Best Practices for Search Committees

Pool Development
- Broad search definitions produce diverse applicant pools.[1] Language matters. The description should not just encourage women and minorities to apply. More assertive language could include, for example, "The search committee is especially interested in qualified candidates who can contribute, through their research, teaching, and / or service, to the diversity and excellence of the academic community."[2]
- Expanded recruitment sources also produce diverse applicant pools. Active search committees will identify and contact graduate programs with high numbers of women and minority PhD candidates and utilize databases and fellowship directories that identify outstanding and diverse candidates.
- When asking colleagues at other schools about potential applicants, follow-up with a second question: "Do you know any good women or minorities?" This often introduces an entirely new set of qualified candidates.

Candidate Selection
- Make multiple lists with multiple criteria (Georgi, 2000).
- Use a candidate evaluation form. Discuss these forms in search committee meetings. Rater accountability has been shown to increase the accuracy and objectivity of ratings (Mero & Motowidlo, 1995).
- Encourage a discussion format that requires contributions from all members. Asking each member of the committee to comment on a candidate ensures that a vocal minority does not dominate the discussion. This format also provides an incentive for everyone to "do their homework."
- Do not eliminate a name from the list for personal reasons (e.g., dual-career needs) until you have actively tried to recruit the candidate. Often, qualified potential candidates are struck from the list based on assumptions about their personal life.[3]

Identifying Unconscious Bias Both men *and* women hold unconscious biases. Research has shown that the brain employs these biases to make sense of complex situations. These biases disproportionately affect minorities, and can be found in:

- **Letters of Recommendation** A study of over 300 recommendation letters for successful medical faculty applicants found that letters for females were shorter, placed less emphasis on research, more emphasis on teaching, contained more "grindstone adjectives" such as "hardworking" and "diligent," contained twice as many "doubt raisers," and were less likely to include "stand-out" adjectives such as "brilliant" and "superb" (Trix & Psenka, 2003).
- **Performance Evaluation** Social psychology research has found that both men and women are more likely to hire a male applicant than a female applicant with an identical record (Steinpres et al., 1999). Deaux & Emswiller (1974) found that success is more frequently attributed to "skill" for males and "luck" for females, even when the evaluators are presented with evidence of equal success for both genders. Beginning in the 1970s symphony orchestras started requiring musicians to audition behind screens; since that time, the number of women hired has increased fivefold and the probability that a woman will advance from preliminary rounds has increased by 50% (Goldin and Rouse, 2000).
- **Publications** A study of postdoctoral fellowships awarded by the Medical Research Council in Sweden found that women candidates needed substantially more publications to achieve the same rating as men, unless they personally knew someone on the panel (Wenneras and Wold, 1997).
- **Small Numbers** Research has shown that women and minorities are judged more fairly when they are at least 30% of the applicant pool (Sackett et al., 1991; Heilman, 1980).

Search Committee Composition
A diverse search committee is often an important factor in identifying and attracting a wide range of talented candidates. Efforts should be made to include women and minorities on hiring committees, perhaps by utilizing faculty from adjoining departments.

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[1] *See, e.g.,* CU Presidential Advisory Committee on Diversity Initiatives Working Paper, 2005; Smith et al., 2004.

[2] Excerpt from the University of Michigan Faculty Handbook, 2004-2005

[3] *See, e.g.,* American Physical Society Best Practices for Recruiting Women

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Guide to Acceptable Interview Questions

It is essential for all members of a search committee to be aware of these guidelines and follow them in both spirit and letter. Avoid any direct or indirect questions that touch on material that may not be asked. This information about an applicant should never be discussed with regard to his or her candidacy for a position.

Sources: Harvard Office of Human Resources, MIT Faculty Search Committee Handbook (2002).

Subject	What May Be Asked	What May NOT Be Asked
Name	Whether the applicant has worked for the University under another name. Whether any other information, such as a nickname or initials, is needed to check the candidate's work and educational record.	Maiden name of a married woman. Inquiries about the name that would seek to elicit information about the candidate's ancestry or descent.
Age	Discussion should be kept to questions about the applicant's career stage.	Inquiry into the date of birth or age of an applicant.
Gender	No questions.	Inquiry into an applicant's maiden name or any question that pertains to only one sex.
Sexual Orientation	No questions.	Inquiry into applicant's sexuality.
Religion	No questions.	Inquiry into an applicant's religious denomination, affiliation, church, parish, pastor, or religious holidays observed. Avoid any questions regarding organizations and/or affiliations that would identify religion.
Birthplace	No questions.	Birthplace of applicant. Birthplace of applicant's parents, spouse, or other close relatives.
Relatives	Names of applicant's relatives already employed by Harvard.	Names, addresses, ages, number, or other information concerning applicant's children or other relatives not employed by Harvard.

Subject	What May Be Asked	What May NOT Be Asked
National Origin	An employer may require an employee to produce documentation that evidences his or her identity and employment eligibility under federal immigration laws.	Inquiry into the applicant's lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, parentage, or nationality; nationality of parents or spouse; applicant's native language.
Citizenship	"Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?"	Any inquiries about citizenship or whether the applicant intends to become a U.S. citizen.
Language	What languages do you read fluently? Write fluently? Speak fluently?	Inquiries into how applicant acquired the ability to read, write, or speak a foreign language.
Disability	You can ask an applicant about his or her ability to perform job-related functions, as long as the questions are not phrased in terms which would elicit whether the applicant has a disability.	Inquiry into whether the applicant has a physical or mental disability/handicap or about the nature or severity of the disability/handicap. Inquiry into whether an applicant has ever been addicted to illegal drugs or treated for drug abuse/alcoholism Inquiry into whether an applicant has AIDS. Inquiry into whether an applicant has ever received workers' compensation. Inquiry into whether an applicant has ever been hospitalized/treated for medical or mental health conditions. Inquiry into whether an applicant has ever been absent from work due to illness. An employer may not inquire as to the nature, severity, treatment, or prognosis of an obvious handicap or disability or of a hidden disability or handicap voluntarily disclosed by the applicant.
Marital Status	No questions.	Are you married? Where does your spouse work? What are the ages of your children, if any? What was your maiden name?

Subject	What May Be Asked	What May NOT Be Asked
Address	Applicant's place of residence.	Do you rent or own your home? How long at each particular address?
Notice of Case of Emergency	Name and address of person to be noticed in case of an accident or emergency.	n/a
Height, Weight, Strength	Questions regarding height, weight, or strength may be asked only if the employer can prove these requirements are necessary to do the job.	n/a
Photograph	No questions.	An employer cannot ask for a photograph to accompany an application.
Military	Applicant's work experience, including names, addresses of previous employers, dates of employment, reasons for leaving.	Inquiry into an applicant's general military experience or type of discharge.
Criminal Record	Inquiry into actual convictions (not arrests) that relate reasonably to fitness to perform a particular job.	Inquiry relating to arrests. Any inquiry or check into a person's arrest, court, or conviction record if not substantially related to functions and responsibilities of the prospective employment.
Education	Inquiry into the academic, vocational, or professional education of an applicant for employment.	Questions about education designed to determine how old the applicant is.
Experience	Inquiry into work experience. Inquiry into countries the applicant has visited. Inquiry into references.	Inquiry into the organizations of which the applicant for employment is a member, the nature, name or character of which would likely disclose the applicant's protected class status.
Organizations	Are you a member of any professional societies or organizations? (Exclude organizations the name or character of which indicates the race, creed, color, or national origin of its members.)	Inquiry into applicant's membership in nonprofessional organizations (e.g., clubs, lodges, etc.)