

Dickinson

Search Committee Best Practices: Staff Edition



A staff resource developed by
the Office of Institutional
Effectiveness and Inclusivity,
Popel Shaw Center for Race &
Ethnicity, and the Women's and
Gender Resource Center

Adapted from *Searching for Excellence & Diversity: A Guide for Search Committees*,
Eve Fine and Jo Handelsman, WISELI: Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute

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INTRODUCTION

Dickinson College has identified Inclusion as a key pillar of its identity as a liberal arts institution and its desire to hire and train diverse staff is a top priority. The *Search Committee Best Practices* guide you are reading is a vital tool for achieving this goal. Its contents are adapted from *Searching for Excellence & Diversity: A Guide for Search Committees* a nationally recognized guide authored by Eve Fine and Jo Handelsman of the Women in Science and Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI) based in the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The purpose of the guide is to develop and implement programs to provide search committees with information, advice, and techniques to help them attract excellent and diverse applicant pools, conduct fair and equitable evaluations, and successfully hire new staff members who will contribute to the excellence and diversity of Dickinson.

Inclusive Excellence is an important principle guiding Dickinson College's efforts as it re-envision both quality and diversity. Inclusive Excellence, "reflects a striving for excellence in higher education that has been made more inclusive by decades of work to infuse diversity into recruiting, admissions, and hiring; into the curriculum and co-curriculum; and into administrative structures and practices. It also embraces newer forms of excellence, and expanded ways to measure excellence, that take into account research on learning and brain functioning, the assessment movement, and more nuanced accountability structures" (Williams, Berger, and McClendon 2005).

The relationship between diversity and excellence is integral to the guide's content. Notably the guide asks search committees to consider how *diversity and excellence* are intertwined. Diversity in discipline, intellectual outlook, cognitive style, and personality offer the breadth of ideas that constitute a dynamic intellectual community. Diversity of social identities and experiences contribute to richness of the environment for teaching and research and provides students and the public with a College that reflects the society they serve.

We have supplied each academic departments and other units with a copy of *Searching for Excellence & Diversity: A Guide for Search Committees* which outlines Six Essential Elements of searches in extensive detail as well as various templates. The full guide tends to focus on faculty searches; copies can be shared by request. This adaptation focuses on administrative and staff searches and strives to serve as a lean distillation of the larger guide that can greatly aid search committee chairs and individual search committee members develop a sense of key procedures, questions and considerations that lead to thorough and equitable searches. Optimally the guide results in the hiring of administrators and staff from a broad range of cultures and with a perspectives, and inspires offices and departments to reflect regularly on the meaning and value of inclusion within their departments and disciplines.

Before the Search Committee Meets

- ◆ Assemble a diverse search committee: Diversity encompasses discipline and college roles, as well as the social identities of the committee.
- ◆ Schedule initial meeting well before application deadline.
- ◆ Chair should be aware of relevant institutional policies and procedures regarding hiring process.



Initial meeting

- Discuss and develop goals for the search.
- Discuss and establish ground rules.
 - ⇒ Attendance
 - ⇒ Decision-making
 - ⇒ Confidentiality and disclosure
 - ⇒ Other common ground rules
- Discuss roles and expectations of search committee members.
- Review institutional policies and procedures for search committees.

Initial meeting



Raise and discuss issues of diversity

Diversity and excellence are intertwined:

- * Discipline, intellectual outlook, cognitive style, and personality offer the breadth of ideas that constitute a dynamic intellectual community.
- * Diversity of social identities and experiences contribute to richness of the environment for teaching and research and provides students and public with a College that reflects the society they serve.

Hold open discussion of diversity:

Topics: *Why is it important to recruit a diverse pool of applicants?*

What are challenges you may face in achieving a diverse applicant pool?

Common perceptions: Pages 4-6 address these perceptions.

- ⇒ Perception of *diversity vs. quality*
- ⇒ Perception that *“the best” is a universal notion unrelated to diversity*
- ⇒ Perception that *heterosexual white male applicants have no chance*
- ⇒ Perception that *there are no qualified women or racial minorities in a field*
- ⇒ Perception that *a person with disabilities cannot perform the demands of the position*
- ⇒ Perception that *minorities are in such demand our College can't compete*
- ⇒ Perception that *minority candidates would not want to come to our campus*

Common Perceptions

Realities

Perception of *diversity vs. quality.*

- Diversity and quality are intertwined rather than mutually exclusive. It is important to envision the possibility of a diverse range of qualified candidates possessing a range of perspectives and originating from a broad range of social identities.
- Disciplinary training, intellectual and philosophical outlook, cognitive style, and personality offer the breadth of ideas that constitute a dynamic intellectual community.
- Diversity of social identities and experiences contribute to richness of the environment for teaching and research and provides students and public with a College that reflects the society they serve.

Perception that *“the best” is a universal notion unrelated to diversity.*

- Hiring committees often say they are dedicated to diversifying but never actually discuss what it would look like to follow through. This is why the Committee must move beyond mentioning diversity and define for their discipline and department why recruiting a diverse pool of applicants is relevant.

Perception that *heterosexual white male applicants have no chance.*

- According to Betts, Urias, Chavez and Betts (2009) the following is a breakdown of minorities in higher education:
- 35% of all higher education students (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008)
- 14% of college and university presidents (ACE, 2007)
- 19% of executive, managerial, and administrative staff (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008)
- 22% of full-time faculty members (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008)
- 25% of part-time faculty members (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008)
- 22% of governing board members at public colleges and universities (Association for Governing Boards, n.d.)
- 2% of governing board members at independent colleges and universities (Association for Governing Boards, n.d.).

Common Perceptions

Realities

Perception that *there are no qualified women or racial minorities in a field.*

- Developing an active recruitment plan is one of the best practices for colleges and universities seeking to diversify their candidate pools. Intentional efforts to reach out is the best way to recruit potential candidates to apply for positions.
- The Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (HERC) offers an extensive list of potential recruitment resources for reaching candidates from a variety of social identities underrepresented in higher education.
- Organizations like the Consortium for Faculty Diversity (CFD) focus on helping connect potential candidates with member institutions.
- The National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity helps nurture graduate students, postdocs, faculty and administrators from underrepresented groups so they are primed for continued success once they are hired.

Perception that *a person with disabilities cannot perform the demands of the position.*

- Job descriptions routinely outline the physical demands of positions making this an area best reserved for the judgment of candidates. Committees can direct candidates to contact Human Resources Services regarding accommodations.

Perception that *minorities are in such demand our College can't compete.*

- Only 11% of the sample (299 Ph.Ds who were recipients of prestigious academic fellowships) described in the Smith study were actively recruited for a faculty position/ encouraged to apply. Qualified scholars from underrepresented backgrounds seem to report a lack of outreach rather feeling in demand via active ongoing recruitment.

Common Perceptions

Realities

Perception that *minority candidates would not want to come to our campus.*

- Committee members should avoid making assumptions about the “fit” of a candidate for an institution and/or community. This is a highly personal and subjective decision.
- When colleges describe themselves using certain terms (e.g. quaint, small, rural, etc.) these often signify a lack of cultural diversity and candidates may be weary of applying on this basis. Using language that provides space for potential candidates to discern the community for themselves is crucial
- Providing an information packet during the interview process that highlight community resources that may support cultural and social needs of underrepresented populations is an important component
- Departments should also consider ways they plan to welcome and support the needs of candidates, especially potential candidates from underrepresented groups. For example:
 - ⇒ What mentoring and developmental opportunities are available?
 - ⇒ Are their institutional mechanisms for underrepresented staff seeking to build community with other employees from underrepresented groups?
 - ⇒ Since underrepresented staff often perform “invisible labor” (e.g. mentoring underrepresented students), and are often placed on committees to ensure inclusive decision-making how will the department support staff?

Resources:

Betts, K., Urias, D., Chavez, J. and K. Betts. “Higher Education and Shifting U.S. Demographics: Need for Visible Administrative Career Paths, Professional Development, Succession Planning & Commitment to Diversity.” April 29, 2009. *Academic Leadership* http://www.hercjobs.org/nj_east_pa_delaware/template_assets/docs/Higher%20Education%20Demographics.pdf

Consortium for Faculty Diversity (CFD): <http://www.gettysburg.edu/about/offices/provost/cfd/>

Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (HERC): http://www.hercjobs.org/jobseeker_tools/diversity_resources/

National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity: <http://www.facultydiversity.org>

Smith, D.G. “How to diversify the faculty.” *Academe* September-October 2000: 48-52.

Tips and Guidelines for Building a Diverse Pool of Applicants

- Develop a broad definition of the position.
- Expand your evaluation criteria to include aspects of diversity (e.g. experience working with, teaching, or mentoring underrepresented students; ability to foster diversity of the campus, curriculum, and/or discipline).
- Comply with U.S. Department of Labor requirements for hiring non-U.S. citizens.
- Develop an *active recruitment plan*:



- ⇒ Advertise in standard journals AND publications targeting women and underrepresented minority scholars in your discipline.
- ⇒ Identify fellowship programs in your field, especially those aiming to diversify the professoriate.
- ⇒ Make lists of professional meetings, societies or associations and members of these organizations and use them to recruit applicants.
- ⇒ Identify committees, caucuses, or individuals in your professional societies that work to increase representation and minorities in your discipline. Solicit their assistance in advertising your position.
- ⇒ Contact alumni/alumnae and seek their assistance in recruiting applicants for your position.
- ⇒ Make calls and send emails or letters to contacts for candidates. Specify your interest in female and minority applicants.
- ⇒ Make an effort to identify colleagues with diverse backgrounds or experiences.



- ⇒ Actively involve all search committee members in specific tasks (e.g. each member agrees to reach out to 10 colleagues to request candidate recommendations and specify interest in recruiting diverse applicants).



Before reviewing applications: Share and discuss research on unconscious assumptions and their influence on evaluation of applicants.



Review strategies for minimizing bias:

1. Replace your self-image as an objective person with recognition and acceptance that you are subject to the influence of bias and assumptions
2. Diversify your search committee
3. Critical Mass—increase proportion of women and minorities in the applicant pool
4. Develop and prioritize criteria prior to evaluating applicants
5. Discuss and develop consensus around the following:
 - What credentials and skills are you seeking
 - What types of experiences will be valued
 - What leadership styles and skills are you seeking
 - What application materials and interview questions will enable you to access candidates' strengths and weakness in areas such as: *research productivity; interpersonal skills and abilities; leadership style; negotiating skills*
 - Which of these criteria (or others) will matter most? How will you evaluate candidates with strengths in some areas/weaknesses in others?
6. Spend sufficient time and attention on evaluating each application
7. Focus on each applicant as an individual and evaluate the entire application package
8. Use inclusion rather than exclusion decision-making processes
9. Stop periodically to evaluate your criteria and their implementation
10. Hold yourself and each member of the search committee responsible for conducting fair and equitable evaluations and for basing decisions on concrete information gathered from candidates' records and interviews—rather than on vague assertions or assumptions about promise/potential.
 - Question and challenge responses such as the following:
 - *I'm not sure how well this candidate will fit here (or in this position); She struck me as too aggressive; Is this candidate sufficiently mature? Or...past his prime?; Will we have a partner hire issue to contend with?*

Logistics for Managing the Review of Applicants



Stage 1: Selecting applicants who meet minimum qualifications

- ◆ Divide applications so each candidate has feedback from at least 2-3 committee members.
- ◆ Create a checklist of requirements in each applicants' folder
- ◆ Maintain a master checklist for all applicants.
- ◆ Chair should review all applicants rejected to ensure qualified applicants were not inadvertently rejected.

Stage 2: Creating the long short list of applicants to consider further

- ◇ Focus on identifying all potentially interesting applicants.
- ◇ All committee members should review the applications to gain a sense of the possibilities present in the pool.
- ◇ Divide applications equitably among the committee for in-depth reviews; each applicant should have at least two, and preferably more, members of the committee.
- ◇ Please set aside at least 15-20 minutes per applicant for a sufficient review.
- ◇ Remember to concentrate on all potentially strong applicants, not just applicants you may personally prefer.
- ◇ Make decisions using a process of inclusion (who should be included for further review) rather than exclusion (who should be rejected from consideration).
- ◇ Host a subsequent committee meeting to decide on size of long short list. Reviewers should remember to rely on previously established selection criteria, focus on inclusion over exclusion, note applicants of whom designated reviewers disagree; and evaluate the long short list before finalizing and ask, "Are qualified women and underrepresented applicants included?"—if not consider whether evaluation biases or assumptions have influenced your ratings.
- ◇ Conduct the selection of the "short list" candidates for interviews at a later meeting scheduled to allow committee members sufficient time to review thoroughly the strengths of the applicants to the "long short list."

Stage 3: Selecting a “short list” of finalists to interview

- ◆ Review objectives, criteria, procedures and ground rules
- ◆ Insist upon uniform application of standards in retaining or dropping applicants in the “long short list”
- ◆ Remind the committee that increasing the diversity of faculty/staff is an important criterion to consider in choosing among otherwise comparable applicants
- ◆ Decide on short list and possible alternates only after the entire committee has had the chance to review the “long short list” in depth
- ◆ Focus on the entire application, being careful to avoid over relying on one factor (e.g. letters of recommendation, prestige of the degree granting institution)
- ◆ Create different rating scales for different criteria (e.g. teaching ability, research productivity); Consider including top applicants from various different rating scales in the “short list.”
- ◆ Evaluate your short list before finalizing and ask, “Are qualified women and underrepresented applicants included?”—if not consider whether evaluation biases or assumptions have influenced your ratings.
- ◆ Be able to defend every decision for rejecting or retaining an applicant.
- ◆ Do not allow personal preferences or narrow perspectives to dominate the process. Avoid relying on information not included in the application materials you requested (e.g. rumors or innuendo about applicants, knowledge about their personal life)
- ◆ Resist the temptation to rank order the finalists on the short list.



Stage 4: Achieving Consistency During Subgroup Interviews

Search committees for staff and administrative interviews often ask multiple subgroups of interviewers from various sectors and departments of campus to meet with candidates. In order to ensure a consistent process and obtain quality responses the following approaches can foster a broad investment in the position, inspire meaningful questions, and yield useful feedback for the committee:

- Assemble interview sub-groups intentionally. Everyone invited should have a vested interest in the position and is ideally someone who is impacted by the position and/or may serve as a potential collaborator with the position.
- Share the job description and the candidate's interview schedule as part of the candidate's application materials (e.g. cover letter, resume/CV) for subgroups.
- Share recommended questions with interview subgroups or encourage subgroups to craft questions beforehand. Articulate to all subgroups that it is best to ask each candidate the same baseline questions to ensure consistency. The search committee and interview subgroups should coordinate their efforts to avoid repetitive questions (e.g. Continually asking candidates why they chose to work at Dickinson College)
- Designate a subgroup lead interviewer to introduce each person present to the candidate and maintain a timely schedule.
- Provide subgroups with evaluation form(s) either in electronic or paper form and request interviewers submit them to a central source promptly after each interview.



Stage 5: Evaluating the finalists

- Committee should meet after each candidate's visit to assess strengths and weaknesses or take notes immediately
- Committee should collect feedback from other groups or individuals who met with candidates as soon as possible.
- Once the Committee has offered the position and a candidate has accepted share their name, position title, and start date with the division, and the College community.