Advance at UNM

Best Practices in Faculty Search
A Toolkit
DRAFT

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Executive Summary

Adhering to national best practices during faculty searches will help UNM recruit and retain excellent faculty. In addition, conducting the search fairly and equitably will help insure that current UNM faculty who participate in searches feel that their perspectives are respected and valued, and that they derive satisfaction from the process. Finally, a polished and professional search will project a positive image of UNM to scientific and scholarly communities in the U.S. and abroad.

ADVANCE at UNM's toolkit provides advice to deans, department chairs, and search committees. It is divided into sections pertaining to each stage of the search process, including: 1) Formulating the position description or ad; 2) Composition and practices of the search committee; 3) Screening and evaluating applicants; 4) On-campus interviews. This executive summary offers quick tips, which we explore and explain in later chapters.

Position description

- Actively recruit candidates
  - All department members should treat this as a year-round activity
  - Don't assume people aren't interested or won't move!
- Describe job in broadest possible terms
  - Narrow qualifications → people self select out of the pool
  - Broad qualifications → more people self select into the pool
- List a wide range of potential courses to be taught, not just 2 or 3
- Avoid gendered language (*dominant* versus *excellent*)

- Include “cues of belonging” in ad
  - “this is a family-friendly institution”
  - UNM has dual career policies
  - This school or college is partnering with ADVANCE at UNM to recruit and retain excellent faculty
- Analyze how your department or unit represents itself online, and make sure you clearly represent institutional values, including a commitment to excellence and diversity

Search committee

- Include a diverse range of background, experiences, perspectives
- Include a member who has an explicit commitment to promoting diversity
- Work to minimize the effects of evaluation biases
  - Acknowledge that we are all biased
  - Avoid evaluative language such as “intuition” and “fit”; explain what you mean in terms accessible to everyone
  - Avoid relying on “proxy” indicators of accomplishment, such as prestige of Ph.D. institution, number of publications or grants, or citation count
  - Assess candidates along multiple dimensions, not just one
  - Avoid simple summary rankings; instead be explicit about how criteria are weighed
- Establish selection criteria and methods for screening and evaluating candidates ahead of time, before the files come in
- Collect and review data on composition of your pool and how it compares to the national Ph.D. pool

Screening applicants

- Monitor adherence to pre-established criteria for evaluating candidates, and call out differential application of these criteria across candidates
  - Develop strategies to apply the criteria fairly to candidates in different situations
- Every eligible file should be read by at least two search committee members, ideally with different backgrounds and points of view
- Search committee members should record their judgements about each candidate when reviewing files
- Committees should agree on a method to aggregate committee member preferences and develop a long list of semi-finalists
- Consider conducting 12-minute virtual interviews with semi-finalists to help decide whom to invite to campus
- Adopt procedures to manage group dynamics, and prevent the most vocal or senior members from dominating the discussion
  - Large committees may consider using clickers to record votes anonymously

On-campus interviews

- Inform candidates ahead of time about what the visit will involve, so they can prepare
- All interview visits should include the same components, such as meetings with graduate students, women faculty (for women), etc.
  - Ask all candidates if they would like to schedule any personal time during the day
- Pay attention to research findings on what behavior has been more and less effective in campus visits

- Everyone who meets the candidate should complete an evaluation form immediately after their interaction
- Do not ask questions about the candidate's personal life or circumstances
- Offer information about parental leave, spousal hiring, child care, schools, etc. to *all* candidates
- Tell all candidates–not just women and minorities–that UNM values diversity and inclusion

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Formulating the Position Description

1.1 Recruitment as a year-round activity

Everyone in the department should treat faculty recruitment as a year-round activity. You should sing UNM's praises at conferences and workshops, when you speak at other universities, and in other contexts where you may come into contact with potential candidates.

Do not assume that potential candidates are not interested in UNM or that they would not move to Albuquerque. You have no idea what their circumstances are. They may have family here, they may have a passion for hiking, or they may have a medical condition suited to a dry climate.

1.2 Job description

Many departments have a tendency to reuse the same ads from past searches. This practice may help to strengthen an existing research area or promote curricular continuity. However, recycling ads will have the tendency to reproduce the homogeneity of the past.[1] If you are trying to diversity your department, using old ads will be counterproductive.

In order to have the best chances of finding excellent candidates, you want as many people to apply as possible. To maximize the pool, we suggest

[1] Abigail Stewart and Virginia Valian, *An Inclusive Academy*, forthcoming book.

that you phrase areas of research or interest in the broadest possible terms. Pitching the job too narrowly (e.g. "social movements in Latin America") will cause people to self-select out of the pool. By listing a broad set of qualifications, you will induce more people to self-select into the pool.

If you want to list potential courses that the candidate should be able to teach, list many, not just two or three.

The job description should avoid gendered language, such as *dominant*. Try using the words *excellent* or *outstanding* instead.

To attract many candidates, especially women, the ad should contain "cues of belonging," which signal that people from certain social groups or with particular life circumstances will be welcome or comfortable at UNM. These may include:

- "this is a family-friendly institution"
- UNM has dual-career policies
- This school or college is partnering with ADVANCE at UNM to recruit and retain excellent faculty

Finally, the ad should contain a checklist of information to be provided by each applicant.

1.3 Representing the department or unit

Most candidates will look at department and university websites for additional information before they apply. You should therefore examine your unit's webpage and consider the following:

- Are our organizational values–including a commitment to diversity and inclusion–adequately communicated in these media?
- Is there enough information available on these website for potential candidates?
- Is it easy for them to acquire this information?
- Does the website portray the department as an open, accessible, friendly place?

- Does the website portray Albuquerque as a diverse, inclusive community to live in?

You may want to consider reorganizing your webpage, and potentially adding a special button or tab for recruitment.

2

The Search Committee

The composition of the search committee, the decision rules it follows, and the manner in which it screens candidates are important to make sure that it makes the best possible decisions. Steps are also needed to minimize the effects of evaluation biases. By evaluation bias, we mean the distorting effects produced by the implicit assumptions, beliefs, and stereotypes we all hold about different social groups. Unless we are aware of them, and actively seek to compensate for their effects, our biases have a tendency to privilege our assessment of some candidates over others due to their group membership. In addition, clear screening criteria and decision making rules, agreed upon in advance, are important to minimize the effects of group dynamics and to make sure that all committee members are able to express their points of view.

2.1 Composition of the Search Committee

Search committees should represent a range of backgrounds, experiences, points of view, and fields of study. They should be diverse. Diverse decision making units help hire a more diverse faculty and make better decisions. Diverse groups are able to supply a broader range of information, examine an issue from various angles, anticipate problems, and develop more innovative solutions.

You might consider appointing someone to the committee who has an explicit commitment to diversity, or someone who has undergone special training in how to uphold fair procedures and to compensate for evaluation bias. Some universities require that a "diversity representative" sit on each committee. This individual is not necessarily a member of a minority or disadvantaged group but rather someone who has undergone training and pledged a commitment to diversity.

Having a diverse search committee, whether via the presence of members of minority or disadvantaged groups or a designated diversity representative, does not on its own solve the problem of evaluation bias. Women and minorities are not immune to evaluation bias. Regardless of who is on the committee, members should still take steps to minimize the effects of bias through the strategies we describe below.

2.2 Managing evaluation biases

Whereas making *explicity* biased decisions, such as ruling out entire categories of people from consideration, is against federal law, *implicit* bias is still pervasive. Everyone has implicit biases that affect our decisions, though we can work to raise awareness and adopt strategies to minimize their pernicious effects.

Contrary to much of previous thought and practice, *mandatory* training, objective scoring systems, and other external measures to limit discretion and control bias may be counterproductive. Some of these mechanisms can activate or normalize bias. People tend to resist external constraints on their behavior, and work to subvert discretion-control measures to defend their autonomy.[1]

However, there is evidence that *voluntary* training, such as participating in "break the bias" workshops pioneered at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, can raise awareness of evaluation bias and increase the motivation to act in unbiased ways.[2] Voluntary participation in training can also help improve departmental climates in the long run.

In the immediate term, committees can work to combat the effects of bias through several strategies, including:

[1]Frank Dobbin, Daniel Schrage, and Alexandra Kalev, "Rage against the iron cage: The varied effects of bureaucratic personnel reforms on diversity." *American Sociological Review* 80.5 (2015), pp. 1014-1044.

[2]Molly Carnes, et al. "Effect of an intervention to break the gender bias habit for faculty at one institution: a cluster randomized, controlled trial," *Academic medicine: journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges* 90.2 (2015), pp. 221-230.

- Acknowledge that we tend to judge people based on our experience, and that we favor people who look like us or have similar experiences.
- Avoid language such as “intuition” or “fit” when discussing candidates, and instead explain your views about particular candidates in greater detail, in terms accessible to everyone.
- Steer clear of “proxy” indicators of achievement such as the status of the Ph.D. granting institution, the number of items on the C.V., the fame of the Ph.D. supervisor, and the reputation of the letter writers.
- Assess candidates along multiple dimensions, not just one.
- Avoid simple summary rankings; instead be explicit about how criteria are weighed.
- Acknowledge uncertainty.

2.3 Selection criteria

The search committee should meet before the search begins to develop the criteria to screen and evaluate candidates. These criteria should respond to the overall strategic vision or plan of the department or unit, as well as an analysis of how the search will contribute to efforts to diversify the faculty. Current UNM policy requires that the department identify both minimum and preferred qualifications for the position. Ideally, the search committee will work to develop the preferred qualifications as a group.

The committee should then discuss how various criteria will be weighed. This work should happen ahead of time so that committee members do not later adjust the criteria toward their preferred candidates. Later, during the search process, committee members should monitor others who may drift from these criteria or apply them differentially across the pool.

2.4 Data

You should collect and monitor data on the composition of the national pool of Ph.D. recipients in your field, the applicant pool to your unit, and on the pool of long-listed and short-listed finalists. Ideally, these data will be disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, and nationality (especially U.S. citizens versus non citizens). Keeping track of these data will enable to you to be aware of shifts in the demographics of the pool as it shrinks, and to analyze any reasons for that shift.

3

Screening Candidates

The principal challenge in screening candidates effectively is to use pre-established and transparent criteria to evaluate candidates, to record judgements of each candidate, to aggregate the preferences of search committee members fairly, and to manage the human dynamics of the search committee.

3.1 Applying selection criteria

The previous "chapter" of this toolkit discussed the importance of establishing criteria to evaluate candidates ahead of time, instead of inventing them on the spot to serve the particular interests of search committee members. OEO already requires that UNM search committees identify minimum and preferred qualifications for each position, and that committees give a "second look" to women and minority candidates. Ideally, members of the search committee, as well as members of the broader department or unit, will together develop these preferred qualifications.

During the evaluation process, search committee members should monitor adherence to pre-established criteria for evaluating candidates, and call out differential application of these criteria across candidates.

Every eligible file should be read by at least two search committee members, ideally with different backgrounds and points of view.

Current UNM policy requires each committee member to score candidates on each preferred qualifications in a search matrix. In addition to these numerical scores, committee members may prefer to record more qualitative impressions and judgements, which they can later share with other committee members.

Search committee chairs may want to coach committee members about how to apply selection criteria fairly across candidates in different situations. For example, it is one thing to score a person who is 7 years past their Ph.D. and holding a job as assistant professor by the criterion of "proven effectiveness as a teacher," and another to score someone who is only completing their dissertation. For the second person, search committee members might want to consider evaluating the person's *potential* to teach.

In general, the committee might want to discuss how to apply all selection criteria in ways that do not put some candidates unduly at a disadvantage simply due to their career stage, age, opportunities at their Ph.D. institution, and the like.

3.2 Aggregating search committee preferences

Committees should agree on a method to aggregate committee member preferences and develop a long list of semi-finalists, and then to produce a shorter list of finalists. Experienced chairs often treat this as a two-stage process.[1]

3.2.1 Forming the semi-finalist pool

There are many potentially valid ways to narrow down the pool to a long list of semi-finalists. The most important thing is not the method *per se*, but that the committee meets ahead of time to agree on a process and then follows this process.

One method that has worked for smaller committees is for each member to identify their top 10 candidates, and then a second tier of 10 candidates. Then, the committee can meet to compare their individual lists and vote or deliberate to determine a collective list.

Another method involves the committee chair analyzing spreadsheets or scoring matrices completed by each committee member, and summing the total scores for each candidate as well as their ranking vis-à-vis other candidates. The chair can then present summaries of these scores to the group.[2]

[1] We are grateful to Julie Coonrod for helping to develop the tips in this section.

[2] Ideally, the large pool will naturally break into several groups (often three) depending on the scores and rankings. Some experienced chairs then discard the bottom third and focus on the top two groups.

In situations when the entire committee has read every file, the group could then go through the candidates one by one and vote on whether to advance them to the next "round." In larger committees, the chair may want to make an initial cut, identifying the top 20-30 candidates, and direct each committee member to read all the files before voting. Ideally, this process will eliminate most candidates, leaving the committee with a smaller pool of around 20. Some experienced chairs then go through the candidates again, and ask if anyone on the committee wants to make a special case to keep him or her in the pool.

Current UNM policy requires that women and minorities also receive a "second look."

3.2.2 Forming the finalist pool

At this stage, the goal is to narrow down the pool again to produce a list of finalists to bring to campus for interviews. Depending on the committee's charge, the goal may be to present a longer list to the entire department or unit to make the final decision on whom to invite for interviews.

Experienced chairs direct committee members to read all the files again, and then conduct a second round of voting or deliberation. In addition, the committee may decide to conduct virtual interviews with all candidates before holding the vote to determine finalists.

3.3 Optional: Short, virtual interviews with the semi-finalist pool

To get a better sense of whom to invite for campus visits, the committee may want to conduct 12-minute virtual interviews, such as via Skype, with each semi-finalist. This procedure has worked well in some leadership searches at UNM.

To manage the interview fairly, the committee should decide on a short list of questions to ask of each candidate. The questions may simply be "why are you interested in this position?" and "what unique qualifications do you bring to this position?"

Though all committee members may be in the room during the virtual interview, it is better to designate only one person–such as the chair–to ask questions.

The advantage of the 12-minute interview is that it can be scheduled in 15-minute blocks, so that the committee can interview the entire pool of semi-finalists in two to three hours. Twelve minute interviews will yield enough information to help the committee determine if it wants to bring someone to campus.

The committee can tape the virtual interviews for the benefit of committee members who cannot be present.

3.4 Minimizing the effects of group dynamics

Everyone on the committee should have a chance to express their point of view. Tips that may help to prevent the most vocal or the most senior members from dominating the discussion include:

- Develop and distribute an agenda before the committee meets.
- Allocate time to each committee member for views and discussion.[3]
- Randomize order of committee members to start discussion.
- Start each meeting by outlining the goals of the discussion.
- End each meeting by summarizing the discussion and soliciting 30 second summary statements from each member.
- Designate one or two committee members to present a minority opinion of the discussion to insure that all perspectives are given consideration.[4]

In large committees, the search chair may want to use clickers in order to manage voting on the smaller pool of semi-finalists and then finalists. Using clickers allows people to vote anonymously.

[3]Senior members of the committee may want to agree to monitor the length of each others' comments to conform to the time limit.

[4]These suggestions for managing group dynamics come from the Yale University Provost's Office document, "Best Practices. Faculty and Leadership Searches," p. 10.

4

On-Campus Interviews

On campus interviews help committees and units evaluate *and* recruit candidates. The visit serves a dual function as both sides try to impress the other. It is therefore critical that departments conduct interviews in a professional and consistent manner and portray UNM in the best possible light.

4.1 Prepare each candidate

You should inform candidates all ahead of time about what the visit will involve, so they can prepare. Interviews should consist of roughly the same components, so that candidates are treated equally and subject to the same expectations.

You should design the visit so that it is helpful to the candidate, which may require getting some information from her or him. We suggest asking each candidate the same set of questions, such as:

- "Would you like us to schedule any personal time for you during the day?" Mothers who are breastfeeding or pumping, or candidates with medical issues, may need this time but feel hesitant to ask.
- "Would you like to meet with a representative of the ADVANCE at UNM program?"

4.2 Structure of the campus visit

Interviews with job candidates at various STEM departments at the University of Michigan shed some light on elements of campus visits that were helpful, which included:[1]

- Warm and frequent attention from the department chair
- Punctual communication
- Sticking to a hiring and decision timeline, and explaining deviations
- Meetings with graduate students
- Women candidates enjoyed meeting with other women faculty and postdocs, as well as with ADVANCE representatives
- Provision of information about work-life balance, dual career opportunities, city environment, etc.
- Respectful and interested treatment of partners and other family members

The same interviews identified problematic and unhelpful practices during the hiring process, such as:

- Contradictory information received from chair and/or other senior faculty
- Apparent disorganization or lack of unity in the department or unit
- Comments about race or gender, and not scientific excellence, as influences on recruitment
- Questions about personal circumstances, such as marital and family status
- Interactions with candidates' partners in ways suggesting that the partner is not valued

[1] University of Michigan ADVANCE program document, "Positive and Problematic Practices in Faculty Recruitment."

4.3 Evaluation forms

Everyone who meets with the candidate should complete an evaluation form immediately after their interaction, so that the form reflects fresh impressions and that people do not muster recollections later, after they have been influenced by other factors.

4.4 Information about work-life balance policies

Many people are attracted to university employment because they think the work setting is more humane than a for-profit corporation.[2] You should work to make the university seem welcoming and family-friendly, while not assuming anything about the candidate's personal circumstances. Though it is illegal to ask candidates certain types of questions, you want to provide information that may be more relevant to some people than others. Your best strategy is therefore to offer information about parental leave, spousal hiring, child care, schools, etc. to *all* candidates. In addition, you should tell all candidates–not just women and minorities–that UNM values diversity and inclusion.

Following these guidelines will make your search a more pleasant experience for everyone, and enhance UNM's reputation for excellence at home and abroad.

[2] University of Michigan Office of the Provost, Handbook for Faculty Searches and Hiring, p. 9.

Acknowledgements

To prepare this document, the ADVANCE at UNM leadership team consulted several sources for information on best practices, including (but not limited to):

- Abigail Stewart and Virginia Valian, *An Inclusive Academy*, forthcoming book.
- Abigail Stewart, “Recommendations for Practices that Increase the Diversity of Applicant Pools and the Fairness of Evaluation Procedures,” July 2017 memo.
- University of Michigan Faculty Search Handbook.
- Yale University Provost’s Office “Best Practices in Faculty and Leadership Searches.”
- University of Michigan ADVANCE program document, ”Positive and Problematic Practices in Faculty Recruitment.”
- Barbara Walter, “Reducing Bias in Academic Job Searches,” Presentation at American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 2015.
- Frank Dobbin, Daniel Schrage, and Alexandra Kalev, “Rage against the iron cage: The varied effects of bureaucratic personnel reforms on diversity.” *American Sociological Review* 80.5 (2015), pp. 1014-1044.
- Molly Carnes, et al. “Effect of an intervention to break the gender bias habit for faculty at one institution: a cluster randomized, controlled trial,” *Academic medicine: journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges* 90.2 (2015), pp. 221-230.

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