Faculty Search Committees: A Brief Guide

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Creating a Climate that Celebrates Diversity

In order to successfully create or maintain diversity on the faculty, a department or unit should develop a favorable climate for faculty from a wide range of backgrounds.

➢ Develop professional relationships, team-taught courses, or collaborative projects with diverse faculty or postdocs in related departments, disciplines, or interdisciplinary programs at Rutgers and/or at neighboring institutions.

➢ Examine mentoring and retention policies for assistant and associate professors.

➢ Have department officers meet annually with faculty at various ranks to explore ways to enhance the intellectual life of the department.

➢ Explore additional ways to recruit a diverse pool of graduate students and/or postdoctoral fellows.

Constituting the Search Committee

- ❖ A diverse search committee is most likely to identify a diverse array of candidates.
- ❖ Include members with different perspectives and expertise and a demonstrated commitment to diversity.
- ❖ Include women and underrepresented minorities whenever possible, *but diversity need not be solely based on race or gender*.
- ❖ It is often helpful to appoint some search committee members from outside the department, particularly for interdisciplinary searches.
- ❖ The committee chair should be someone who is looked upon by faculty colleagues as a leader and who also holds diversification of the faculty as a goal.

3

Consider a Diversity Advocate

A designated individual who advocates for diversity as a core component of excellence in the search process. The Diversity Advocate assists the search committee by maintaining a focus on diversity in the following ways.

❖ Serve as a resource to faculty, staff, and students.

❖ Review and communicate diversity goals for the unit.

❖ Monitor recruitment outreach efforts.

❖ Assist with extra recruitment efforts aimed at outreach through direct and personal contacts.

❖ Review diversity of applicant and finalist pools.

❖ Address and discuss bias in the search process.

❖ Assess and encourage best practices.

Ground Rules

❖ Discuss and agree upon fair, objective, and uniform procedures with which to evaluate candidates before screening actually begins.

❖ Insist on evidence and well-reasoned judgment over unsubstantiated assertions.

❖ Agree upon the criteria of evaluation, the credentials candidates are expected to submit, the deadline for application submissions, and the manner in which matters of confidentiality are to be handled.

❖ Establish plans for actively recruiting women and underrepresented minorities prior to beginning the search.

❖ Agree on and follow a timeline, but avoid taking shortcuts when pressed for time.

Best Practices

❖ Search committee ground rules include evaluation criteria, a process for discussion and handling disagreements, and a method for determining who will be invited to interview.

❖ <u>Slow down</u>. Make time to review the complete application.

❖ <u>Do not rank-order</u>. Consider alternatives to rank ordering, such as summaries of each finalist.

❖ <u>Insist on the evidence</u>. Require search committee members to back up statements and opinions with facts and evidence.

❖ <u>Be aware </u>of the possibility of your own hidden bias or cognitive errors in evaluating competence and merit.

Avoiding Pitfalls

Cognitive errors, mental distortions, shortcuts can lead to...

➢ **Snap judgment** - making a decision without substantive thought and/or one that is not based on evidence.

➢ **Elitism** - assuming that the best candidates always come from schools/social classes/regions that have traditionally been considered "the best," without careful attention to CVs, recommendations, needs of the department, etc.

➢ **Premature ranking** - a rush to rank candidates; a focus on filtering out rather than filtering in.

➢ **Momentum of the group** - if most group members have rallied together for their favorite candidate, it may be difficult to encourage people to step back and look more objectively at other qualified candidates.

➢ **Longing to clone** - seeking candidates who would be a mirror image of oneself or one's colleagues, instead of carefully assessing which candidate would be best overall for the department.

Source :Faculty Diversity Search Committee Training Handbook, 2009

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious biases are mental associations that are so well-established as to operate without awareness, without intention, or without control. They are not only hidden from public view, but in many cases, are also hidden from the person who holds them. Unconscious biases can be brought to full awareness.

➢ ***Positive and negative stereotypes*** - presumption of innate competence/incompetence, ability/lack of ability to fit in, etc., based on race, gender, and other personal characteristics.

➢ ***Raising or lowering the bar*** - setting higher/lower standards for some candidates based on negative/positive stereotypes.

➢ ***Provincialism*** - limiting a definition of excellence to those schools/ individuals/ geographic areas one knows.

➢ ***Seizing a pretext*** - giving excessive weight to a relatively minor point, in order to justify disqualifying a candidate.

➢ ***Good fit / bad fit*** - may refer to the disciplinary niche or programmatic needs of the department, but it also may be an indicator of how comfortable or culturally at ease we feel about the candidate.

Interviews

❖ Schedule interviews and events to ensure consistent treatment of all candidates, including internal candidates.

❖ Send the candidate an itinerary before the visit and make sure they are aware of the kind of presentation you have scheduled, and the audience expected to be there.

❖ Give the candidate a chance to interact with the department's faculty in multiple venues. Formal talks may not reveal every candidate's strengths. Consider including Q + A sessions, "chalk talks," and other less formal interactions.

❖ Make sure to discuss the department's expectations, especially if the position is a Joint Appointment.

Campus Visit

❖ Develop a group of core questions based on the position-related criteria by which the candidates are to be evaluated.

❖ Use core questions with all candidates to allow comparative judgment and ensure that crucial position-related information is obtained.

❖ Aim questions at discovering what the candidate can bring to the position and limit them to issues that directly relate to the job to be performed.

❖ Provide an opportunity for the candidate to discuss any special requirements or circumstances, such as the need to find a position for a partner.

❖ Avoid questions related to age, arrests (convictions are a different matter), citizenship, disability, health, marital status, nationality, race, religion, and sexual orientation <u>in both formal and informal conversations</u>. Structure your questions so that they get to the crucial point immediately.

Pro-active Recruiting

❖ **Active recruitment** is the process of generating a pool of applicants rather than merely tapping it.

❖ An approach based on the long-term cultivation of relationships and connections with those who may become applicants for a position at some future point, especially those from underrepresented groups such as women and minorities.

❖ Helps ensure a diverse and excellent pool of candidates for faculty positions.

❖ Active recruitment is a good, legally sound, practice to improve the diversity pool.

Diversity; Realistic, Efficient & Effective

A lot of people in our industry haven't had very diverse experiences. So they don't have enough dots to connect, and they end up with very linear solutions without a broad perspective on the problem. The broader one's understanding of the human experience, the better design we will have.

–Steve Jobs

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