



DENTAL FACULTY RECRUITMENT AT LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the dental faculty shortage as reported by the American Dental Association in its publication *The Future of Dentistry* and the *Journal of Dental Education* report on the demand nationally for dental school faculty. Budgeted full-time faculty vacancies in U.S. dental schools stand between 300 and 400 with present and anticipated state and federal shortfalls forecasting even further cuts or at least lack of government support. Acknowledging various reasons for, and responses to, the shortage, the School of Dentistry at Loma Linda University is seeking to deal creatively with a faculty shortage. A survey of newly hired full-time faculty indicates the issues that concern them and their colleagues. Loma Linda University School of Dentistry's response to the shortage includes a routine invitation to students, particularly seniors and residents, to consider teaching at the school. In addition, a simple alumni recruitment form is used for personal relationship building with alumni. A student loan reimbursement program for new faculty is a successful program in recruiting new, young full-time faculty. To provide for the long-term future of the research function of the school, a new program focusing on hiring doctoral (PhD)-prepared individuals who will be trained in the predoctoral DDS program at the expense of the school is in place. This article suggests further steps that can be taken to enhance the cause and reputation of the school's educational program.

The signs of growing faculty shortage in U.S. dental schools and, in fact, for the world, have been highlighted both in the first Global Congress on Dental Education at Prague in 2001 and in two national studies published by the *Journal of Dental Education* in 2002 and 2004.^{1,2} The latter study reported that whereas no adverse effects have been identified by the perceived shortage, "foresight and planning and necessary steps need to continue" to ensure the preparation and continuity of a quality dental faculty work force. A significant factor in this study was the finding arising from a new question added to the ADEA survey of faculty educators: 51 percent of the new faculty came from private practice to fill full-time or part-time positions in a ratio similar to that which had been maintained with departing faculty members. These results are based on a survey of 52 responding dental schools reporting a total of 296 vacant budgeted positions in 2002-2003 — 270 full-time



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and 26 part-time positions. Budgeted positions remain a tricky concept to define because of varying interpretations of the term. A Loma Linda University Dental School administrator said, "Sure, we need more faculty. No, we don't have budgeted vacancies because of funding limitations."

A growing concern on the Loma Linda campus is the aging of full-time dental faculty and the difficulty of securing qualified replacements for those who retire or who have reached retirement age. Faculty recruits for specialty graduate programs are especially sparse. Reporting its national survey of all-American dental schools in *Future of Dentistry*, the Health Policy Resource Center of the ADA emphasized the facts of a growing shortage of qualified dental school faculty. This study reported figures close to those reported in the 2002 study; it identified 300 to 400 budgeted full-time faculty vacancies and a shortfall in clinical faculty totaling 244.³

Major Factor in Faculty Shortage

The primary reason for shortage, according to the *Future of Dentistry* study, "appears to be related to the significant disparity in income available" in faculty appointments with that achieved through the private dental practice. In the past, dental school retention efforts focused on the school's holding its faculty against competition from other dental schools. All of the recent studies (2002-2004) portray today's faculty retention issues relating to more financially attractive opportunities in the private sector.^{1,2,4} It would seem to follow, then, that if salaries were enhanced in dental schools, the faculty shortage would go away. Maybe.

Issues Contributing to the Shortage of Full-time Faculty

Over the past decade, the gap between private practice and den-

tal faculty income has perceptibly increased. The numbers are revealing. Annual salaries of clinical faculty holding the academic rank of assistant professor and above have risen an average of 25 percent to 30 percent during the past decade. During the same time, the average net income of solo private practitioners has increased 78 percent.^{1,2}

Student debt continues to increase and is a major factor affecting decisions regarding both choice of location and postdoctoral work opportunities.

Dental faculty retirements are accelerating, and dental schools expect higher levels of scholarship with the obvious

demand for ever-better educated and trained faculty.

Combined with these patterns is another different situation for the nation and all of the states.

Budget cuts from city, state, and federal sources have been and will continue to adversely affect dental school operations as part of the educational enterprise. In a 2003 survey of state financing of dental education, the conclusion was reached that "a significant number of state and state-related dental schools receive so little state support that they function as private schools, operationally."⁴ Dental schools are expected to meet the academic expectations of the parent university while at the same time caring for the clinical needs of the service area, which is ever widening to include teaching and service — in many cases, on another continent. The faculty need is a global issue, which the 2001 Global Congress on Dental Education highlighted.

Possible Solutions for the Full-time Faculty Shortage

The ADA's *Future of Dentistry* offers several suggestions for alleviating the challenge of faculty recruitment. For example:

- Add to the school's already overloaded curriculum, with tracks for training dental practitioners to be faculty,
- Develop a debt forgiveness program for graduates who return to faculty positions (many schools are doing this now),
- Beseech the federal government to allocate more funds to underwrite research, specialty training, and teaching scholarships and fellowships, and
- Test "alternate, less faculty-

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dependent models for educating dental students."³

Faculty Recruitment/Retention Efforts at LLUSD

At Loma Linda University Dental School, it was decided to examine faculty recruitment over time.

Funding Advanced Education

The primary faculty recruitment strategy began with an invitation to alumni and other dentists to teach at the school and to offer the possibility of graduate education as a bonus. This strategy seemed to work relatively well until the 1990s, when the school, like all other dental schools, became acutely aware of the difficulty of attracting qualified faculty. Although providing graduate education had proved to be a major asset in faculty recruitment, it was clear something more was needed.

Recruitment Strategies

As the concept of recruiting new, younger faculty became a matter of discussion in the faculty and among the students, it became apparent that most of the faculty recruitment had been informal, following no predictable pattern.

Word-of-Mouth Recruitment

Recruitment had depended on who knew who, largely limited within specialties, and was a word-of-mouth phenomenon. The school did not have a database to refer to when a faculty need arose, so the "Do you know anyone who might be interested and would qualify?" question was floated around. Amazingly, in many instances, the word-of-mouth "search" produced a candidate. Though the recruit was not always as well qualified as hoped for, it seemed to work out much of the time. The faculty and administration is now facing the fact that the past practice of faculty recruitment is no longer adequate.

Faculty/Student Loan Reimbursement Program

Like many other schools, Loma Linda has had a semblance of a faculty loan reimbursement program in place for some time. Recently, the school administration decided to make a concerted effort over time to use a reimbursement program for attracting young qualified faculty to teach by contributing to a pay down of their dental school debt. The dean's office has an annual \$150,000 line item in the budget dedicated solely to a faculty loan reimbursement program. While teaching on campus, young faculty recruits receive up to \$30,000 a year for five years to aid in debt payment. Since the 1988-'89 school year, 11 full-time teachers have joined the faculty in the school. This program is providing a small but steady stream of promising young faculty members.

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The PhD/DDS Research and Teaching Track

The school has ongoing needs for broadly trained faculty who also have dental school training and experience. The concept is to find PhD-prepared individuals who have already attained significant skills in research at the doctoral level and to sponsor them through the DDS degree so that they may serve in both the academic and clinical programs as well-trained and competent faculty. This program is young, but the prospects seem bright with two new faculty members in place and several more beginning in mid-2005 with training that will provide faculty custom-educated to perform specific roles in the school.

Funding for the Recruitment Program

At present, the faculty recruitment program has become a line item in the school's budget, with data entry performed by Information Technology Services and primary screening of responses to recruitment efforts channeled through the Office of the Restorative Dentistry chair.

New Faculty Survey

It has been decided that recently hired full-time faculty would be good sources for determining why they accepted an appointment at the school. A survey instrument with five questions was devised and hand delivered to 21 full-time faculty who have been hired in the past four years. Nineteen completed and returned the survey. Twelve of the respondents participated in one-on-one 60-minute in-depth interviews.

Written and oral responses to the

questionnaire are recorded here of at least three of the 19 subjects mentioned. Because the responses were spontaneous instead of being selected from a list, all responses were considered to be worthy of consideration as the strategy was planned.

1. What factors and persons influenced you to become a dental school educator?

- Faculty member contact and invitations
- Commitment to the spiritual mission of the school
- Enthusiasm for teaching
- Desire to give back

2. Why did you choose Loma Linda University School of Dentistry?

- "It's my alma mater."
- Commitment to values and foci
- Spiritual environment
- Geographic location
- Personal invitation

3. What keeps you in the teaching profession?

- Interaction with positive, motivated students
- Stimulating academic/clinical environment
- Enjoyment derived by continually learning
- Opportunity to use talents

4. What can we learn from you about recruiting faculty at LLUSD?

- The importance of personal contact
- The need for support of administrators and those who oversee our activities
- The importance of vital faculty practice opportunities
- There needs to be a better faculty

- orientation program
- e. Salaries should be higher

4. What changes do you recommend at LLUSD?

- a. Less hiring paperwork
- b. More in-service training
- c. Administrators present in the clinic
- d. More minorities and women
- e. Increased use of electronic resources and technology
- f. More time for administrative duties
- g. Increased faculty-to-student ratio

In summary, the responses suggest that successful recruitment requires listening, learning, and action. The recruits responded to these approaches and conditions:

- a. Clear mission and foci of action
- b. Administrators' presence clinically
- c. Maintenance of an energizing environment
- d. Faculty orientation/in-service training
- e. Minority/female recruitment
- f. Electronic education resource development
- g. Streamlined hiring paperwork

Survey Results

In analyzing the responses to the survey instrument, several factors stood out in the data.

The importance of personal relationship topped the list. "No one ever asked me to teach before," repeatedly emerged as a compelling incentive, a simple but profound finding. Potential faculty are more likely to respond if invited by a school faculty member or administrator to look seriously at teaching rather than simply reading a notice or sensing an impulse to inquire about a faculty position.

A second finding was that there are more dentists than it was imagined who actually entertain the idea of full-time or part-time teaching. The survey turned up a good number of practicing dentists, even younger dentists, who genuinely enjoy the challenge and rewards of working with students. Dental school

debts and practice expenses are a major deterrent to those who would enjoy and be capable teachers.

A third finding concerns a skill set of enhanced faculty qualifications.

New faculty have come with a personal dimension that is crucial in the new clinical group practice model at Loma Linda and is being adopted in a number of dental schools. When students work in a group with underclassmen, hygiene students and coordinators, new challenges emerge for dental faculty. The skills of mentoring and coaching become crucial for faculty and students. The ability to listen, question, and stimulate critical thinking becomes important in the

faculty recruitment program. The idea of joining the faculty is mentioned in class beginning in the freshman year. Exit interviews with seniors routinely include a question regarding their interest in teaching. At a recent "farewell" dinner for orthodontic residents, six responded to a questionnaire inquiring into their suggestions for the program. One of the questions explored their interest in teaching. All six responded favorably; two preferred full-time; two chose part-time; two selected visiting status. The faculty members have been happily surprised by the robust response of seniors indicating their interest in teaching.

The alumni and dentists practicing

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teaching enterprise. Schools have more paperwork and, seemingly to some faculty, more policies and procedures than are necessary. The ability to tolerate what some faculties openly ignore highlights the importance of being a team player in today's dental school. The clinic floor is no place for the "brilliant lone eagle" faculty member who ignores what she or he pleases all the way from quality assurance forms to treatment plans. A dental school, after all, is a combination school, business, and clinic at least; therefore, it requires checks and balances that can safely be minimized in private practice.

A Fresh Look at Practicing Dentists at Loma Linda University School of Dentistry

Taking a tip from the findings of the summary of new full-time faculty, the school set in place a formal data-based

in the service area of the school comprise a rich source of possible faculty for the dental school. Included here is a simple survey being used now with alumni. It is crucial to note that a personally submitted survey to a prospective recruit by a school representative with an invitation to "think about it" has considerably more impact than simply mailing it to the hundreds of alumni. The survey is introduced this way:

Faculty Interest Gleaner

The Loma Linda University School of Dentistry Faculty Recruitment Project is a conscious effort on the part of the School of Dentistry to build the best possible faculty and to make its own alumni a major source for faculty members.

School of Dentistry alumni would make ideal faculty for a number of reasons. First, we believe we turn out some of the best dentists in the country, from

a clinical perspective, and would love to tap that skill for the next generation of graduates. Second, alumni have observed, understand, and have often contributed to the special mission of the Loma Linda University School of Dentistry, with its emphases on spiritual values and service ethic. Third, alumni have recently seen the world from the students' perspective and are likely to have constructive, fresh ideas for how to improve the student experience. Fourth, alumni are already familiar with the operations of Loma Linda, making orientation and adjustment a shorter, more efficient process.

Given the previously mentioned information, and the fact that a number of alumni have indicated no one ever broached the subject of potential service as faculty members, it seems appropriate to initiate this process to begin assessing interest in such service. The faculty-prepared survey appears below.

What else can dental educators do to interest qualified faculty? The dental school can give detailed and regular support to a first-class faculty practice facility, professionally managed so that faculty can enhance their income. In some instances, this is enough to attract and retain quality faculty; 2) develop a debt-reduction plan for new or younger faculty who desire and are qualified to teach; and 3) support a development program with professional staff that can cultivate donors, write grant proposals, and present the needs of the dental school to a wide array of constituents.

The faculty shortage in dental education is a global issue. There seem to be no questions about that, but the haunting response to the new faculty survey at Loma Linda remains instructive: "No one ever asked me before."

Summary

There is no question there is a global shortage of dental school faculty. Various explanations include the growing financial gap between private practice income and faculty salaries, budget woes in all states, and the rapidly expanding roles that dental schools play in teaching and providing clinical dentistry to their service areas.

Concerned, as are most other dental schools, about the supply of qualified future faculty, LLUSD in the fall of 2004 reviewed past and present strategies used in faculty recruitment. They had consistently included paid graduate training and word-of-mouth recruiting. A more

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Survey

Welcome to the first official faculty recruitment survey! It would be extremely helpful to the school in launching this project if you would respond as briefly (or comprehensively) as you wish to the following questions. Thank you for participating.

1. Would you be interested in serving as a faculty member of the LLU School of Dentistry?
2. If so . . .
 - a. On a scale of 1 (least) to 5 (most), how interested are you in serving as faculty? _____
 - c. Is there a particular specialty you would be interested in teaching?
If so, please name the specialty. _____
 - d. How soon would you be interested in serving (an approximate date)? _____
3. If not . . .
 - a. Why not? _____
 - b. Is there anything that could have been, or could be, done to turn your response into a positive interest? _____
 - c. Are there any other ways that you could envision being of service to the Loma Linda University School of Dentistry? _____
4. Do you have any postdoctoral advanced education in dentistry or in a dental specialty? If so, please name them. _____
5. Would you be willing to pursue specialty education (sponsored by LLUSD) prior to serving on the faculty? _____

coordinated recruitment effort was instituted, which the school's recruiters now see as promising for schools with similar recruitment concerns. The current approach includes a systematic faculty loan reimbursement program, an energetic personal recruitment program with seniors, students, alumni, and practicing dentists in the school's service area, which has resulted in an active, up-to-date database. The preliminary results are a happy surprise in that a healthy number of dentists, both young and older, view interaction with dental students as a new and stimulating aspect of their career path. More responses came than were imagined, with dentists willing to look carefully at themselves as faculty; some have joined the school as this article is penned. **CDA**

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