Faculty Hiring Model:
How to Prioritize and Allocate Faculty Positions Among Academic Units?

Junjie Wu
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
North Carolina State University

FSLI Leadership Project Summary

Overview
The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) at North Carolina State University is currently reviewing its faculty hiring model. Key design issues with the current model are how to define, prioritize, and allocate new positions among academic units. The primary objective of this project is to examine the strengths and weaknesses of alternative faculty hiring models used in different colleges and universities and propose a new model for the college. This project will directly inform the design of the new faculty hiring model in my college, as well as in colleges or universities that might be considering changing their faculty hiring models in the future.
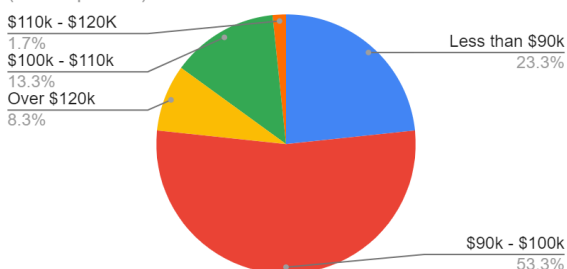
Methodology
This project starts with a survey aimed at learning from the practices and experiences of other institutions. The survey begins by describing the architecture of my college's faculty hiring model and asks a respondent to describe their institution's model. It then asks respondents to share their perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the hiring models at their institutions and NC State. The survey concludes by asking respondents to sketch the characteristics of an ideal hiring model, and whether they are aware of a college or university that has adopted such a model.

Key Survey Results
Starting salaries and startup packages are key information for designing a successful faculty hiring model. Based on the 61 survey responses, the most common starting salary for a new faculty member in an agriculture and life sciences college is between $90,000 and $100,000, with a small percentage (8.3%) of starting salaries above $120,000. Responses for typical startup packages for new faculty members varied more widely, with the most common answer being over $400,000 and the least common being between $200,000 and $250,000.
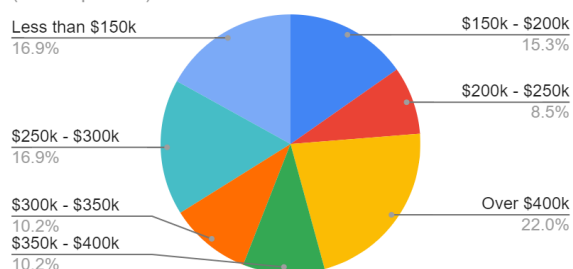

The majority of respondents said lost faculty lines were returned to and controlled by their college. The main strengths of this type of faculty hiring models include the flexibility to quickly reallocate resources based on strategic plans and priorities, input from various sources leading to equitable decisions, and the potential for positive change initiated by deans. These models can incentivize growth, prioritize new

initiatives and foster communication between departments and the college. Weaknesses identified include lack of transparency in decision-making, unpredictability leading to uncertainty and declining rates of position refills. Additionally, challenges such as slow processes, shrinking departments, and morale issues among faculty highlight areas for improvement in this model.

In your college, who retains control over a lost position?

- 🔵 At the Assistant Level, the Dept does. Above that the college.
- 🔴 Department retains 2/3 of position, 1/3 reverts to college
- 🟡 It varies
- 🟢 Most positions are controlled by our AES with some input from CES and College (teaching)
- 🟠 Mostly the department, but with approval from the college
- 🟢 Our division (college is only the academic side, we also have Extension and Research)
- 🔵 The college
- 🔴 The department
- 🟡 The university

The level of control varies across the faculty hiring models in which the college controls lost positions. At one end, positions are typically replaced on a 1:1 basis, although this isn't guaranteed and circumstances and budget constraints may lead to cutbacks. At the other end, every hire is treated as a new request, regardless of whether this is a previously existing position that a faculty member has vacated. In the middle, departments set strategic priorities and positions are requested and granted by the college based on these priorities, with varying degrees of guarantee. The strengths and weaknesses of alternative college-controlled models are summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Strengths and Weaknesses of Alternative College-Controlled Hiring Models

Hiring Model	Strengths	Weaknesses
1-for-1 Model (Budget allowing)	Able to keep positions Equitable Efficient Quality hires No uncertainty	Lack of funding for startup Lacks strategic consideration Hiring could be ceased due to budget constraints
NCSU CALS Model (2-for-1 Model)	Predictability Transparency Addresses specific needs Mitigates budget shortfalls Balance between departmental autonomy & college needs Structured	Departmental shrinkage Critical vacancies Rigid model Conflict between departments & administration Resource allocation uncertainty Decreased program quality
Strategic Priority Model	Keep positions central to main priorities Departments evaluate priorities Flexibility Input from many sources	Lack of transparency Have to make a case Unpredictable/Timing unclear Rate of refill declining

The second most used faculty hiring model is the university-controlled faculty hiring model. This type of models offers strengths such as promoting for strategic thinking about departmental needs and keeping

positions central to main priorities. Weaknesses include lengthy processes leading to gaps and a top-down approach that may neglect the benefits of research and extension. These models can also prioritize exciting positions over critical core needs while hindering departments' planning and resource reallocation due to unpredictable outcomes and limited control over salary lines.

Key Characteristics of a Successful Hiring Model
Our analysis of survey results reveal that a successful faculty hiring model must have the following key characteristics: transparency, flexibility, predictability, balanced decision-making, strategic vision, financial sustainability, and rewarding excellence. These features ensure responsiveness to changing needs, fairness in resource distribution and alignment with institutional goals. While no single model may be perfect for all institutions, incorporating these elements could guide the development of effective faculty hiring strategies.

Based on the survey results and input from many other sources, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at NC State has developed a new faculty firing model. We believe this new model avoids some of the key issues associated with the old model while building in the key desirable characteristics of a successful faculty hiring model identified in the survey. In particular, the new model is fundamentally department-driven and reflects the shared values of the Department Heads and the Dean and Directors. The process is transparent, strategic, and based on a dynamic, structured, collaborative decision-making process. We believe the new faculty hiring model will significantly enhance the faculty and propel the growth trajectory and long-term success of the college.