

Screening to Be Inclusive

The initial screening process consists in verifying the degree to which an applicant meets the stated minimum required qualifications including terminal degree, area of expertise/discipline, years of teaching, etc. The in-depth screening process is more qualitative in character than the initial screening. Here, the search committee examines all the material sent by the applicant with great care and assesses the degree to which the applicant has met or exceeded all the criteria established by the committee. The search committee may wish to gather further information through telephone or email contact with either the applicant or one or more of his/her references. If this additional contact is used, all similarly situated candidates must be treated the same.

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 full ad/job description. Note: The committee chair or members must prepare the screening sheets for this phase in the review and determine any evaluation weighting criteria **prior** to reviewing candidate applications. 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 must be evaluated by the same criteria; 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.

Women, individuals of color, and applicants from other underrepresented groups can face particular barriers in the screening process for faculty positions. Their backgrounds or resumes may look different because their educational starting point and other experiences have been different, they may have attended colleges/universities that are not as well known to majority faculty members as those the committee members may have attended, and their career paths may not be as traditional as those of majority faculty. Committees need to be aware of these differences and discuss how to objectively evaluate them. It is vital that the committee take the time to obtain more information if needed to fully assess a candidate, and be careful not to dismiss as less valuable or appropriate an institution or professional trajectory less familiar to them.

- 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 underrepresented populations as well. Committee members may sometimes favor younger candidates or those who look like fast and rising stars, who pursued graduate work immediately after the baccalaureate, and whose work history is

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- without interruption. The profile of such a candidate is often irresistible to committees, even if it is not always the best or closest match with all the preferred qualifications set forth in the job description. If the committee fails to look carefully and objectively at applicants whose educational or career paths did not follow a conventional or more common pattern, the committee may be missing an opportunity to hire a faculty member with life experience, maturity, and commitment that may make him/her a better teacher, creative scholar, and more well-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 can be an issue for applicants from low-income backgrounds, first generation college/advanced degree applicants, and those from non-majority groups. We know that talent can be nurtured at many different institutions, yet we are often initially attracted to those candidates who attended well-known institutions, because we expect their educational preparation to be high quality and that they are likely to be bright and talented because they were successful at such an institution. But committees should remember that talented and equally qualified candidates from non-majority racial or ethnic backgrounds may 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. Equally talented women and students of color may not have the same opportunities to work with highly visible leaders in the field, reducing their access to networks for future jobs and influential references.

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:

- Include persons from underrepresented groups on search committees and throughout the search process.
- If there are questions about unfamiliar credentials, before dismissing an applicant's candidacy, take time to become more familiar. Contact schools or other resources. Incorporate a phone interview stage and ask follow up questions or for additional materials of all candidates at that stage in the process. Or contact the nominator or references to clarify any points of concern.
- Focus on the full spectrum of experiences, qualifications, and expertise that

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candidates 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, videotaping, 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 taped interviews or video conferencing.