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**STARTING AND OPERATING AN INTERNAL EXECUTIVE AND
FACULTY SEARCH FUNCTION**

Tom Gausvik

Associate Vice President for Human Resources

The University of Georgia

Athens, Georgia 30602

Abstract

The Executive and Faculty Search Group (EFSG) was created at the University of Georgia in October 2006 under the leadership of Tom Gausvik, Associate Vice President of Human Resources. This initiative is one of only two fully functional, full-featured internal executive/faculty search functions in a higher education institution. (The first was created by Gausvik at the University of Virginia in 2001.) The UGA unit is comprised of a director, two executive search consultants, and two executive search coordinators. The mission of the group is to assist senior administration in the acquisition of top talent in the ranks of the senior management, faculty leadership, faculty, directorships, and other critical positions. The process excellence provided by this internal search group continuously exceeds the level of quality an external search firm would provide, at a fraction of the cost.

The EFSG team improves the quality of the search process and significantly shortens the service times (search days to fill) by assuming all administrative and talent-sourcing duties, including search committee and candidate communication, placement of advertising, research, direct cold-call recruitment efforts, use of assessment reporting tools, candidate scheduling, and document management. These tasks, when left to the school/college or department as an additional project, add stress to an already overburdened leadership and administrative staff. EFSG creates efficiencies by allowing leaders and their staff to pursue their regular business responsibilities. It provides improved quality by bringing to bear best practices and efficiencies in running a consistently credible and confidential search process. This ability to replicate efficient, high quality practices delivers a diverse, high quality pool of candidates that extends (beyond the completed search process) the university's relationship with all candidates, selected or not.

The Executive and Faculty Search Group has made a positive impact on the University of Georgia, and subsequently, the University System of Georgia. As University employees, the team is able to provide executive and faculty recruitment and search services with insight and experiential knowledge of the University of Georgia culture and institutional needs. The team's enthusiasm for the mission of the institution is an integral component of each candidate contact. Possessing an intimate knowledge of the University, school/college or department, and the position, the EFSG team members speak with authority as vested partners about the candidate's responsibilities in the position and as stakeholders about why the candidate should come to UGA. The EFSG creates value by building relationships with the University's leadership, faculty and staff. This partnership, built on trust, allows the EFSG team to institutionalize best-in-service practices across the University. Additionally, as the prime point of contact with individuals seeking to lend their expertise to the University, by its actions and through a consistent message, EFSG communicates the mission of the University.

Introduction of the Organization

The University of Georgia (UGA), established in 1785 as the nation's first state-chartered university, is the flagship institution among the 35 colleges and universities in the University System of Georgia. With more than 34,000 students, approximately 9,000 faculty and staff, and an annual budget of \$1.3 billion, UGA is the largest and most comprehensive educational institution in Georgia and a driving force in the state's economic growth.

The University of Georgia's academic reputation is on the rise, and admission is increasingly competitive. More than 17,000 applicants applied for the fall 2008 class of approximately 4,800 freshmen. For 8 of the past 10 years, the University of Georgia has been ranked among the nation's top 20 public universities by *U.S. News & World Report*, and the institution is consistently recognized as one of the best values in American higher education.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

Recruitment of key leaders and faculty is paramount to growing the reputation and resources of the University. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent each year on external search firms, hired to attract the best and brightest talent, thus growing the UGA academic and research enterprise. Although skilled in their trade, these firms depended upon the University to provide institutional information so that candidates would become familiar with their potential employer. Other searches were often handled by committees of internal administrators and faculty members, stealing valuable time from their primary teaching and research responsibilities. These searches were "start-

from-scratch” processes, each handled differently, with no real guidance. Therefore, the start-up time was considerable, as each search committee formulated its own rules and procedures.

Human Resources (HR) recently completed a year-long study of impending retirements in an effort to assess the institutional risk of both human and financial resources. As a general statement, nearly half of the University’s faculty and staff are eligible to retire in the next 10 years. In addition, the looming exit of senior research faculty is of particular concern because of the amount of grant dollars controlled by these researchers. Also affecting the strategic leadership of the institution will be the loss of institutional memory and experience felt when other senior faculty, leaders, and staff retire. This loss of leadership ability, knowledge and expertise, along with the competitive environment for top talent, compounds the need to establish an efficient, best-practice method of recruiting the best and brightest to UGA.

Therefore, it is an institutional imperative in today’s environment to produce a final outcome significantly better than that achieved through previous search methods. External searches are costly and lengthy, have little institutional customization, and too often fail to produce the desired outcomes. Internal search processes can suffer some of the same pains, in that they also can be lengthy, consume an inordinate amount of time, “reinvent the wheel,” and repeat prior mistakes and missteps.

Through the use of EFSG services, the University of Georgia avoids such problems and delays. The bar is additionally raised through the participation of hiring officials, committee chairs, faculty members, and other campus leaders. Consequently,

EFSG is teaching high-impact search techniques that can be replicated with later searches.

Design

Associate Vice President for Human Resources Tom Gausvik came from the University of Virginia, where he created the first stand-alone, fully featured internal executive search function in higher education. Because of the success of that program, Tom recruited its leader, Frank DiGiacomo, to assist in the establishment of the Executive Faculty Search Group (EFSG) at UGA. The EFSG has significantly evolved beyond the University of Virginia program through continuous customer and process improvements. It represents the “version two” of the internal search group function in higher education today, especially in conducting academic leadership searches, development of new search and recruitment practices, and integration of the Human Resources function into identification, sourcing, and vetting of the best candidates for key administrative and faculty leadership positions. In essence, the activities of EFSG are similar to Development offices in higher education in terms of prospect donor research, donor relations, etc.

It was understood that the EFSG would operate in a service model different from the traditional HR model and often, outside the normal workday hours. At the inception of EFSG and prior to the director’s arrival, a few current Human Resources staff members expressed interest in the new venture. Although three HR staffers joined the EFSG upon the director’s arrival, two of the three individuals found it not to be the right

fit for them over the first few months and requested their talents be used elsewhere in HR. The third individual remains with the EFSG as a search consultant.

As a new function, and one that drew some skepticism, EFSG would have to exceed all expectations and convert the skeptics (including some members of the University administration). The consistent, positive feedback since October 2006 indicates that the EFSG has succeeded in that quest. The skeptics have become advocates and supporters, as well as return customers as hiring officials.

There is a perceived or “real” value associated with any business enterprise, and the EFSG experience would likely be judged against experience with external search firms. All hiring officials who had used external firms concluded that the EFSG provided a superior value in terms of administrative support to the search committee, sourcing of talent, handling of candidates, and other nuances associated with the search process. By far, the sentiment was that the EFSG experience was superior. The relatively small fee is designed to recover some administrative costs, yet saves the institution time and money compared to external or internal search processes. The fee does not include travel or accommodation costs for candidates, which are paid by hiring departments. Further, any hiring official not completely satisfied with the service or outcome of an EFSG-directed search is not required to pay the fee. This has never occurred. The EFSG is about the quality of the process and quality of the outcome.

Implementation

In October 2006, UGA launched the nucleus of EFSG: a highly professional, customer service-oriented team designed to coordinate faculty and administrative

searches using proven techniques and methodology. The EFSG was quickly initiated to UGA, managing three searches: Vice President for Instruction, Dean of the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, and Dean of the College of Family and Consumer Sciences. This was no small challenge for a newly created internal search function, as it placed the spotlight squarely on the abilities of the EFSG.

Both the process and staff were unknown to the UGA community, so the initial searches were critical to the initial success of EFSG. There was no institutional marketing or communication to solicit business; rather, EFSG's credibility and reputation would be built with each search. Simply stated, the EFSG would be judged on results. Initially, there was no fee associated with EFSG services because the unit needed to establish its value. By word of mouth, those who participated in EFSG-administered searches trumpeted its success and value to the institution. After one year, HR presented the notion of a fee structure to senior administration and those hiring officials who had used its services. Everyone agreed that a fee structure would further establish the value for the service.

EFSG demonstrates an incredible amount of confidence, expertise, organization, and finesse in managing all the issues related to the search for top faculty and administrators. In addition, the team possesses a deep understanding of the nuances of the University and higher education, all necessary for success. A top selling point of the EFSG is the institutional knowledge possessed by the internal team. Rather than focusing on a speedy hiring process, emphasis is placed on quality hires. "Success" is declared when the best candidate is identified and hired, all the candidates have an excellent experience with UGA, and the hiring official and search committee members agree that

the EFSG involvement created a superior search process and outcome. There is no compromise on the quality components at all stages—the initial engagement with the hiring official (the client), the interactions with the search committee, and the relationships developed with prospective candidates.

After the initial searches resulted in quality hires, word spread that the process was a highly professional one and a vast improvement over previous methods, both external and internal. At one point in 2007, the EFSG had approximately 10 searches in progress; it became clear more staff members were needed in order to maintain the highest level of quality that our clients deserved. This created another exhaustive search process to find the right individuals to become part of this high-performing team. Only after numerous candidates were vetted over many months of research and exhaustive interviewing and assessment were new staff members added. Currently, the EFSG is comprised of the director, two search consultants, and two search coordinators. Either the director or one of the consultants may lead a search, meet with search committees, interact with candidates during interview visits, and monitor the actual interviews. The two coordinators handle financial arrangements (travel reimbursements, etc.), preparation of the search committee materials (candidate resumes and other information), placement of advertising, and other administrative tasks associated with the search.

The process of working with the hiring official to develop a comprehensive talent sourcing and search plan is extensive and highly interactive, focusing on the development of a relationship between the executive search consultant and hiring official. Some typical passive recruitment activities are employed, including developing an appropriate marketing strategy using local, regional, and national print and Web publications.

However, these activities have been upgraded to create a unified and consistent branding strategy and process for UGA. As result of the comprehensive upfront work preparing a search for launch, search committees can quickly begin work on the actual search.

Individuals who express interest in EFSG position vacancies receive “high touch” guidance, which includes use of the EFSG Web site (<http://www.hr.uga.edu/recruitment/efsg/efsg.html>) to view comprehensive position profiles and other details. Along with confidentially responding to potential candidates who access the position description on the Web site, the EFSG team actively executes a detailed “cold call” talent sourcing campaign to tap the top talent “not in play” at peer and aspirational institutions or other organizations across a global market.

In addition, EFSG guides and facilitates curriculum vita (résumé) reviews, screening of candidates, as well as selection of semi-finalists and finalists. EFSG coordinates all candidate interviews, whether in person or via video conferencing. If site visits are involved, EFSG staff members coordinate hotel reservations, transportation, community tours, and all other details related to candidate interviews. Interviews are monitored for quality and consistency among all candidates, although the individual search committees conduct the actual interviews. Nothing is spared in “rolling out the red carpet” to visiting candidates. In addition, one component of the EFSG provides active advice and counsel for the selected candidate’s spouse/partner in seeking employment either inside or outside the institution. Because of the excellent care and attention to detail, candidates and their spouses/partners often describe their UGA encounter as “the best recruiting experience ever.”

The EFSG search process is intended not only to find the right candidate for a specific position vacancy but also to identify candidates for future needs of the University. The EFSG creates an entirely positive experience for each candidate, regardless of whether he/she is selected for the current position. Thus, UGA provides customer service from the heart: humanity is included in the search process; attentiveness to each candidate (as well as his/her spouse or partner) is unparalleled; and this treatment is extended to the entire candidate pool, thus encouraging top candidates to remain connected to opportunities at UGA.

Each EFSG search is uniquely tailored to the client's (hiring official's) needs and those of UGA as a whole. Because EFSG staff members are UGA employees, their knowledge and loyalty are reflected in the service provided to candidates and search committee members alike. Since the inception of the EFSG in October 2006, the following searches have been completed, and those in progress are indicated by an asterisk at the bottom of the list.

- Vice President for Instruction
- Dean of the College of Family and Consumer Sciences
- Dean of the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources
- Associate Chief Information Officer
- Assistant Vice President for Physical Plant
- Director of the International Center for Democratic Governance
- Director of the Washington Semester Program
- Senior Director of Benefits
- Environmental Program Policy Director
- Director of Finance and Business Services, Enterprise Information Technology Services
- Dean of the College of Environment and Design
- Director, Georgia Center for Continuing Education Conference Center and Hotel
- Director of Admissions, School of Law
- Director of Student Financial Aid
- Editor, Georgia Review
- Director of Contracts and Grants

- Associate CIO for Application Development and Data Integration
- Associate Director for Diversity Recruitment
- Assessment Specialist, Office of Institutional Effectiveness
- Director of Music, Hugh Hodgson School of Music*
- Director of Center for International Trade and Security, School of Public and International Affairs*
- Director of Development, School of Law*
- Department Head, Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Sciences, College of Pharmacy*
- Director of Full-time MBA Program, Terry College of Business*

Benefits

Although not all searches listed above would have engaged the services of an external executive search firm, the cost savings for the searches conducted from October 2006 through June 2008 have been estimated at approximately \$442,000 (or 30% of the annual salaries of the individuals hired). Because the EFSG's cost recovery averages only \$6,000 per search, EFSG has demonstrated a significant value-add in both a return-on-management and return-on-investment. However, the cost recovery did not occur until late 2007, once EFSG had proved itself. More importantly, the unanimous feedback from hiring officials and search committee members has been that EFSG has exceeded their expectations when compared to the results from normal recruitment processes or those handled by external search firms.

EFSG has enormously increased the breadth and depth of Human Resources' relationships and partnerships with the University's leadership, faculty, staff, and the candidates involved in searches. The EFSG approach creates a relationship that lasts beyond the completed search process and emphasizes one of Human Resources' key tenets: "UGA...[is] a place for everyone in the community," which extends to the larger community as well.

Through the implementation of EFSG services, the University has embarked upon an institutionally consistent, highly efficient and high-quality talent selection and search process. EFSG has contributed to the acquisition of highly skilled, diverse, and visionary leaders not through the normal passive recruitment techniques, but rather by executing a laser-like approach and aggressively pursuing the best talent, even when they may not actively be seeking to change positions. Many of the gifted individuals recruited to the University would not have committed to come were it not for the exceptional efforts of the members of the EFSG team. Their work demonstrates that UGA is more than just another employer or university; it is an institution which values and hires only the best.

Retrospect

Hindsight indicates that the implementation of EFSG went better than hoped, offering second-to-none service. The approach to implementation was straightforward and simple: EFSG would prove itself one search at a time and, if successful, campus leaders would seek its services. Such a venture required the support of senior management, and both the Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration and the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost were key sponsors from the inception. No dean or campus administrator has ever been directed to engage the services of the EFSG; however, because of its consistent focus on quality and attention to detail, many are now choosing to do so.

In conclusion, the Executive and Faculty Search Group has proven its ability to provide UGA with a significant competitive advantage in identifying, recruiting, and hiring the best talent for its key administrative and faculty leadership positions.