

## Recommendations for Ensuring the Integrity of Faculty Searches

### Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Please refer to the *FAS Appointment and Promotion Handbook* (available at <http://academic-appointments.fas.harvard.edu/>) for current policies and procedures for conducting faculty searches. The material below, culled from behavioral science evidence and departmental feedback, highlights critical moments in conducting tenure-track and senior searches. These moments deserve close attention to ensure that the search process has integrity and leads to the appointment of the best available candidates.

We recommend that all search committee members read this document before a search begins. Prior to each stage in the search process, the committee chair should remind the committee of the issues described in each section below:

1. Launching the search (page 1)
2. Narrowing the list (page 2)
3. Interviewing finalists and campus visits (page 4)
4. Departmental discussion and vote (page 5)

### **1. Launching the search**

- **Define the search** broadly so as not to focus too narrowly on subfields with few specialists. Fields grow and move in ways that we may not fully perceive at the start of a search, and the search definition should allow for applicants whose work may speak to us in unexpected ways. As you review candidates, consider not just the quality of the candidate but also the future importance of the area of work.

Because it is hard to predict where stellar candidates may emerge, the advertisement should be written in an open and non-exclusionary way. It is helpful to avoid characterizing (or internally conceiving of) a search as a direct replacement for a departing colleague.

Many exceptional candidates do not apply to Harvard because they feel that Harvard is out of reach. With this in mind, we encourage search committees to compose advertisements that sound welcoming to all candidates. Evidence has shown that barriers to entry, both perceived and real, may keep some of the best candidates from applying.

- Ensure that the **search committee membership** is diverse in academic perspectives as well as qualities such as career stage, gender, and ethnicity. The efficiency of a small committee of like-minded people should be balanced against the benefits of a larger committee of more than three members. The chair of the department is responsible for ensuring the diversity of the committee. The chair of the search committee is responsible for including expertise from around the University, as needed. Remember that tenure search committees should include a tenured faculty member from another department.

We recommend that, whenever possible, tenure-track faculty be included in the search committee (e.g., when conducting searches for tenure-track faculty). Tenure-track faculty are among the best detectors of talent among their peers, yet they can be less likely to offer suggestions unless asked. In general, signaling openness to information, advice, and

feedback (both within the department and when seeking input outside Harvard) should be maximized during a search.

- Before the search begins, the committee should discuss **methods for actively recruiting women and underrepresented minorities**. (E.g., talking with graduate students and colleagues at Harvard and elsewhere.) Why is this important? Availability and anchoring biases prevent us from thinking of people outside traditionally represented groups. Moreover, it often occurs that some names are mentioned early in the process, and those candidates may have a disproportionate likelihood of being advanced to the short list. In each discipline, some institutions appear to do an excellent job of recruiting women and minorities. Critical mass then plays a role in attracting other candidates. At a minimum, please post the advertisement in professional journals, websites, and listservs within the discipline, including those geared toward women and minorities. Whenever possible, the chair of the search committee should attend, in the year of the search, social gatherings organized by groups such as minority or women's caucuses at professional meetings. The signaling value of such attendance is greater than may be recognized.
- **Review data on past departmental searches** to understand the broader context of your search. Analysis shows that many Harvard departments do not keep pace with the pipeline of women Ph.D.s emerging from the Ivy+ schools. The FAS Office for Faculty Affairs can help you with data, as needed. The office of the Edgerley Family Dean of the FAS takes this issue seriously; we cannot lose the best talent to other institutions, due to avoidable failures of perception, detection, and prediction of talent.
- Before considering candidates, **discuss selection criteria** and a process for rating applications relative to teaching, research, and mentoring skills. Discuss how to weight different qualifications. Research has shown that people tend to generate selection criteria after they have become attached to a particular candidate, rather than having criteria in place and finding candidates who match them. Discussing criteria in the search committee is important for all searches. It is especially useful for fields undergoing changes in theoretical positions and methods, where new areas of expertise are in demand. There is nothing wrong with changing criteria during a search if the change is undertaken deliberately—for intellectual or professional reasons, and not as an unconscious response to a particular candidate.
- **Consider deadlines.** Posting your advertisement early is one of the simplest ways to advantage your search. Depending on the norms of your discipline, application deadlines will vary. Our peer institutions may have earlier deadlines than Harvard. If Harvard's January winter break delays your candidate interviews until February, you may be interviewing candidates who already have offers in hand. While norms differ according to discipline, we recommend that you consider conducting interviews as early in the academic year as possible.

## **2. Narrowing the list**

- As the committee moves towards narrowing the list, **review the search process** to determine whether sufficient effort has been made to recruit a diverse pool of candidates. Additional steps can always be taken to encourage women and minorities to apply for the position. Please take those steps now. Be cautious about assumptions that scholars are unavailable or

unmovable. Noteworthy candidates should not be ruled out from a sense that their partners will not move to the area. People's priorities can change if an offer is extended to them.

In searches for tenure-track faculty, ask tenure-track committee members to informally assess who might be missing. Write to other tenure-track colleagues in the department, asking if they know of outstanding candidates at other schools whom we might approach. If the candidates they mention have not applied, the committee should confer about the reason for the absences. The chair of the search can follow up with exceptional candidates.

- Include all committee members in the **evaluation process**. A study has shown that more equal distribution in conversational turn-taking—i.e., not having a few members dominate the conversation—is a stronger predictor of a team's ability to perform a task than either the averaged or maximum intelligence of individual team members. The chair of the search committee should encourage reticent members to offer their opinion.

Often, for expediency, a few committee members will read the full set of applications to narrow down the pool. We recommend that all committee members read a subset of the applications. This allows the committee's diversity to actually influence early choices.

As you narrow the pool to a medium list, apply criteria consistently to all candidates, even if your favored candidate ranks low on a particular criterion. Let the data stare back at you so that you can see (and possibly reshape) your judgment. At all times, adopt the stance that the search is an evolving process, rather than one that locks the door quickly. A nagging feeling that you could do better is a valid basis for revisiting decisions. Throughout the process, if committee members identify outstanding candidates who are not in the pool, the committee should follow up with these candidates.

- **Rank candidates on the criteria**, such as teaching, research, and mentoring capacity. Why? These criteria will be used not only in this search but also during associate and tenure reviews. Ask if the demands of your discipline *as it now exists* signal the need to expand the criteria by which to judge talent, e.g., the ability to collaborate across disciplines or to master new technologies. These are rarely considered when we think in traditional ways about talent; but they can matter when evaluating contributions over the course of a professorship.
- Recognize and be able to work through the **evaluation biases** that often affect the review of women and minorities. Evidence from the behavioral sciences repeatedly shows that people tend to underestimate women and minorities' qualifications when evaluating their applications and job talks. One approach is for the committee to first review applications from women and minority candidates. This can help the committee to avoid anchoring on a less representative group of candidates. Ask yourself, when you find yourself strongly preferring a particular candidate, why that may be the case. Irrelevant features (such as sharing an *alma mater*) may account for feelings of comfort and admiration that could influence the environment in which candidates are judged. Increasingly, the evidence shows that decisions are affected by the help that we provide some candidates over others. Because helping is a positive behavior, it is not likely to raise doubts, yet it can shape the outcome. Ask yourself how much a candidate's characteristics deviate from the culture's (and likely your own) image of the "strong" type of candidate. Remember, it is not your job to hire someone you like or a person with similar tastes in non-academic matters. Rather, you are here to hire somebody who will make the department strong, even after you have left Harvard.

- As the committee moves from the longer list to the short list, **consider including the top women and minorities**, or provide details on why these individuals were not on the short list. Why is this important and not a bias in itself? Several studies suggest that equal achievements are not regarded as equal. For example, a recent study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences showed that even today, men and women in academic settings like our own select men over equally qualified women. According to the study, people read identical accomplishments differently and tend to see males as more competent than females. In other studies in the employment setting, white Americans with a felony record fare just as well, and even better, than African-Americans with a clean record. We encourage you to ask yourself what you are doing to correct for what we know to be fairly widespread differences in evaluation. Be wary of “intuition” as your guide. Be prepared, and ask others, to explain a rejection or retention of a candidate due to “fit,” for example. “Fit” is often a proxy for factors that, upon consideration, should not influence our decisions. (Harvard is required under its affirmative action guidelines to provide information on why women or minorities were not chosen.)
- Please remember that the committee’s job is not to send a final list of potential interviewees to the Divisional Dean. Instead, this is a moment when the search committee chair will **discuss the short list with the Divisional Dean** and determine whether it represents the field and the applicant pool. If it does not, the chair should be ready to explain why and to work with the Divisional Dean to get further information before proceeding. As you know, in the absence of a compelling explanation, the Divisional Dean is obliged to require that the search committee reconsider the composition of the short list. For example, if the gender distribution in the pool is 50:50, the law of small numbers dictates that in a given year, your short list may consist entirely of all men or all women. If you bring such a list to the Divisional Dean, you will need to demonstrate that this is rare—by providing comparisons to short lists from preceding departmental searches and demonstrating that selection behavior is unbiased over time. Deans can understand an imbalanced short list, but multiple searches with all-female or all-male candidates signal a flawed decision process. Your best baseline is the pipeline of Ph.D.s emerging in your discipline from the top institutions. Seek out this information as a check on your process. So much of the final outcome of a search is determined by the short list.

### **3. Interviewing finalists and campus visits**

- It is very hard to create equal interviews for all candidates. Develop a **common set of “core” questions** for all candidates, to allow comparative judgment, and evaluate candidates’ responses according to the criteria developed earlier. These core questions should be supplemented with questions pertinent to each individual. Be aware that some questions cannot be asked, and learn what they are. *All faculty on search committees must read the attached “Guide to Unacceptable Interview Questions” and understand that it is illegal to base your hiring decisions on the answers to such questions.* If a candidate voluntarily provides information in non-permissible areas, the best practice is to make no further comments or inquiries, even if they seem harmless.
- **Schedule visits with consistency.** To acquire good comparative data, schedule equal time for each candidate (including internal candidates) to interview and to meet with as many of the same people as possible. While faculty schedules can be hard to coordinate, make sure

that at least a small core group of faculty, besides the search committee, meets with each candidate. Provide candidates with opportunities to interact with departmental faculty in multiple venues, both formal and informal, and remember that every aspect of the visit is not just part of the evaluation process, but is also an opportunity for recruitment. Adopt the perspective of the visiting candidate, and remember that the individual's experience can affect not only this recruitment but others in the future. Research shows that subtle indicators of dismissal or disrespect are easily detected, and this can impede progress for many years. (Many of us have heard candidates share vivid, unpleasant memories of decades-old interviews.)

- **Videotape job talks.** Strongly consider scheduling audio-visual staff to tape all job talks. Voting should occur only after all voting members unable to attend the job talk have viewed the video. Ideally, the tapes should be available online (with password protection) at the end of the day of the talk. Make a-v arrangements well in advance, and the search committee chair should share the link to the video as soon as it is ready.
- **Avoid informal discussions about the merits and demerits of a candidate outside scheduled search committee and departmental meetings.** During the interview day and immediately after, it is tempting to discuss candidates with individual colleagues. It is advisable not to do so, even informally, especially with others who have voting rights. This may be hard, but it allows for independence of thought and permits a diversity of perspectives to develop up until the moment of voting. Even comments made in passing can influence others and predetermine the outcome. Tenure-track colleagues who detect that a tenured colleague prefers a particular candidate may be less likely to speak up for another, possibly better candidate. More introverted colleagues, who do not offer assessments easily and loudly, may have less impact than they should. One suggested method is to ask faculty to write a brief evaluation of the candidate immediately after the interview day (memory can play tricks on assessments, so timing is important). These evaluations can be forwarded to an administrator who does not have voting rights. That administrator can make all evaluations (both received and actively solicited) available to the search committee for its deliberations, before the committee presents its views to the department.

#### **4. Departmental discussion and vote**

- It is important to avoid a truncated, hastily put-together discussion about the candidate. **Please schedule the department's meeting** at a time when the vast majority of members can attend. Avoid late afternoon and evening meetings whenever possible, as these times may be difficult for faculty members with family responsibilities. Allow sufficient time for discussion of the proposed candidate(s).

Some departments find it helpful to schedule a discussion meeting separate from a voting meeting, on two different days. This separation allows the discussion to "settle" before a vote occurs. Whether you have one meeting or two, a useful norm is for every voting member to offer an opinion before a vote is taken. Otherwise, a call for a vote can prematurely curtail discussion.

- During the discussion, the search committee should inform the department of both the criteria applied during the search and the efforts made to attract a diverse applicant pool. As there are pros and cons to each candidate, it is useful to mention both, so that faculty can weigh

these relative to the criteria. All discussants should **be alert to irrelevant factors influencing decisions.**

- Follow **consistent departmental procedure** for all candidates considered. Observe the “Guide to Unacceptable Interview Questions,” and do not allow discussion of impermissible considerations.

While the practices described in this document may initially seem difficult or strange, they emerge from evidence in the decision sciences that can help us to achieve our goal: to hire the strongest candidates for the faculty at Harvard.

**Attachment:** “Guide to Unacceptable Interview Questions”

**Online resources:**

1. FAS Office for Faculty Affairs (<http://facultyresources.fas.harvard.edu/fas-office-faculty-affairs>).
2. Website for FAS Faculty and Researchers (<http://facultyresources.fas.harvard.edu/>).
3. Harvard University Office of the Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity (<http://www.faculty.harvard.edu/>).
4. University of Michigan ADVANCE Program (<http://advance.umich.edu/>).