Faculty Hiring: Best Practices for Search Committees

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1. Introduction

The UD ADVANCE Institute has as its broad goal diversifying and strengthening University of Delaware's (UD’s) faculty. Originally funded by a National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE Institutional Transformation award, the Institute's research-driven initiatives aim to increase the representation and advancement of under-represented faculty and to support a campus climate conducive to the success of all faculty. Towards these ends, this manual is a resource for faculty search committees that outlines research-based best practices for hiring excellent and diverse faculty members.
Evidence that recruiting for excellence is not orthogonal to diversity can be found in a longitudinal case study on the representation of women STEM faculty at MIT. The figure above shows the number of women faculty in MIT’s School of Sciences from 1960 to 2010. Notice that prior to 1972, there were only one or two women in the School of Sciences. That number rose in a 3-year window (1972-75), but then plateaued. A second increase occurred from 1997-2000, followed by another plateau. What caused these increases? In 1972 Title IX was passed as a follow-up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 1996, a group of senior women faculty provided the Dean with evidence of gender-based inequities in resources and support. After a detailed equity study confirmed their concerns, the Dean worked to improve equity and to recruit women faculty in the School of Sciences. The second plateau occurred when this Dean left MIT in 2000. Below are some key take-aways from this study.

- **Excellence is not orthogonal to diversity.**
  
  Follow-up research on research productivity and professional status showed that the women hired in the School of Sciences were as successful as the men.

- **Leadership is critical.**
  
  It took the heft of the Federal Government, and then of the Dean, to support and to steer the faculty into selecting excellent and diverse faculty.

- **Efforts to diversify must be active and on-going.**
  
  The increases that occurred in association with Title IX became the “new normal”. Consequently, further increases in the number of women faculty stalled. It took a Dean’s active intervention in 1997 to disrupt the new normal and, once again, apply active efforts to recruit diverse faculty.

This manual is largely organized around the search committee process. Sections 2-4 focus on the early stages of the search. Section 5-7 focus on the processes leading up to, and including, the virtual and campus interviews. The final section gives suggestions on following up on the offer and beyond. Appendices take a deeper look into certain steps in the process and provide specific tools and policies that will help search committees along the way.

### 2. Before the Search

There are things that Departments can do before the search process begins to help support a productive and effective search process. For example,

- **The department should have regular discussions about faculty hiring priorities.**
  
  - Keep priorities broad to allow for more flexibility at other stages in the process.

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1 Revised from Hopkins, MIT Faculty Newsletter, no. 4, XVIII, 2006.
Example: If the department has needs in more than one area, consider phrasing the request as “area A or area B.” It may be the case that the department later decides to focus on one of these areas, but this can be adjusted when writing the job ad.

- Avoid thinking in terms of replacing a specific departed faculty member. Think of hiring as an opportunity to build the department in a desired direction.
  ◦ **Cultivate a pipeline of potential candidates, even in years when you are not hiring.**

- Establish a tradition of faculty attending disciplinary meetings and reporting back on attendees who may be good potential hires. Be sure to make note of academically excellent under-represented scholars.
- Invite potential candidates to give seminars in your department, even if they’re not yet looking for jobs.
  ◦ **Attend a UD ADVANCE Faculty Recruitment Workshop**

### 3. Writing the Job Advertisement

The language of the job advertisement can make a difference to who does and does not apply. Studies show, for example, that women are less likely than men to apply for positions in which they do not see themselves as an excellent fit.\(^2\) For this reason and others, special attention should be given to creating a description that is likely to yield an inclusive pool of candidates. For example,

- **Develop a broad definition of the position, desired experience, disciplinary background, etc.**
  - Be clear about what is required and what is preferred. To ensure a deep and diverse pool, when appropriate, use “preferred” instead of “required,” “should” instead of “must,” etc., when describing qualifications and developing criteria.
  - **Incorporate diversity and inclusion language in the job advertisement.**
    - Find out if your unit has required or recommended language and act accordingly.
    - You may also want to include more specific language to convey departmental priorities around diversity, such as:
      
      “The department is interested in candidates who can teach or mentor a diverse student population.”
      
      “The department seeks candidates who can address diversity and equity in research and teaching.”
      
    - If the search committee plans to require that all applicants submit a diversity statement, instructions for what to include in that statement should be part of the

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job ad. See Appendix A: The Use of Diversity Statements in Faculty Hiring.

- Consider mentioning UD’s family-friendly policies and procedures. For example:
  
  “A recipient of a NSF ADVANCE Institutional Transformation award, UD has services to assist dual-career couples and supports work-life balance through family-friendly policies.”

- To reach a diversity of applicants, be sure to distribute the ad widely.

4. The Initial Committee Meeting

Schedule the first committee meeting as early in the process as possible. This will leave time to actively recruit strong candidates and allow plenty of time for fair and thorough evaluation. It may also increase your chances of making an early and successful offer. Below is a list of topics to be covered at the first meeting.

- Clarify the charge of the committee.
  - Is it to provide a ranked list of finalists for a departmental vote?
  - Is it simply to identify which candidates to bring to campus?
  - Etc.
- Overview the main steps of the search process and establish a broad timeline.
  - Application deadline.
  - Deciding on the long short list.
  - Conducting virtual interviews.
  - Campus visits.
  - Making the offer.
- Discuss specific roles and duties played by individual committee members such as…
  - the role of the search committee chair, the role(s) played by members acting as representatives of specific programs, etc.
- Decide how decisions will be made, either by consensus or by majority vote.
- Decide whether absentee votes will be allowed.
- Establish ground rules surrounding confidentiality; be clear on who may or may not contact candidates and under what conditions.
- Discuss active recruitment and plan steps to deepen the pool. You will need to submit information on this step via Talent Link
  - See Appendix B: Active Recruitment of Faculty Candidates
Create an evaluation tool based on agreed upon criteria for creating the long short list. You will need to submit information on this step before the finalist pool is approved.

See Appendix C: Tips for Creating Evaluation Tools for Faculty Searches

5. Fair Evaluation of Candidates

Our brains constantly receive and handle an overwhelming flow of information. Cognitive shortcuts are a tool that our brains use to filter, sort, and analyze information to help us solve problems and make quick decisions. Often these decisions are trivial (e.g., what to have for lunch) and cognitive shortcuts do no harm. However, cognitive shortcuts can cause us to make incorrect decisions based on stereotypes, which in turn can lead to biased outcomes. Bias in selection processes is well documented in social science literature. Here are only a few examples:

- Researchers in Sweden conducted a systematic review of actual applications for a prestigious postdoctoral fellowship after noticing that women tended to receive a significantly small proportion of the awards compared to men. The study discovered bias in the review process. The review panel scores for women applicants was far lower than that of male applicants of equivalent research accomplishments. In particular, women applicants had to be 2.5 times as productive to have received the same rating as men applicants from the fellowship review board.\(^3\)

- A study asked STEM faculty to evaluate applications for an undergraduate lab manager position. All CVs provided were identical, except that some had a male and some had a female name. The faculty (both men and women) rated applicants with a male name as more competent and more hirable than applicants with a female name. Moreover, the faculty would offer the male candidate more mentoring and more salary than the female candidate.\(^4\)

- A follow-up study asked physics and biology faculty to evaluate applications for a postdoctoral research position in their field. This time the CVs were identical except they had different names to suggest not only candidate gender, but also race/ethnicity. Physics faculty showed preference for male candidates over female and for White and Asian candidates over Black and Latinx. Biology faculty showed preference for Asian candidates over Black and Latinx.\(^5\)

When we are on a search committee we are tasked to process a lot of information in a short amount of time in order to make decisions. This is exactly the type of setting in which our brains revert to the ease of relying on cognitive shortcuts. However, the decisions we are making when


we evaluate faculty candidates are too important to risk errors and bias, like the ones evidenced in the studies described above.

The good news is we can structure our evaluation process to minimize the impact of cognitive shortcuts. In fact, as a result of the Swedish postdoc study described above, the sponsoring agency of the fellowships strategically overhauled their review processes for all their postdoctoral fellowships and as a result they achieved gender parity in awarding fellowships. Here are strategies that can be used when evaluating applications in order to ensure fairness and achieve the highest quality results:

Optimize Conditions for Evaluation

- **Minimize distractions such as exhaustion, hunger, and competing activities.** Distractions increase the probability of defaulting to intuitive, often unjustified, conclusions.
- **Mix up the order in which committee members review applications.** For example, some can sort applications by name from A to Z and others from Z to A. Others can review in the order submitted. Etc. The idea is to make sure each application is reviewed by at least one fresh set of eyes.

- Evaluate all applicants based upon the criteria you agreed upon as a committee during your first committee meeting.
- Create an evaluation tool for each committee member to use to record ratings and comments about the candidates. *See Appendix C: Tips for Creating Evaluation Tools for Faculty Searches*
- Each committee member should review applications independently. To avoid influencing one another, avoid conversations about candidates before the committee meeting for creating the long short list.
- In some cases, committee chairs may request evaluation summaries on each candidate be submitted before the long short list meeting.
- Bring your completed evaluation tool to the committee meeting when you discuss candidates.

6. **Creating the Long Short List & Virtual Interviews**

Once each committee member has had time to review each candidate according to previously agreed upon evaluation criteria, the search committee will meet to create a long short list. This is a semi- finalist pool of candidates (~ 8-12) that the committee will interview virtually. This

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pool must be approved through Talent Link by the Department Chair and Dean prior to the start of the virtual interviews.

*Here are some tips on how to create a semi-finalist pool of candidates.*

◦ Each committee member shares the candidates that they evaluated as *yes* and as *no*.
◦ Keep or drop those candidates in which there is consensus. In the absence of consensus, err on the side of keeping a candidate.
◦ Carefully discuss the remaining candidates. Refer to the committee’s developed criteria/evaluation tool if you need to defend one of your favored candidates. This will keep the conversation on track relative to the agreed-upon criteria.
◦ Loop back to see if you missed anyone, especially if your long short list is not diverse.
◦ If the semi-finalist list is too long, carefully discuss which candidates should be cut and why. Again, keep the conversation focused on the committee’s agreed-upon criteria.
◦ Follow the “search committee general practices” listed on p. 4 (above).

**Avoid the Slippery Slope**

- It is not uncommon for evaluation criteria to shift in the process of the search.
- Sometimes this occurs to accommodate a preferred candidate but can occur for other reasons as well.
- To avoid this, verify that the committee is using mutually agreed upon criteria. Refer back to these criteria throughout the discussion of candidates.
- Sometimes discussion reveals a need to adjust evaluation criteria. This is okay as long as the adjustments fit with agreed upon hiring priorities and are not an ad hoc means of accommodating a preferred candidate.

**Virtual Interviews**

Once the committee has settled on a long short list, committees often rely on virtual interviews (or phone calls) to evaluate these candidates. To help ensure fair evaluation at this step of the process, consider the following practices.

◦ Use your agreed-upon selection criteria to help you structure interview questions.
◦ Use the same questions for all candidates. Bias can be reduced with structured interviews and common questions.
◦ Use best practices in conducting virtual interviews.

*See Appendix D: Conducting A Good Virtual Interview*
7. Creating the Finalist Pool & Campus Visits

The finalist pool is the set of candidates (~3-4) to be invited for campus interviews. The finalist pool must be reviewed and approved by the administration prior to the start of campus visits. The committee will need to submit two pieces of information at this stage:

1. Describe the process or evaluation tool(s) used to evaluate candidates,
2. Describe the active steps taken to create a diverse and highly qualified applicant pool.

Do not contact any candidates before the finalist pool has been approved.

The committee will likely want to create a new set of evaluation criteria at this stage.

- These criteria should be consistent with the job description and should be based on the expectations related to research, teaching, and service.
- It is important for the committee to agree on the relative importance of the different criteria.

Campus Interviews

When it comes to campus interviews, it is important to keep in mind that the candidates are evaluating your department and UD as much as you are evaluating them.

Below are some planning steps to take prior to the campus visit. For each candidate...

- Review accessibility accommodations offered through UD’s Office of Disability Support Services and communicate these options to each candidate.
- Ask whether the candidate would like to meet with people in other departments or social circles.
- When creating the candidate’s on campus schedule, avoid over or under-scheduling.
- Create a welcome packet with the following types of information:
  - Departmental graduate and undergraduate programs.
  - Departmental policies related to mentoring, etc.
  - UD ADVANCE Resources: Family Friendly & Dual Career Brochures
    Visit the UD ADVANCE website or contact advance for copies of the following brochures.
    
    Dual Career Services at University of Delaware
    Family-Friendly Policies for Faculty at University of Delaware

Once the candidates are on campus...

- Keep in mind that some questions are not appropriate during an interview. A good rule of thumb is to stick to professional (not social) content in one’s discussions with the candidate.

See Appendix 3. Interview Questions to Avoid

- Reduce the influence of unconscious bias by keeping the interviews structured and similar. Consider, for example, using common questions for each candidate. This does not preclude
unstructured discussion or individualized questions

- All committee members, and ideally all faculty, should meet with each candidate and should attend each candidate’s job talk.
  - Consider videotaping the job talk for those faculty members who are unable to attend.

- Create a questionnaire for each faculty member to fill out, a standardized evaluative feedback to be sent to the committee immediately after each visit.

- When the campus visits are over and it is time to vote on and discuss candidates, be sure to avoid the slippery slope (as referenced above).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dual Career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Candidates will often have a partner who also needs a job in the area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- You may not ask if this is a consideration; however, the candidate may volunteer this information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- During the interview, make sure candidates receive info on UD’s dual-career assistance (UD ADVANCE can supply brochures).</td>
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<tr>
<td>- If a dual-career request comes up, being able to act quickly makes a big difference.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. **Closing the Deal & Beyond**

The work of the search committee does not end when you turn over the committee/department recommendation to the chair/dean. Now that you have found the best candidate for your position, you want to make sure that they get an offer and that they accept your offer. Here are some suggestions for how the search committee can remain involved:

- Keep updated on the progress of the offer.
  
  Is it moving along in a timely manner? Is the candidate receiving all needed information?

- Support your candidate’s negotiations for success.

- Dual career? Start-up? Etc.

When the candidate accepts the offer, welcome your new colleague to UD. If s/he is an assistant professor, consider checking with the department chair to make sure a formal mentor is assigned before the semester begins. It is never too early to start mentoring a new colleague to success!
Appendix A. The Use of Diversity Statements in Faculty Hiring

Institutions are increasingly requiring diversity statements as part of the academic hiring process, with the broad aim of enhancing diversity and inclusiveness on university campuses. It is important to note, however, there are a variety of more specific goals that might be achieved with the use of diversity statements as well as a variety of ways to use them in the search process. Therefore, search committees should give careful attention to a number of factors when deciding whether and how to use diversity statements. Below are some questions for discussion to help committees make these decisions.

What is a diversity statement?
Diversity statements often include a description of a candidate’s contributions to diversity in their professional lives as well as plans for the future.

What is the committee trying to achieve by requiring diversity statements?
The use of diversity statements might serve a number of valuable purposes, such as...
- To send a message that the department or the institution values diversity.
- To attract a diverse pool of applicants.
- To identify faculty who have demonstrated skills or interest in supporting diversity and inclusion efforts within the department or on campus.
- To give search committees a tangible way to make diversity a part of the search process.

There are also some perceived drawbacks associated with the use of diversity statements, such as...
- Some are concerned that requiring diversity statements will discourage some candidates from applying.
- For international candidates, it can be difficult to understand diversity and inclusion in the U.S. context.
- Search committees may not know how to effectively use and evaluate diversity statements.

It is also important to be aware that requests for diversity statements in faculty hiring is a relatively new phenomenon. Consequently, there is very little research on their effectiveness for achieving these or related goals. Additionally, some have argued that there are potential drawbacks associated with the use of diversity statements.

What type of equity and inclusion projects or goals do you hope to achieve with this hire?

There are a number of ways in which an individual can contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The committee should discuss departmental or institutional priorities as well as the type of contribution(s) that they expect of their future colleague. For example, is the committee seeking...
- a candidate who can teach and/or mentor an increasingly diverse student population?
- a candidate who can support K-12 outreach and/or pipeline building?
- a candidate who addresses diversity and equity in one’s research or teaching?
- a candidate who can support diversity related initiatives on campus or in the community.

How should the request for a diversity statement be framed in the job advertisement?

Because of the variety of ways in which an individual can contribute to equity and inclusion in one’s professional life, the job advertisement should be as specific as possible about the type of contribution(s) expected of a successful candidate. Ideally, these should be linked to departmental and institutional priorities as discussed...
above. Below are examples of requests for diversity statements from a variety of job ads. It is up to the committee to determine the type of description that best fits their departmental culture and needs.

Emory University is committed to student and faculty diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the diversity statement, applicants should reflect upon their experience and vision regarding the teaching and mentorship of students from diverse backgrounds. (Emory Univ., Faculty Position, July 10, 2019, chroniclevitea.com)

To be in a better position to serve a fast growing and highly diverse student body, and to fulfill the University’s commitment to promoting diversity, inclusiveness, and excellence on our campus, we actively seek candidates with demonstrated experience working with, teaching or mentoring students from under-represented communities. (San Diego State Univ., Faculty Position, July 17, 2019, chroniclevitea.com)

The required [Diversity Statement] should be no longer than 2 pages and should discuss how the candidate would help achieve Angelo State University’s goal to attract and graduate more women, Hispanic, and students from other under-represented groups. (Angelo State, Faculty Position, Engineering)

In addition to the materials noted above, applicants should also submit a one-page diversity statement that discusses past or future contributions to inclusive excellence in the areas of research, teaching and/or outreach. (U. Mass. Amherst, Faculty Position, July 22, 2019, chroniclevitea.com).

**How will you assess the diversity statement?**

The search committee should create evaluation criteria for assessing a candidate’s potential for contributing to equity and inclusion projects and goals as expressed in his or her diversity statement. Include specific diversity metrics in the assessment rubric used to generate the long short list. The committee members should discuss how much weight they want to assign to a candidate’s potential for contributing to diversity and inclusion projects and priorities. More suggestions for assessing diversity statements can be found here: [U of Washington Tips for Assessing Diversity Statements](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/developing-and-writing-a-diversity-statement/)

**What are some other ways to include diversity and inclusion in the search process?**

If the committee is not sure it wants to use a diversity statement, but still has an interest in making diversity an explicit part of the search process, consider one or more of the following options.

- Follow best practices for writing a job ad to communicate the value of diversity and to deepen the pool. For suggestions see [Stewart & Valian, 2018. Recruiting Excellent and Diverse Faculty, Inside Higher Ed](https://chronicle.com/jobs/article/Recruiting-Excellent-and-Diverse-Faculty/).
- Active and ongoing recruitment is an important part of the search process. Think broadly and creatively about recruiting candidates. Contact colleagues and ask them for names of potential candidates. Call candidates and invite them to apply. When you call, focus on their qualifications and experiences that make them a good candidate for the job. More suggestions for deepening the candidate pool can be found here: [UD-ADVANCE, Active Recruitment of Faculty Candidates](https://www.udadvance.org/active-recruitment-profitable).
- Ask a question during the skype interview stage about the candidates’ experience and ideas for contributing to equity and inclusion projects and priorities.

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Appendix B. Active Recruitment of Faculty Candidates

Recruiting a strong and diverse pool of candidates is critical to hiring for excellence. Nothing you do later in the search process can make up for a shortage of excellent candidates. Growing the pool requires a conscious effort—placing an ad and waiting for applications is not sufficient. Some excellent candidates may not see themselves in your advertised position without some encouragement. Think broadly and creatively about recruiting candidates, and do so continuously, not just when the search process gets under way. This is a responsibility not just for members of the search committee, but for all faculty interested in maintaining and improving the level of scholarship in the department.

Tips for Building a Large and Diverse Pool of Candidates

- When writing the ad, develop a broad definition of the position and the desired scholarship, experience, and disciplinary background. Be clear about what is really required and what is preferred. If appropriate, use “preferred” instead of “required,” “should” instead of “must,” etc., when describing qualifications and developing criteria.
- Consider including “experience working with/teaching diverse groups/diverse students” as one of your preferred criteria in the job ad.
- Contact colleagues at a wide range of institutions and ask them to suggest potential candidates. Faculty not on the search committee can do this as well. Be sure to ask specifically for the names of women and underrepresented minority candidates.
- Follow up by calling potential women and underrepresented minority candidates and encouraging them to apply. Cite their work and tell them why they are a good candidate for your position. Meet with prospective candidates at conferences or during seminar visits to their home departments.
- Make lists of professional meetings, societies, members of these societies, etc., and use them to recruit candidates. Many professional societies include faculty search events in their programs.
- Consider recruiting established faculty at other smaller institutions. If they already have a record of accomplishment, it is easier to evaluate their likelihood of doing well in your open position.
- Think long term and cultivate your pipeline of potential candidates even in years when you are not hiring. Establish a tradition in your department of faculty attending meetings and reporting back in the fall on attendees who may be good potential hires.
- Invite potential candidates to give seminars in your department, even if they’re not yet looking for jobs. If they have a good experience, they may be more encouraged to apply for positions at UD in future years. It also gives them the opportunity to add to their CV and practice their talk.

Above all, remember that at this point your goal is to expand your pool of potential candidates. Sifting and winnowing will occur later in the process.
Appendix C. Tips for Creating Evaluation Tools for Faculty Searches

Successful search processes begin with fair evaluation of candidates based on their qualifications for the position, rather than falling back on personal preferences or biases. This document provides tips for creating evaluation tools to support fair and consistent evaluations of all applicants.

The committee will need to submit information on this step in Talent Link as part of the hiring process.

An evaluation tool lists no more than six agreed upon qualifications for the position.

◦ Related in part to different hiring priorities, evaluation tools will differ greatly from search to search.
◦ The committee may want different evaluations tools for different stages of the search process (creation of the semi-finalist pool, finalist pool, etc.)

Here are some steps for committees to follow in the creation of such tools:

1. Start by specifying ‘required’ qualifications. A candidate lacking such qualifications will receive no further consideration. Some examples…
   - Degree and area of specialization requirements.
   - Post-doc experience, rank, etc.

2. Create a list of ~ five desired qualifications and methods of measurement. The examples below can be used to get the conversation started. Committees should make adjustments to fit their hiring needs.
   - Past research productivity. Measured in terms of…
     ◦ Number of publications. Possibly also expectations surrounding co-authorship.
     ◦ Journal quality.
     ◦ One’s evaluation of the published research itself.
   - Research potential. Broadly measured in terms of quality and creativity of research program.
     ◦ Has the candidate clearly communicated a coherent and feasible vision for future research?
     ◦ Is the proposed research creative, innovative, or novel?
     ◦ Is it appropriate in scope – i.e., not too broad with potential to grow over time?
   - Ability to secure grant funding.
     ◦ Does the candidate have past success or experience writing grants?
     ◦ Does the proposed research align priorities of relevant funding agencies?
   - Ability to contribute to graduate and/or undergraduate programs.
     ◦ Alignment between research area and/or past teaching experience with departmental teaching priorities. Be specific and discuss the relative importance of different priorities.
     ◦ Amount of past teaching experience and/or experiences related to teaching.
     ◦ Clear and careful communication of teaching goals, approaches to meeting those goals, and interest in teaching and mentoring.
   - Ability to collaborate with relevant units across campus. Measured in terms of…
     ◦ Alignment between research area and the unit(s) in question.
     ◦ Past collaborations or plans for future collaborations with scholars in relevant area(s).
- Ability to contribute to departmental priorities surrounding diversity or departmental climate.
  ◦ How this criterion is measured will depend on the specific priorities.

3. Discuss the relative weight or importance of various evaluation criteria.

4. Establish a common numerical or descriptive (e.g., exceeds expectations, meets expectations, not acceptable) evaluation scale.
   - If numerical, committees should avoid the temptation to simply add up the numbers and, thus, rank candidates in terms of an overall numerical score. *The purpose of the evaluation tool is not to rank candidates in numerical order but to keep committee members focused on agreed upon evaluation criteria, rather than falling back on personal preferences or biases.*

5. Create a common evaluation tool. It is up to the committee to determine the exact format (rubric, spreadsheet, something else).

6. Each committee member should use this tool to evaluate each and every candidate.
   - Don’t simply record your numerical or descriptive rating.
   - Keep careful notes to explain or justify the rating you have given.
     *Careful notes support not only fair and consistent evaluation, but also help expedite committee decision and required justification of the committee’s decisions in Talent Link.*

7. To avoid “group think” and the possibility of overlooking an excellent but unique candidate, search committee members should not share their impressions with others until each has evaluated all candidates.
Appendix D. Conducting a Good Virtual Interview

Faculty recruitment is an integral part of achieving excellence as a university. Interviews by Skype (or some other video-conferencing service) are often used for the first meeting of our applicants. In addition to the University and College policies and procedures for search committees,\textsuperscript{1,2} the following are recommendations for an effective virtual interview.\textsuperscript{3-5}

1. The Search Committee Chair has responsibility for ensuring a smooth and effective interview process.
2. When scheduling the interview, be aware of time zones and allow enough time between each interview.
3. Once the interview has been confirmed, send interviewee and interviewers the relevant information – names of interviewers, Skype contact details, duration of call, etc.
4. Find out whether the candidate needs any special accommodation for the interview. This becomes important for persons with disabilities.
5. Have reliable internet access (use ethernet rather than Wifi) and a platform with which you are familiar. Make sure that the interviewee has received relevant information about the internet access and has adequate time to become comfortable with it. Offer the candidate a chance to do a test run with a member of your IT staff.
6. Try to anticipate technical problems and have back-up options at the ready and someone on hand to facilitate.
7. Ensure consistent treatment of all candidates, including internal candidates.
8. Develop a set of core questions for each candidate. Be aware that certain questions are not allowed. (See below.)
9. Be as prepared for this interview as if the candidate were sitting in front of you, and conduct the interview with the same level of professionalism and importance.
10. Your set-up is, for the candidate, a photographic representation of the institution and its culture so be carefully aware of how that is portrayed. Use a quiet space that will not be interrupted and that shows your department in a positive and professional light.
11. Establish eye contact with the interviewee: look into the camera, not at the image of the person on the screen.
12. Be kind/humane to the interviewee
   - individually introduce committee members
   - sit at a reasonable distance from the camera such that panel members can be clearly seen, even if it means having only 2 or 3 persons visible at a time
   - check for appropriate lighting, camera angle, non-distracting background
   - committee members should be physically present, stay for the duration of the interview, and be fully engaged with interview while there. (Candidates can see you looking at your phones, etc.)
   - have a pre-arranged order of questioners to minimize long silent periods. Recognize that the candidate will be disadvantaged and demoralized by lost time
   - allow all interviewees similar time for interview. Have extra questions at the ready to minimize lags in the conversation. At the end, let the candidate know the next steps.
13. Use a distinct, dedicated line for each candidate and hang up, making sure the line is clear, before starting discussion.
**Sample Interview Questions for Faculty.** A useful list of sample questions grouped under the headings - Experience And Qualifications, Diversity Experience, Teaching and Student Engagement, Research and Professional Development, Project Management and Problem Solving, Technology and Professional Relationships, is available at [https://agrilifeas.tamu.edu/documents/faculty-interview-questions.pdf](https://agrilifeas.tamu.edu/documents/faculty-interview-questions.pdf).

*Remember that in general, questions that touch upon age, race, ethnicity, national origin, disabilities, gender, religion, children, marital status or sexual orientation should be avoided.*


**References and Resources**

1. Interview Guide, Search Committee Training, UD Human Resources, August 2015.
3. Kelsky, K., Making the Most of a Skype Interview, ChronicleVitae, August 9, 2016.
4. OneWire Resources, Tips on How to Conduct the Perfect Skype Interview, August 12, 2013.
**Appendix E. Questions to Avoid**

Do not ask questions which are not relevant to the candidate’s ability to perform the job. If the candidate volunteers personal or irrelevant information, immediately indicate to the individual that the information is not relevant to the ability to perform the job and will not be considered in the hiring decision. Then, continue with your next prepared question related to the position. Below is a list of inappropriate questions that should never be asked during an interview, along with the appropriate questions to ask instead.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Examples of Inappropriate Questions</th>
<th>Examples of Appropriate Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NAME</strong></td>
<td>What is your maiden name? Have you ever legally changed your name? What does your name mean?</td>
<td>Are there other names under which you have worked that should be used to verify your academic credentials or prior work references?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGE</strong></td>
<td>How old are you? How many years before you plan to retire?</td>
<td>Are you 18 years of age or older?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIRTHPLACE</strong></td>
<td>Where were you born? Where were your parents born?</td>
<td>Are you eligible to work in the United States?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CITIZENSHIP</strong></td>
<td>Do you hold citizenship in any country other than the United States?</td>
<td>Are you eligible to work in the United States?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS</strong></td>
<td>How tall are you? How much do you weigh? What color are your eyes or hair? What is your race?</td>
<td>Can you perform the essential functions of the job with or without reasonable accommodation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEALTH/DISABILITY</strong></td>
<td>What is your medical history? Do you have any disabilities? What are your disabilities? How will your disabilities affect your performance? Have you ever filed a Workers' Compensation claim against a former employer?</td>
<td>Can you perform the essential functions of this job with or without reasonable accommodation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARITAL STATUS</strong></td>
<td>Are you married, single, divorced, separated, widowed? Are you living with anyone?</td>
<td>No appropriate questions with regard to marital status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAMILY</strong></td>
<td>Where does your spouse work? Are you the primary wage-earner for your family? Do you have children? What are your child care arrangements?</td>
<td>No appropriate questions with regard to family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Examples of Inappropriate Questions</td>
<td>Examples of Appropriate Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELATIVES</td>
<td>What are the names of your closest relatives or friends?</td>
<td>Are you related to anyone employed by this University, or to a member of the University Board of Directors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATIONAL ORIGIN</td>
<td>What is your lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, parentage, nationality, or the nationality of your parents or spouse?</td>
<td>Are you eligible to work in the United States?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELIGION</td>
<td>What is your religious affiliation? What holidays do you observe?</td>
<td>Are you available to work on the days/shifts expected of this position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE</td>
<td>What is your native language? What language do you speak at home?</td>
<td>What is your fluency level in the language(s) required to effectively perform this job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINANCIAL STATUS</td>
<td>How is your credit history? Have you ever declared bankruptcy? Have your wages ever been garnished?</td>
<td>Questions regarding financial status are usually not job related so should generally be considered inappropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILITARY SERVICE</td>
<td>Was your discharge honorable or dishonorable? Why did you serve with a foreign military?</td>
<td>What training or experience that you gained in your military service is relevant to this job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATIONS</td>
<td>Are you a member of any social clubs, fraternities, sororities, lodges, teams, or religious organizations?</td>
<td>Are you a member of any professional, trade, or service associations that are directly related to this job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBSTANCE ABUSE</td>
<td>Do you have a history of alcohol or drug addiction? What medications are you currently taking?</td>
<td>Do you currently use any illegal substances or any legal substances illegally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALARY LEVEL</td>
<td>What is the lowest salary you will accept?</td>
<td>Are you interested in the position at the level it is budgeted?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>What is the name of your pastor or religious leader?</td>
<td>What is the name of an individual who would serve as a employment reference?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>