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Tara L. Harl

Jeffrey A. Johnson

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FORUM

**RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION CHALLENGES FOR AVIATION FACULTY
IN U.S. UNIVERSITIES**

Tara L. Harl and Jeffrey A. Johnson

Unlike traditional academic disciplines that have existed since the inception of the modern university, collegiate aviation has encountered distinctive challenges that are inherently unique. One significant challenge for university aviation search committees is to hire potential faculty member candidates that have a combination of advanced academic credentials (i.e., the doctorate) in addition to a strong aviation related employment history. Several formidable barriers present challenges in attracting candidates with industry experience into university aviation programs. For example, individuals currently employed in the aviation industry do not typically have a doctorate. Mid to high level aviation managers or professional pilots may be accustomed to making an income that can easily approach or even exceed \$100,000 in the industry whereas university aviation faculty positions typically do not offer competitive salaries that effectively attract industry professionals as viable candidates. Furthermore, a master's degree educated aviation industry professional who would otherwise consider a career change to university aviation may not be particularly thrilled with the expectation to engage in research and obtain a doctoral degree for promotion and tenure considerations that ultimately leads to long term employment.

Unfortunately, significant barriers to recruitment for university aviation search committees represent a fraction of the overall problem. For example, promotional challenges for experienced aviation industry professionals employed in university settings can be equally daunting. Rodney Rogers (see the Spring 2003 edition of the JAAER) argued that alternative paradigms need to be considered for collegiate flight programs such as a promotional track that would allow faculty members the option to exclusively engage in teaching and service instead of a traditional research track. Regrettably, non-aviation educated administrators such as deans, provosts, and chancellors often do not recognize that a university aviation faculty member's professional experience from the aviation industry is often more important than engaging in research for a vast majority of undergraduate aviation programs. The traditional "publish or perish" model at many universities has the uncanny ability to deter long term employment for prospective aviation faculty members who do not have a research interest. Conversely, these are often the same individuals who have strong industry experiences and are well connected in developing new industry internships and employment opportunities for aviation students. It should be noted that Rogers' perspective was uniquely written from the flight program side and indicated that a large contingent of faculty members at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical

University is ex-military pilots. With the exception of briefly mentioning air traffic control, Rogers did not address faculty issues involved with non-flight aviation programs such as airline, corporate or airport management. Recruiting university faculty members with these types of industry experiences who have a doctorate (or are willing to obtain it) and a research interest is seemingly far more difficult than hiring aviation flight faculty.

Globalization and rapidly changing technologies in the aviation industry place significant demands for collegiate programs to realistically prepare students for the workplace beyond the mastery of technical competencies. Historically, many collegiate aviation programs have used a strong contingent of faculty members who are military retirees (Embry-Riddle) while their civilian counterparts with expertise in ATC, airline, manufacturing, general aviation operations, and business aviation have been virtually non-existent by comparison. How can collegiate aviation market itself as producing viable workers for the future without a strong contingent of faculty members who also have a civilian industry background when a majority of aviation graduates are planning on entering the civilian aviation sector? Traditional academic programs require doctorates although the aviation industry (beyond engineering or design) typically does not recognize the doctorate as viable to management and leadership success.

Recruitment and Promotion Challenges

When current managers were queried as to what requirements are needed for upper management positions, a doctorate is rarely ever mentioned whereas the master's degree has become much more recognized as a requirement. Important upper management attributes include civilian industry experience, communication skills, team skills, knowledge of aviation business finance, networking skills, membership in professional aviation organizations such as AAAE, NBAA, PAMA, and current knowledge of issues facing industry.

University aviation programs will more than likely encounter difficulty in attracting candidates with a doctorate

as current faculty members continue to retire. It would appear that relatively low starting salaries combined with the requirement of high academic credentials (the doctorate) in many institutions will continue to present itself as a formidable barrier for prospective industry candidates that would otherwise make outstanding faculty members. Indeed, recruitment and promotional challenges for aviation faculty continues to be a two-pronged problem that will surely provide significant challenges well into the 21st century. →

Tara L. Harl is an assistant professor in the Department of Aviation at St. Cloud State University. She has a B.S. in Aviation from the University of Dubuque, a M.Ed. in Aerospace Education from Middle Tennessee State University, and is completing her doctoral dissertation at St. Mary's University of Minnesota. She is a member of the NBAA Corporate Aviation Management Committee and a contributing member of the Minnesota Business Aviation Association (MBAA).

Jeffrey A. Johnson is an assistant professor in the Department of Aviation at St. Cloud State University. He has a B.S. in Aeronautical Studies from the University of North Dakota, a Master of Aeronautical Science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Daytona Beach), and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from Bowling Green State University. He previously served as interim chair of the Department of Aviation at St. Cloud State University and is a member of NBAA and MBAA.