Evaluating Applicants

Screening Applications & Creating a Short List
Search committees should discuss and develop criteria for screening in advance of receiving applications. Be certain to address all criteria that may be pertinent to the goals of the hire and the development or program – specialty areas, diversity, and research methods may be some of these. The relative weighting of each criterion should also be addressed so that all members are clear on the most important requirements as well as those that are desirable or preferred. Consider generating a matrix with these criteria for committee members to use while evaluating applications – these might be divided into areas for research, teaching, service, mentoring, etc. to generate top applicants in each area.

It is important to consider an applicant’s entire career – some applicants may have less traditional routes to the professoriate and may have academic or employment gaps or time spent in professional positions. Evaluating the entire career can help understand all of the strengths an applicant will bring to the position and the department. Building this recognition into the screening criteria will help search committees assess these strengths relative to others. Ignoring these life experiences may deprive departments of strong candidates. All eligible applicants for the position must be screened and evaluated in the same manner, using job-related criteria.

Unconscious Bias and Evaluation of Candidates
There is a wealth of information on bias and assumptions in hiring generally as well as in faculty hiring specifically. It is important for search committee members to be aware of the possibilities for bias in screening applications. Some areas that show potential for bias are:

- Homogeneous search committee.
- Poorly articulated screening criteria or rigidity in a screening matrix.
- Inconsistent weighting of criteria among committee members.
- Inaccurate or unconscious assumptions about merit.
- Unconscious bias or assumptions about applicants based on gender or other group generalizations.
- Ignorance or misunderstanding of social norms or customs of other cultures.

Many of these potentials for bias can be mitigated by good communication in committee meetings regarding these topics and follow-up with individual members by the committee chair to ensure that members are clear on instructions or assignments. Unconscious bias and assumptions are less easy to mitigate and the consequences can range from undesirable to severe.

Committee members should familiarize themselves with these suggested resources regarding unconscious bias and its impact on the evaluation of candidates:
Evaluation of Candidates – Tiered Review

Committees should use a review process that separates applications into tiers beginning by separating minimally-qualified applicants from unqualified applicants and applicants with incomplete files. Qualified applicants should then be separated into at least two tiers based on the agreed-upon criteria.

- Large pools of applicants may require that search committees divide up applications for thorough evaluation. It is advisable that each application receive an evaluation from at least two committee members.
- Sufficient time should be given to each applicant’s file to ensure a fair and thorough review. Most research on this topic recommends at least 20 minutes for each application. Many researchers have concluded that an undistracted, thorough review of this time length is the best counterbalance to unconscious and unintentional bias or assumptions.
- Generate a tier-2 list first– this list would include all candidates who meet an agreed upon level of the criteria for screening. If the committee has divided up the full list of applicants, this list would be based on individual member’s recommendations and would thus underscore the importance of at least two reviews for each application.
- Generate a top-tier list as a full committee from those applicants in the tier-2 list. This ensures that all well-qualified candidates are thoroughly considered by all committee members.
- Documenting why each applicant has been screened out during the process is vital to appropriate record keeping. The department or program, as well as the search committee, must be able to defend such decisions if a complaint is filed and an investigation required.

References

The department determines the type of references to be requested in UC Davis Recruit – they can choose to include references as part of the application, or in contact information only. When soliciting letters, it is advisable to include a copy of the position description. The writer should be informed that the recommendation will be treated confidentially only if s/he requests confidentiality specifically in their letter. The search committee is not obligated to solicit letters from all references provided by the candidate but may choose to contact only those they believe have the most pertinent information. Notes should be taken during the conversations with

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1 If the department anticipates recruiting faculty with the award of tenure at the time of appointment, solicitation of letters must be in compliance with University Regulations.
candidates’ references so that a written record of the conversation may be placed in the application packet. If the timeframe is limited, telephone references may be obtained but external letters will still be required for appointment; the number of letters will depend upon the faculty series. Issues to consider when using telephone references include:

- The search committee may contact references that are not provided by the candidate, however, it is advisable to inform candidate of these contacts.
- The search committee may not ask questions of a reference which are not permitted to ask of the candidate in an interview.
- All questions must be job-related and similar for all candidates.
- A written record of the telephone reference must be generated and kept with the applicant’s file.

**Interviews**

**Developing Interview Questions**

Search Committees should establish a core set of interview questions to be asked of all candidates scheduled for interviews (whether face-to-face, teleconference, or on campus). Questions should be based on the job-related criteria by which candidates are to be evaluated.

Candidates should be interviewed with the desired skills, attributes, and functions of the position in mind. Departments may wish to consider including behavior-based interviewing techniques to understand a candidate’s potential based on actual past behaviors rather than rely on responses to hypothetical questions.

**Appropriate and Inappropriate Questions**

For a list of appropriate and inappropriate questions, please visit the following links:

- [Sample Interview Questions for Faculty Candidates](https://academicaffairs.ucdavis.edu/local_resources/docs/training_development/stead/summary.chart.of.legal.interview.questions.pdf)

**Preparing for Interviews**

Suggestions for interview preparation include:

- Schedule the call/meeting with candidates and interviewers and establish duration of interview (typically 30 minutes is sufficient);
- Prepare core questions from agreed-upon criteria;
- Determine the order in which interviewers will ask questions;
- Test teleconferencing equipment and procedure prior to the interview.

Suggestions for conducting the interview include:
• Introduce individual participating committee members;
• Describe an outline of interview;
• Ask questions pertaining to background, experience, and contributions;
• Allow time for candidate’s questions;
• Explain next steps of search process;
• Thank candidates for their time.

Conducting On-Campus Interviews
Search committee members should view themselves as “recruiters” and commit to providing “concierge-level” service to all candidates. This commitment sends the message that UC Davis is serious about attracting and retaining top-quality talent (Mallon, Grigsby, & Barrett, 2009).

During on-campus interviews, part of the concierge-level service means that the search committee is attentive to balancing the interview with the interests of the candidate. Search committees are encouraged to use a consistent interview schedule, but also encouraged to give individual consideration to candidates, tailoring the schedule to accommodate each candidate’s personal and professional interests. Search committees should also consider publicizing job presentations beyond their own department and college and obtain written evaluations from those attending for the committee’s review.

Search committees should provide candidates with clear and comprehensive information regarding the position, the campus, and the community as preparatory materials prior to the visit. These may include (but are not limited to):

• Institutional and departmental strategic plans;
• Institutional and departmental financials;
• Institutional and departmental histories and fact sheets;
• Institutional and departmental summaries in education, research, and clinical care;
• Selected summaries or excerpts of departmental reviews;
• Details on important strategic initiatives, and/or new programs;
• Brief bio-sketches on all individuals with whom the candidate will meet;
• Details of the local community and region;
• Other important non-confidential materials such as information on dual-career services, university benefits, child-care offices, etc.

Some logistics to consider when planning on-campus interviews include:
• Reimbursing candidates’ expenses (e.g. airline tickets, hotel reservations, etc.);
• Transportation between airport, hotel and campus;
• Addressing any special needs (disability accommodation, dietary requirements);
Individual and group meals;
Selecting someone to greet the candidate;
Avoiding accidental “run-ins” if you have multiple candidates visiting at once;
Providing a tour of department and/or campus and community;
Providing any additional information to candidates;
Providing information to interviewers (CV, letters, publications, evaluation forms);
Planning visits with community or other campus personnel or entities. This may be especially important for candidates from underrepresented communities to be able to identify colleagues and local communities. The Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion can help organize meetings with local community members.

Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities
Departments are required to provide accommodations and access to candidates with disabilities, which may include an interpreter, reader, guide, or site modifications for mobility impairments. Search Committee members should not deny any accommodation requests. The Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion will assist search committees with identifying necessary and reasonable accommodations prior to candidate interviews.

Below are some useful tips to help search committee members during the interview:

- For candidates with hearing impairments:
  - Use a normal voice, do not shout;
  - When using an interpreter, address the candidate, not the interpreter;
  - Allow time for interpreting;
  - If candidate lip reads, maintain eye contact and speak clearly.

- For candidates with visual impairments:
  - Identify yourself and anyone else present;
  - Provide alternative forms for printed material;
  - Do not touch the candidate; allow him/her to take your arm if necessary;
  - Candidates with service animals must be allowed equal access.

- Avoid inquiry about a candidate’s disability, condition, duration of disability or whether s/he may have a disability;
- Candidates may be asked to address/demonstrate how they would perform essential functions of positions with or without accommodation.

Interactions with Candidates
Prior to the visit, the department should make sure that the candidate’s curriculum vita, a copy of the position announcement and a copy of the interview schedule are provided to everyone who will be expected to interview or meet with the candidate. Departments should consider inviting a relocating spouse and/or partner to accompany the candidate on the campus visit.

Items to consider prior to campus interviews include:
- Sending candidate an information packet;
• Confirming travel, lodging, meals, and transportation;
• Confirming with search committee members their responsibility for hosting, escorting candidates from airport and other locations to campus and scheduled meetings;
• Arranging a tour of the local community, as applicable;
• Arranging a campus tour and meetings with groups of interest to the candidate;
• Scheduling a meeting with the Department Chair, Dean, or other leadership team members;
• Arranging meetings with staff, faculty, and graduate students;
• Scheduling initial and debriefing interviews with search committee members or chair, as applicable;
• Scheduling candidate’s presentation/research seminar;
• Scheduling a meeting with the diversity liaison;
• Scheduling breaks as suitable for candidates to rest;
• Announcing candidate’s presentation/research seminar beyond the department and college.

Closing the Interview
Once candidates’ visits have concluded, the search committee should inform candidates of the proposed timeline for filling the position as well as provide candidates with next steps in the process. Once the search committee has concluded all candidate interviews, the search committee should submit final recommendations to the hiring authority. Using the format requested by the hiring authority, the search committee should highlight each candidate’s strengths, weakness, and likely contributions to department, college, and institution.

Public Disclosure
Some parts of faculty searches are subject to public disclosure. The names of search committee members are public, as are the finalists for each position. Search committees should inform finalists at the time of inviting them to a campus interview that their names and curriculum vita will be publically disclosed for review. In the interest of protecting confidentiality in the beginning processes of the search however, search committees should not release applicant names beyond those members of the committee and other departmental or program personnel involved in the search. Additionally, no search-related documents should be released or circulated beyond committee members and other departmental or program personnel involved in the search.

Notification to Unsuccessful Candidates
Applicants make a significant investment of time to prepare their materials for application and deserve the courtesy of timely communication from the search committee. Search committees should be diligent in maintaining communication with all applicants regarding the process of the search. Unsuccessful applicants should be notified as soon as the decision has been made that the
applicant will no longer be considered for the position. These decisions may happen at many stages during the progress of the search and committees should notify applicants as soon as possible. Detailed explanations of why an applicant was not selected are neither required nor recommended. These notices can be sent through UC Davis Recruit and should be in order for the communication record to be documented in UC Davis Recruit.

Faculty searches are typically long processes and first-time applicants may not be aware of the timelines. It is important to maintain communication with applicants who are still under consideration so that they are aware of the process. Each communication with applicants should be considered an opportunity to present UC Davis Health System in a positive light, regardless of whether the department or program ultimately hires the applicant. Respectful communication with applicants underscores the desirability of coming to UC Davis either for the current search or future searches.