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Investing in Faculty Success and Inclusive Work Environments

Mitigating Bias During On-Campus Interviews

PLANNING THE ON-CAMPUS INTERVIEW

Where Bias Emerges: Regardless of identity characteristics, candidates who come to campus for interviews are doing their own assessment of whether UMCP will be an inclusive, positive place to develop their careers. Search committees might anticipate that only individuals with “visible” identities (such as women or underrepresented minority (URM) scholars) are interested in learning about campus environmental aspects such as diversity and inclusion resources, dual career procedures, or other family-related benefits. As a result, only some faculty are given information and they may feel singled out.¹

What Search Committees Can Do: Sharing information about diversity and inclusion resources and family-friendly policies sends the signal to all candidates that these issues are important to the department and campus. Provide all candidates with the opportunity to meet with student groups and relevant campus constituents (See Campus Diversity Resources for a list of groups willing to meet with on-campus interviewees). Set up time for current faculty from underrepresented groups to meet with all on-campus candidates, if they are interested. Additionally, search committees can ask candidates which groups or campus offices they would be interested in and make reasonable accommodations to add those groups into the on-campus agenda.²

STRUCTURING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Where Bias Emerges: An evaluator’s implicit assumptions about competence and ability, based on a person’s gender, age, race/ethnicity, ability status, etc., are more likely to inform hiring decisions when interviews are unstructured. Characteristics of an unstructured interview include not having an interview protocol to be used for each candidate, or relying heavily upon information gleaned from informal follow-up questions or overall sense of fit. These types of interviews have also been shown to be less powerful in predicting a candidate’s future success and performance.³

What Search Committees Can Do: The search committee can develop an interview protocol composed of questions that address the skills and qualifications described in the job ad and the criteria they have developed to evaluate the candidate. The protocol should be followed as closely as possible with each on-campus candidate. These criteria should be shared with all faculty and staff interacting with the candidate, not just the ones who conduct the formal interview. The feedback on how well each candidate meets criteria should be collected in a systematic manner to be used at the department’s evaluation discussion.⁴



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FACILITATING FAIR JOB TALKS

Where Bias Emerges: Research indicates that during academic job talks, women are more likely to be interrupted and spend more time answering questions than male presenters. Similarly, women and URM faculty also report having their expertise questioned in classroom interactions with students; this may also occur in student sessions of campus interviews. Outside of higher ed, studies show that women are more likely to be interrupted in everyday conversations, in professional meetings, and even in the Supreme Court and the Senate.⁵ These interruptions can reduce the amount of time candidates spend discussing their research and qualifications.⁶

What Search Committees Can Do: For each job talk, the search committee should appoint a facilitator, who introduces the presenter and keeps time. The best strategy for limiting interruptions is for the facilitator to ask the audience to hold questions until the talk has concluded. If this is not possible, the facilitator should monitor the number of questions asked during the talk and, should they become too numerous, hold remaining questions until the end so that the candidate can proceed with his or her talk. Job talks should last the same amount of time for all candidates and be scheduled at the same general time of day.⁷

PREPARING CAMPUS EVALUATORS

Where Bias Emerges: On-campus interviewees meet with a variety of faculty and staff over the course of the interview day(s). The feedback gained from these interactions is crucial for making the hiring decisions. However, research shows that bias is most likely to emerge when the criteria for judgement is undefined, broad, or the process for giving feedback is unclear or rushed.⁸

What Search Committees Can Do: Create and share candidate application materials (the position description, CV, a selected research article, etc.) with all faculty and staff who are meeting with the candidate. Provide specific evaluation criteria (ideally in rubric form) that allow evaluators to record their feedback. These should be the same criteria the committee has decided to use to evaluate final candidates. Avoid asking for general impressions based on blink judgements or impressions of overall “fit” with the department or college. Instead, provide prompts that ask evaluators to comment on specific skills and qualifications outlined in the job description and criteria established by the committee.⁹

FAMILY-RELATED BENEFITS AND DUAL-CAREER RESOURCES

Where Bias Emerges: UMCP has many family-related benefits and some dual career resources available for faculty. Department chairs and hiring officials might be able to provide more assistance to faculty who make these needs clear early in the hiring process. However, many candidates – knowing the role that bias can play in hiring decisions based on partner and/or parental status – may be hesitant to ask about such benefits and policies.¹⁰

What Search Committees Can Do: Provide all candidates with access to faculty benefits and dual career information (see <https://advance.umd.edu/inclusive-faculty-hiring> for the Top 10



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Reasons Faculty Work at UMCP, which describes these benefits and links users to relevant campus offices). Additionally, connecting candidates to other administrators/faculty - who are not involved in the hiring decision – can also facilitate learning about the benefits and policies available at UMCP. See the Office of Diversity & Inclusion’s handout, Diversity and Inclusion Resources for Faculty (below) for groups who may be willing to meet with faculty candidates.¹¹

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² Fine & Handelsman, 2012

University of Arizona ADVANCE, (n.d.). *Interview Tool Kit*. Retrieved from <http://diversity.arizona.edu/sites/diversity/files/interviewtoolkitfinal.pdf>

³ Bragger, J. D., Kutcher, E. J., Morgan, J., & Firth, P. (2002). The effects of the structured interview on reducing biases against pregnant job applicants. *Sex Roles*, 46, 215–226.

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⁴ University of Arizona ADVANCE, n.d.

⁵ Brescoll, V. L. (2011). Who takes the floor and why: Gender, power, and volubility in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 56(4), 622-641.

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⁶ Alberts, H. C., Hazen, H. D., & Theobald, R. B. (2010). Classroom incivilities: The challenge of interactions between college students and instructors in the US. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 34(3), 439-462.

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⁷ Blair-Loy et al., 2017

⁸ Uhlmann, E. L., & Cohen, G. L. (2005). Constructed criteria redefining merit to justify discrimination. *Psychological Science*, 16(6), 474-480.

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⁹ Fine & Handelsman, 2012

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¹⁰ Fine & Handelsman, 2012

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¹¹ Schibinger, L., Davies Henderson, A., & Gilmartin, S.K. (2008). *Dual-Career academic couples: What universities need to know*. Palo Alto, CA: The Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research, Stanford University.

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