TIPS ON EVALUATING THE APPLICANT POOL

In-depth screening of applications is the committee’s next major challenge.

This screening process is more qualitative in character than the initial screen (if used) where the emphasis was on verifying that applicants met the stated minimum qualifications.

The search committee examines the material sent by the applicant with great care and assesses the degree to which the applicant has met or exceeded the criteria established by the committee.

The search committee may wish further information through telephone contact. For instance, a search committee charged with finding a researcher may wish to know more about the type of research the applicant has done and the persons with whom he/she has worked, or how the applicant's colleagues perceived his/her work.

Of course, a search committee may collapse the processes into one review of the applications if desired, reporting those candidates not meeting minimum as an option when the status of all candidates is recorded in PeopleAdmin.

This is the stage where the careful crafting of required and desired qualifications in the ad and job description can pay off. The committee’s review focuses on the candidate’s qualifications in relation to what was stated in the ad/job description.

Usually the committee chair or members develop a form to guide the review of applications (see sample evaluations). The evaluation categories should relate directly to the stated qualifications in the ad or job description.

Categories can be weighted if the committee determines that certain credentials or qualifications are more important than others. While the committee has some latitude in developing an evaluation process that meets their needs, several elements are required:

- There must be documentation of what was considered and these must be job-related.
- All candidates should be evaluated by the same criteria; and it should be clear to anyone reviewing the documentation why certain
applications were advanced and others were not and that the grounds for such decisions were not discriminatory.

**Screening to be Inclusive rather than Exclusive:**

Women and individuals of color face particular barriers in the screening process for faculty or administrative positions. Their backgrounds or resumes may look different because their experiences have been different, they may have attended colleges that are not well known to majority faculty members, and their career paths or experiences may be dismissed as less valuable or appropriate than those which are more familiar to them.

How does this happen and what are the unintended biases that might result in less traditional, but nevertheless very interesting and qualified, candidates making it to the pool of finalists?

**Candidates who present work histories that may be intermittent or started late because of family responsibilities:**

This is an issue for many women and for some men as well. Committee members may sometimes favor young candidates who look like fast and rising stars, who pursued graduate work immediately after the baccalaureate, and whose work history is lock step without interruption.

The profile of such candidates is often irresistible to committees, even if it is not a best match with the preferred qualifications set forth in the job description. The presumption is that these will make better faculty members.

In dismissing those whose educational or career paths don’t follow this pattern, the committee may be missing an opportunity to hire a faculty member with life experience, maturity, and commitment that may make them a better, more rounded faculty member.

It is also critical that we create realistic expectations for faculty members which recognize life and family obligations and do not treat these as deficiencies but as evidence of fully-realized lives.
Candidates who attended lesser known institutions:

This is a particular issue for applicants from low-income backgrounds and those from non-majority groups. Talent can be nurtured at many different institutions, yet we are often attracted to those candidates who attended well-known institutions, presuming that their educational preparation will be superior, or that they are more likely to be bright and talented because they were chosen to attend such an institution. Those from non-majority racial or ethnic backgrounds often have different patterns of college attendance, particularly at the undergraduate level, for a wide variety of reasons including the expectation of greater support and nurturing at a minority-serving institution, as well as geographic, familial, or income-related reasons.

Candidates whose advisors are not known to committee members or are not known leaders in the field:

This is an issue related to the one above. Assumptions are often made in favor of candidates who worked under a well-known colleague in the field, even if the quality of that experience was not optimal. Women and students of color often do not have the same opportunities to work with highly visible leaders in the field, reducing their access to powerful networks for future jobs and influential references.

Candidates whose research and publications, or job experiences, focus on women and non-white populations:

There are several aspects to this issue. Some young scholars have chosen to focus their work and preparation on issues related to women and/or non-white populations. In many fields, this is where the cutting edge research and interdisciplinary work is occurring.

Faculty on search committees may not have familiarity with this research, the methods used, or the journals where such work is most likely to be published. Committees need to look carefully at the quality of the candidate’s research to determine the potential for contribution and evidence of methodological and conceptual excellence.
In the case of administrative positions, candidates with professional experience working with special populations are sometimes presumed to have a narrow or restrictive set of skills and interests. Yet, for many non-majority individuals, entry into professional positions in higher education has been through programs serving special populations.

It is important to recognize differences in background, particularly for women and non-majority candidates may reflect different opportunity structures, and that assumptions made about such candidates, as well as majority candidates, need to be tested.

**There are a number of strategies available to the committee to address such concerns:**

- Involve the dean’s office in reviewing applications for women and people of color to get another perspective.

- If there are questions about their credentials, gather more information from applicants from diverse backgrounds before dismissing their candidacy.

- Do a phone interview; ask for additional references, copies of research articles or other samples of work, or additional material that will assist in the evaluation. Or contact the nominator or references to clarify any points of concern.

- Focus on the full spectrum of experiences, qualifications, and expertise that the individual may bring to the department.

- Candidates from diverse backgrounds may bring a special interest in student mentoring, opportunities to network or do outreach or research in new areas, ability to collaborate, excellent teaching evaluations, or other qualities that will make them successful faculty members and highly valued contributors to the department and university.

- Test assumptions made about all candidates.
• Focus on what candidates have actually achieved and can do in the position.

• Screening by prestige factors alone risks losing real talent.

Remember that more broadly defined qualifications in the job description and ad (such as disciplinary specialty, required experiences, and so on) will make it easier for committee members to consider seriously applications from candidates whose background may not have followed an idealized path or timeframe.

Getting to a Short(er) List:

Committees often find that they want to collect more information and impressions on a larger group of candidates before they go to the short list of 3 or 4 for an on-site visit.

Some options available include telephone interviews or video conferencing to engage the candidate in more extended conversation about his or her qualifications and fit for the position.

Regardless of method, committees should use a consistent set of questions with all candidates. Telephone interviews are straightforward, inexpensive and reasonably effective in gathering additional information. However, if the position involves having a public presence, it may be worthwhile to try video conferencing.