Academic Search Policy Guide

The distinction of the University of Chicago rests on the research, teaching, and service of the academics who work here. President Zimmer has challenged the University to build a scholarly community comprising a mix of individuals who, through their diverse experiences, backgrounds, and viewpoints, make unique contributions to our intellectual culture. The goal of every academic search is to find the best individuals to make that contribution. This academic search policy guide is intended both to help units attract large and diverse applicant pools for every open academic position at the University, and to allow department chairs, deans, directors, and the provost to monitor the search and screening processes that preceded a recommendation to make an academic appointment. As a federal contractor, the University is obligated to monitor and evaluate our hiring and other employment processes for compliance with the law and University policies. The policies and expectations of the Provost’s Office are compliant with our legal obligations (refer to the list at the end of the policy guide) and support search processes that will attract diverse pools of applicants.

The Provost’s Office expects that the documentation of a search for a pool of applicants and of the screening of those applicants will show that the steps outlined below have been followed. However, this document is not intended to be a guide to “best practices” for searching for and screening a diverse and talented pool of applicants and recruiting the candidates we want to hire.

Attracting and recruiting outstanding academics, particularly from underrepresented groups and groups designated as protected classes under government laws and regulations, requires effort beyond advertising in customary venues to develop the applicant pool for every open position. For Affirmative Action purposes, underrepresented group designations include women, African American or Black, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, and American Indian or Alaska Native, those who identify with multiple races, as well as individuals with disabilities and covered veterans.

To support academic recruitment processes, the University of Chicago uses Interfolio’s search module. Search administrators, evaluators, and unit leaders can use the module, called Academic Recruitment, to post, review applicants, and manage search processes. After hire, other aspects of career progression are managed and tracked through Interfolio’s related modules, collectively called the Academic Recruitment and Careers System (ARCS).
Contents

1. Think broadly about department/school/institute hiring priorities ....................................................................................... 2
2. Seek potential applicants routinely and actively .......................................................................................................................... 2
3. Write position descriptions to include appropriate required and preferred qualifications ........................................................... 3
4. Determine what application materials will be required ............................................................................................................. 3
5. Encourage timely application without triggering a compliance issue .......................................................................................... 4
6. Understand and adhere to deadlines ........................................................................................................................................... 4
7. Establish clear screening criteria ................................................................................................................................................. 5
8. Create a posting .................................................................................................................................................................................. 5
9. Publicize the position and conduct outreach ............................................................................................................................. 5
10. Review advertisements for accuracy ............................................................................................................................................ 6
11. Evaluate applicants and monitor the screening process ........................................................................................................ 6
12. Interview best qualified candidates ........................................................................................................................................... 7
13. Write a “search narrative” ......................................................................................................................................................... 7
14. Maintain records during and after the recruitment and hiring process .................................................................................. 7

1. Think broadly about department/school/institute hiring priorities
The more narrowly defined the field of interest, the more limited and homogeneous the pool of applicants is likely to be. Departments, institutes, and schools are expected to search in the broadest subfield areas possible to increase the diversity and competitiveness of their applicant pools.

2. Seek potential applicants routinely and actively
Thoughtful, targeted, and continuing outreach beyond advertising is essential to our efforts to recruit the most talented academics to the University. It is completely appropriate to identify and keep in touch with individuals who, when a position opens, will be encouraged to apply and compete for it. As search committee members contact colleagues about open positions or plans for open positions, they should make specific inquiries about promising candidates from diverse backgrounds. It is crucial to document these activities, because the University is required by the federal government to show that those involved in hiring make good-faith efforts to assure that applicant pools are diverse in all dimensions.

Search committees and department representatives should also use every opportunity to communicate the unique teaching and research opportunities available at the University whether or not a search is underway. Broad outreach efforts should be supplemented by personal communications to promising students who might consider an academic career.

All involved in the search process must understand certain basic principles. Outreach may include extra and targeted efforts to attract women, minorities, individuals with disabilities, and veterans, but outreach must not exclude any group, and screening must not prefer anyone based on membership in a group. It is just as wrong and unlawful to “search for a woman” as it is to “search for a White
male,” although it is permissive and even desirable to conduct a search of which a goal is to increase the diversity of the applicant pool and ultimately the faculty.

3. Write position descriptions to include appropriate required and preferred qualifications
For the purposes of this guide, “position description” encompasses 1) the details of the job and unit, 2) the qualifications, and 3) the required application materials and how to apply. Within the Academic Recruitment module, these can be divided into three separate sections to aid applicants in locating important information.

A well-crafted position description not only helps attract the broadest applicant pool, but also avoids process problems down the road that could needlessly delay the review of a case or, in exceptional circumstances, require redoing a search. *Position descriptions for academic appointments should never be tailored to fit a candidate who has already been identified.*

“Basic qualifications” are those without which a person cannot do the job. Examples include: terminal degree in a field or subfield, years of prior experience in a similar position, licensure, record of publication in peer-reviewed journals, or a record of funding. A job seeker who applies for an open position through the Academic Recruitment module cannot be given the status of “Qualified Applicant” (or similar) unless he or she has submitted all required materials by the deadline and has met the basic qualifications outlined in the position description.

For these and other reasons, qualifications must be drafted with care, combining what is required with “preferred qualifications” in a way that promotes the unit’s and the University’s goals. *It is important to understand that search committees may not legally consider anyone who lacks the stated basic qualifications, regardless of the jobseeker’s promise.* If a position description states that a “PhD is required” in order to apply, any jobseeker who does not hold that specific degree at the time of application may not be considered or hired. Requiring just a “a doctoral degree” obligates the committee to consider individuals with a JD or MD. Since requiring candidates to hold a PhD degree to apply will exclude all job seekers who do not have a PhD degree in hand, many units stipulate that “having the PhD in hand by the start date” is a condition for beginning the appointment. (Note that a new Assistant Professor must have either the diploma or an official letter attesting to the fact that all requirements for the degree have been completed). Likewise, identifying specific subfields of interest as a required qualification means that all jobseekers who do not specialize in one of those subfields will not be allowed to proceed through the applicant system. By contrast, identifying a subfield as “preferred” will expand the applicant pool. When appropriate, specifying as “preferred” those subfields in which there is high interest among members of protected classes can be effective in diversifying the pool.

4. Determine what application materials will be required
The position description must state in detail what materials an individual needs to submit in order to apply, and in what format the materials should be submitted, if relevant. In every instance, the instructions must indicate that a CV is to be uploaded into the Academic Recruitment module during the application process. All other required materials must be uploaded or requested (in the case of confidential letters) through the module to be considered, except in extenuating circumstances where a given material cannot be uploaded due to format or size. An application must be given the “Incomplete Application” status if materials are uploaded by an applicant but they are
blank or otherwise do not correspond to the requirements. Materials submitted online are made available to all search committee members (and other designated representatives) electronically through the module.

5. Encourage timely application without triggering a compliance issue

Although the position description does not need to include the date on which review or screening will begin, in fact this date must be at least thirty (30) days after the first public advertisement has appeared, or for searches that do not require a public advertisement (see Publicize the position and conduct outreach), thirty (30) days after the posting has been activated on the UChicago Academic Recruitment job board. This thirty-day rule does not preclude determining that some jobseekers do not possess a stated requirement, such as a PhD in political science, and therefore do not qualify as applicants at all. But it does preclude screening and comparing qualified applicants: homing in on the early applicants can improperly disadvantage those who apply toward the end of the thirty-day moratorium that must be observed on screening and comparing qualified applicants. Postings must not state that review or screening will begin “immediately.” Keep in mind that every applicant must be fully considered. Therefore, do not make statements such as, “To receive full consideration, apply by ___.”

6. Understand and adhere to deadlines

**Deadlines for jobseekers.** For jobseekers, a “deadline” is either 1) the deadline selected for the posting by the unit creating the position (which the Academic Recruitment module will explicitly show on the posting), or 2) a date by which the position will stop accepting applications (for rolling deadlines). If the posting states a deadline explicitly, it must not be removed from the job board prior to that date. Although postings are not required to state a deadline, search committees should be familiar with the policies that control the timing of phases of the process and should thoughtfully consider how best to communicate with jobseekers.

a. Search committees must plan at the outset whether to announce a deadline for jobseekers to complete their applications, or to allow the applicant pool to grow after the screening process begins. It is permissible not to state a deadline, but units then incur an obligation to track and consider all applicants. Using such language as the “Screening of applications will continue until the position is filled or the search is closed” makes it possible for a unit to close the search (removing the posting from the Web) when a candidate is selected and a set of back-up candidates is identified.

**Deadlines for units.** For units, there is a deadline after which they may not bring forward candidates from an applicant pool. These deadlines are intended to assure that the pool of candidates is refreshed as candidates enter the market each year. Units should be mindful of these deadlines, and plan accordingly.

a. For faculty positions, recommendations to the provost must be received within two (2) years from the initial date of the posting.

b. For all other academic job groups, recommendations to the provost must be received within one (1) year from the initial date of the posting.

Units wishing to continue to search for or screen applicants for a position after this deadline must create a new posting, and begin again to search for qualified applicants.
7. Establish clear screening criteria
The specific criteria used to screen applicants must be stated in the “search narrative,” described in more detail in Write a “search narrative”. An evidence-based screening process depends on forming an early consensus on the specific criteria that will govern the search committee’s screening. For instance: What are the qualities committee members will be looking for in an applicant’s research? How are those qualities identified and measured? What are the expectations with respect to publication? What evidence of teaching excellence will the committee be looking for? Are there particular markers of quality that will move an applicant to the short list? Within the Academic Recruitment module, an unlimited number of criteria can be established for a single search in advance of the screening and a “blind review” process can be enabled. These features allow search committee members to consider the strength that each applicant brings to each criterion without regard to one overall ranking or other members’ reviews. However, any disciplined, evidence-based approach to evaluation can help search committees avoid implicit biases by keeping in view the different strengths that applicants inevitably will have, which may be overlooked if applicants are initially evaluated relying on impressions of their relative global merit.

8. Create a posting
All academic positions must be posted through the University’s Academic Recruitment job board (or an alternative platform that a unit has been authorized to use) and only those jobseekers who complete an online application by the deadline may be considered applicants for a position. The University’s posting is the official announcement describing the position, qualifications, and procedures for applying.

All postings for new academic positions must be approved by the respective dean’s or director’s office before the position is activated on the system and a search commences. It is the dean’s or director’s responsibility to review the prepared posting (either before it is entered into the Academic Recruitment module or after, as long as the final posting is the version approved) to ensure that it meets our compliance obligations.

Remember, if a deadline is part of the posting, the deadline for individuals to complete all the steps to apply must be at least thirty (30) days after the first public advertisement has appeared or, for searches that do not require a public advertisement, thirty (30) days after the posting has been activated on the UChicago Academic Recruitment job board.

9. Publicize the position and conduct outreach
After the posting is approved and published on the job board, the position must be advertised in appropriate venues outside the University to generate the broadest applicant pool and to meet our obligations as an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Appropriate advertising venues are, at minimum, those commonly recognized in the field of study and that are likely to reach potential candidates at the appropriate level of seniority for the position. The text of the position description in the advertising must be identical with the text of the position description in the posting, including specific instructions for applying through the Academic Recruitment job board (or alternative platform a unit has been authorized to use) and the EEO statement built in to each posting on the job board. In the professional schools, where one advertisement may be used to announce open positions in different disciplines, the advertisement
must include links to separate postings for each of these disciplines so that jobseekers can select their field of expertise when applying.

Although a posting is required for every academic opening, advertising is not required for positions that are not “regular” jobs. To be “regular,” the job must be at 50 percent effort or more, and for a term of at least twelve (12) months.

Openings may also be publicized on departmental/school/institute sites and the like, in which case they must direct people to make application and provide required materials through the Academic Recruitment job board or alternative platform a unit has been authorized to use. Unit channels cannot substitute for the public posting and advertising process.

In addition to advertisements, announcements, and other efforts to publicize the position in appropriate professional association newsletters or journals, search committees should advertise or promote the position to organizations dedicated to advancing the interests of women, underrepresented minorities, individuals with disabilities, and protected veterans in academia generally or in specific fields, including websites of various professional organizations for women and underrepresented minorities.

10. Review advertisements for accuracy
All advertising must also include the mandatory non-discrimination, Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity, and request for accommodation instructions statements currently in force. These must be identical to those automatically included in the job posting when created through the Academic Recruitment module. Be certain the publisher has included them.

11. Evaluate applicants and monitor the screening process
The screening process must evaluate each applicant in an objective fashion, using the specific selection criteria developed in advance of the actual winnowing of the applicant pool by the search committee to evaluate the evidence that candidates were asked to submit. To ensure that the particular strengths of each applicant are accurately considered and that the strongest candidates are advanced and proposed for appointment, search committee members should refer consistently to the selection criteria.

Effective screening practices lead to a gradual winnowing of the applicant pool, typically to a short list, then to interviewees, and finally to one or more selected candidates. These decisions to advance an applicant or to remove an applicant from further consideration must be recorded through the Application Statuses available within the Academic Recruitment module. These include, but are not limited to: Longlist, Shortlist, Campus/Offsite In-Person/Remote Interview, Selected, Not Selected. Note that these do not replace the disposition codes that must be attached to each applicant when they are winnowed out of the pool or selected as the final candidate(s).

1This policy may be updated to reflect how postings and ads function in the Academic Recruitment module, which is different than in ACO. Individuals with an urgent question related to this policy should contact Steve Gabel, sgabel@uchicago.edu.
12. Interview best qualified candidates

Search committees are expected to interview a number of applicants as part of the screening process. Interviews may be conducted by telephone or video conferencing, via email, or face-to-face, but search committees should strive to apply interview practices consistently to all candidates at the same stages of the screening process unless an individual candidate’s personal circumstances require otherwise.

Care must be taken in all interviews to avoid even the appearance of improper bias for or against any candidate; a guide to interviewing practices is available here.

13. Write a “search narrative”

A “search narrative” is required with every recommendation. The narrative should give an account of the outreach, pool acquisition, screening, and selection phases of the process. The account should say who did what at each stage in the process, and how; who screened and winnowed the pool of applicants, who assembled each short list, who decided whom to interview, and so on. It should explain why the selected applicant was thought to be, with respect to the criteria, the best candidate to bring forward, as compared to the other candidates in the final group, whether that be a short-listed group, or a group that made campus visits. If there is no short list, that is, a preliminary winnowing down by application of stated criteria, then the selected candidate must be compared to every qualified applicant in the pool, by name. The narrative is expected to lay out the considerations that were salient for the faculty as they compared all the candidates in the final group to one another. It must be submitted on the form provided by the Provost’s Office. There are no limitations on the length. The goal of the narrative is to enable an independent observer to understand the disciplined process by which the department decided to recommend one or more candidates, and decided not to recommend all the others.

Everyone involved in the search process must understand that although extra efforts to attract, for example, underrepresented minority candidates to the pool of applicants are entirely appropriate and encouraged, once the screening process begins, committees must not consider sex, race, ethnicity, political or religious beliefs, membership in a protected class or any other attributes irrelevant to participation in the work of the University. Everyone should understand that University policy precludes consideration of anything except the quality of candidates’ academic work.

14. Maintain records during and after the recruitment and hiring process

Records of all searches (whether the position is filled or not) must be retained in the Academic Recruitment module by the unit for three (3) years from the date of the last action taken. Such records include copies of all advertisements, all materials sent to and received from individuals who qualify as applicants as well as from all jobseekers who request to be considered for the position but were found not to meet minimum qualifications, any reference letters received, and all documentation of the deliberations of the search committee and the unit, including interview notes and any evaluation records. These materials can be uploaded to a position in the Academic Recruitment module through the administrative features.
At three (3) years, all documents related to the search, in all media, should be destroyed.²

²This policy will be updated to reflect how documents can be destroyed through Interfolio. Individuals with an urgent need to destroy records older than three (3) years should contact academicrecruitment@uchicago.edu.