Recruiting New Colleagues Tip Sheet: Equitable Evaluation of Candidates

Before considering the following tips for an intentionally equitable evaluation of applicants and potential candidates, take into account the following 3 overarching questions:

a) What were elements of your application that you hoped the search committee would consider when you applied for your current position?
b) What kind of "weight" should different demographic and identity factors play in how the search committee will evaluate those in the applicant pool? More importantly, why?
c) How confident am I that members of the search committee, and the department or unit at large, will trust the search committee to take into account a broad range of factors when narrowing down the applicant pool? If confidence is "low" what can be done about that sooner than later?

The responses to each of these questions will help you and the search committee focus on the toughest aspect of any search - selecting on-campus interview candidates - while helping frame layered and complex discussions around collegiality, inclusion, equity, etc.

General Tips for Equitable Evaluation of Applicants

- Develop a systemic, straight-forward "applicant evaluation tool," to ensure that each search committee is evaluating applicants in a consistent manner
    - The evaluation tool should include valid criteria based on the profession's standards of practice, ethics, mission statements, etc.
    - The evaluation tool should be used not only as a tool to ensure accountability for the evaluation process, but also to ensure accountability for the search committee
- Discuss and determine the role that "prestige" will play in the evaluation process, and development of an "applicant evaluation tool," including but not limited to:
    - Prestige of degree-granting institution
    - Prestige of institution where the applicant was most recently affiliated
    - Prestige of publication outlets, commissions, and/or funding resources
    - Prestige of presentations, conferences, and/or workshops
    - When considering the role of "prestige," note the level of fairness and equity that went into assigning "prestige" to the related institution, journal, association, etc.
- It is becoming more common to ask candidates to share their philosophies, thoughts, experience, etc. around diversity and inclusion. If the search committee decides to ask for such a statement, it is important that the unit or department have its own statement on diversity and inclusion on an appropriate website, as well as anticipate answering questions related to diversity and inclusion
- "Schemas" can be defined as templates we hold for how certain aspects of others' identities might influence their actions, values, beliefs, interests, etc. Consequently, understand and acknowledge the influence that "schemas" have when evaluating candidates, such as:
    - Parental and Partner Status schemas
    - Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation schemas
    - Race, Ethnicity, Country-of-Origin, Second Language Learner, Immigration Status, Socio-Economic schemas
- "Proxies" can be defined as "summaries" of an applicant's work. For example, rather than reading or reviewing an applicant's entire collection of programming initiatives or publications, an evaluator relies on "proxies" such as a CV or letter of recommendation that "speak" to the quality of an applicant's expertise, success, etc. Two things to consider when using "proxies:"
    - How valid are the "proxies" themselves? (e.g., the recommender's reputation)

    - How consistently will the process of using “proxies” be across the entire applicant pool?

General Tips for Search Committees

- Before you start reviewing applicants in earnest, test the interrater reliability of the committee by selecting 2 or 3 application dossiers and separately using the “applicant evaluation tool,” then coming back together as a search committee and discussing your ratings of those applicants
- Discuss and, if possible, critique the “prestige” assigned to journals, commissioning bodies, quality of previous institutions, particularly as it relates to possible biases and/or inequitable treatment of members from underrepresented groups in those organizations and/or processes
- If considering the use of Diversity and Inclusions statements, it is not necessary to require them from all applicants; however, strongly consider using them when narrowing down the list of overall applicants to a “short list” from which 3-4 on-campus interviews will be offered
- If asking for Diversity and Inclusion statements, make sure to link to Departmental or Unit statements on diversity and inclusion, as well as the ODI Website
- The most effective ways for Search Committees to address the impact of “schemas” on the search process is for members to talk about “schemas,” along with “stereotypes,” “biases,” etc. Once “schemas” have been identified and acknowledged, it becomes easier to control for their influence. And consulting with members of the ODI team, as well as colleagues in HR, can help ameliorate the difficulty that comes with having these discussions.
- The use of “proxies” is not as limiting as conflating “prestige” with “proxies.” For example, references and letters of recommendation are extremely important when evaluating potential colleagues. However, caution should be used when assigning more “weight” (in other words, “prestige”) to a recommender because she works at school X and another recommender works at school Y. Even something as simple as one CV was “written better than another CV” is assigning a disproportionate amount of “weight” to one CV-as-proxy versus another, and is actually more a test of one’s writing or organization abilities than it is the caliber of their work or their potential success as a colleague. For these reasons, at the very least discuss the “process of evaluating proxies” among the search committee membership.