

Addressing Bias in the Hiring Process: Guidelines for the Search Committee

Advance @ UNM workshop advice



Bias: It happens to everyone

When forced to make decisions on a tight timeline and with incomplete information, everyone defaults to mental shortcuts (also known as schemas or unconscious biases) that essentialize certain characteristics while overlooking others.

- This is a normal part of how the human brain works.
- Everyone does this: all ages, genders, ethnicities, social backgrounds, etc.
- In a hiring/selection process, bias systematically disadvantages some groups.

Who it affects: Underrepresented groups

Unfortunately, the groups most affected by unconscious biases are also least represented at UNM. *These are the very groups from which we most want to recruit excellent candidates:*

- Hispanic
- African American
- Native American
- Women in STEM
- Veteran
- Disabled

Minimizing bias: search committee meetings

To avoid systematically disadvantaging some groups in the hiring process, the search committee should use techniques that force evaluators to examine all parts of a candidate's dossier/profile. This helps resist the natural inclination to essentialize certain characteristics.

- Use preferred qualifications to drive all parts of the evaluation process.
- Agree in advance on evaluation criteria and how they will be applied.
- Avoid discussion of global rankings; discuss each qualification & candidate separately.
- Ensure that *each* committee member shares comments in every meeting.
- Designate one or two committee members to present a minority opinion for each case.
- Use a process that includes an automatic second-look for anyone who would be cut.
- Resist the urge to generate ranked lists. First deliberate on all qualifications, then create an unranked list of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" candidates.

Minimizing bias: gathering feedback from others

Even if the search committee does a good job accounting for bias, it still must rely on feedback from others. The committee must account for potential unconscious bias in this process:

- Recommendation letters are often biased against women. E.g. letters for men are often longer; letters for women are more likely to mention personal life.
- Teaching evaluations are systematically biased against women and minorities.
- Phone/skype calls can disadvantage some personality types and obscure their accomplishments. To mitigate: provide topics in advance and keep interviews short.
- Consider: bias accumulates in a scholarly dossier. Underrepresented groups are less likely to get opportunities, less likely to be cited, less likely to get awards, etc.
- Use a comment sheet to gather feedback from department faculty and students on ALL preferred qualifications (see back). Do not request rankings or global comments.