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
  • People with Disabilities

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. Do not request rankings or global comments.