Retaining a Diverse Law Faculty. Iowa Law Review, 96(5), 1707–1718.

Wagner, C. Z. (2020). In Search of Best Practices on Gender Equity for University Faculty: An Update. *Villanova Law Review*, *65*(5), 1187–1206.

Wagner, C. Z. (2017). Change from within: Using task forces and best practices to achieve Gender equity for university faculty. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2955249

White, A., & Maguire, M. B. (2021). Using backward course design to create the next generation of nurse educator leaders. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, *52*(12), 554–557. https://doi.org/10.3928/00220124-20211108-06
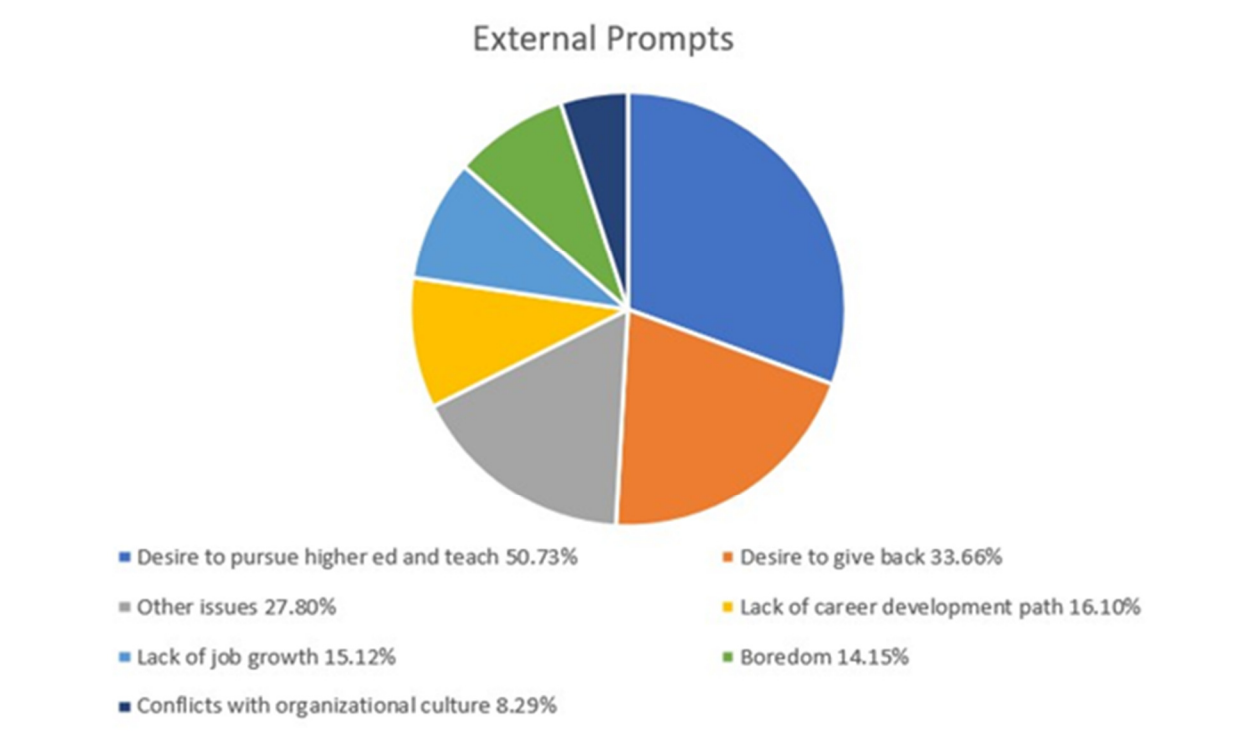
**APPENDIX**

**Table 1**



**Table 2**