

EVALUATING APPLICATIONS

A key factor in promoting equity in the evaluation process is establishing and documenting the **criteria for evaluation prior** to reviewing applications or conducting interviews and consistently evaluating all aspects of the application. These criteria should be clear, and the committee should have a conversation as to what the criteria mean, and how the criteria will be evaluated.

Before looking at any applications, please consider the following questions so that your evaluation process can be equitable and consistent.

- Have we agreed on screening criteria for each qualification?
- Have we budgeted enough time to discuss each applicant thoroughly?
- Do we require factual, job-related reasons when we reject a candidate?
- Have we agreed to build the case for advancing each qualified candidate before identifying deficits? (Gillies, 2016)

As the committee discusses and documents the criteria for candidates, be sure to ask the following questions regarding the meaning of the stated criteria and how they will be measured.

- What kind of evidence do we need to evaluate intercultural competency?
- How will the committee know if a person has the ability to maintain positive working relationships with other staff and students?
- How would we know someone is excellent in the skills required for the position?
- If the criteria state that being a team player is important, what does that mean?

Search committees that do not have these conversations ahead of time may find themselves measuring candidates by different standards based on each member's own personal understanding of the terms or criteria.

It is very important to clearly define terms, criteria and the assessment of said terms and criteria ahead of time. Not spending sufficient time creating and clarifying the characteristics, skills and knowledge (both required and preferred) to succeed in the role will likely result in more work down the road in your discussions and compromise equity and inclusion. Not clarifying the criteria and how they will be measured for every candidate may unnecessarily eliminate candidates from consideration or may not give you job-related reasons for preferring one candidate over others.

Best practices for evaluation standards:

1. Establish well-defined evaluation criteria prior to evaluating candidates, and adhere to the criteria when evaluating candidates.
 - a. **Be consistent in evaluations.** Utilize an evaluation rubric (See Appendix B) to maintain consistency in evaluating the correct criteria. Unconscious bias may cause shifting standards to be applied in the evaluation of candidates and result in some candidates being held to differing standards based on stereotypes. Research has shown that when criteria are not clearly articulated before reviewing candidates, evaluators may shift or emphasize criteria that favor candidates from well-represented demographic groups (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001; Fine & Handelsman, 2012).

2. **Determine if there are certain characteristics, professional experiences, skills and knowledge that will be prioritized** prior to evaluating candidates. Have a conversation about why they are better indicators of success in the job than other characteristics, experiences, skills and knowledge that might also be required or preferred.
3. Establish **transferable skills** that are developed in non-academic settings but that may be relevant to the position in question.
4. Establish what will signify or communicate **strength within a qualification**.
 - a. For example, how will the committee determine whether one candidate demonstrates stronger strategic planning skills than another candidate?
 - b. For example, how will the committee determine whether a candidate is better qualified to initiate educational training?
 - c. What kind of evidence do you need to establish differences in strength among candidates?
5. **Assess every candidate's demonstrated commitment to diversity and their demonstrated experience working with diverse populations.**
 - a. Determine how diversity, equity and inclusion values will be evaluated within the functions of the job rather than merely as a separate add-on qualification.
 - b. Consider all the groups of people they will be interacting with and consider how they will promote an equitable and inclusive community at Whitworth.
 - c. Establish ways to identify that a candidate is self-reflective and thoughtful about differences between and within groups (particularly those from historically underrepresented or marginalized identities).
 - i. For example, committees for a faculty position should determine how candidates will demonstrate inclusive excellence in the classroom and how their approach to instruction will connect well with a diverse student body.
 - ii. For example, faculty candidates should be evaluated on their demonstrated ability to effectively interact and advise a diverse student body, on diversity-related research, and their ability to practice inclusive pedagogy.
6. Be wary of:
 - a. **Elitism:** Avoid positive evaluation of a candidate solely because of their association with an institution or individual with a prestigious reputation. These indirect assessments of a person's qualifications are not the most reliable indicators of future success in the role.

Remember that institutional connections and qualifications can also be the result of racist or sexist structures or systems.

- b. **Shifting and inconsistent standards** for candidates. Remember to appeal to what the group has prioritized and what would indicate strength. Differing standards can often be the result of stereotypes, so be clear to articulate the standards that are being used in the group's assessments of a candidate.
- c. **Ranking prematurely:** Ensure that all applicants have been fairly evaluated before ranking (Columbia, 2016).
- d. **Hidden assumptions:** Avoid evaluations that are not based on the evidence but are assumed based on other associations that one might have).
 - i. Having more experience does not entail having better qualifications.
 - ii. An uncommon research area does not entail that the candidate cannot teach main subfields in the discipline.
 - iii. An untraditional career trajectory or history does not entail having poor qualifications.
 - iv. Do not assume that racially minoritized candidates will not be happy at Whitworth.
 - v. Be aware that candidates from underrepresented backgrounds may have different communication styles or customs.
- e. **Appeals to "Whitworth culture":** Avoid relying on "fit" with a culture (e.g., university culture or departmental culture) without adequately defining what this entails or how it is connected to skills, characteristics and qualifications for success in the job. Also, remember that "culture" or "fit" is something that can unfairly discriminate against people from historically underrepresented or marginalized groups.
 - i. For example, we expect all faculty and staff to show evidence of or communicate an active Christian faith. However, what candidates emphasize as important in their Christian faith may vary widely and can also depend on a candidate's cultural background.
- f. **Conflicts of interest:** Be sure to disclose when one's interests potentially interfere with an objective evaluation (e.g., when evaluating a friend or someone you know).

Best practices for discussing applicants.

7. Utilize an **inclusion strategy rather than an exclusion strategy** when evaluating applicant materials and creating a shortlist.
 - a. Look for strengths in each candidate before critiquing weaknesses or applicant deficits (Columbia, 2016).
 - b. Research indicates that moving candidates through the evaluation process by means of inclusion (selecting suitable candidates from a list) rather than exclusion (eliminating unsuitable candidates) can reduce the impact of bias and stereotyping in the evaluation process (Hugenberg, Bodenhausen & McLain, 2006).
8. Spend **sufficient time** evaluating and reviewing each applicant. Equitably allot time to the discussion and evaluation of each candidate.
9. Evaluate an **applicant's entire application**, placing equitable weight on each element of the application as determined by the search committee.
10. Discuss candidates only within the whole group, and do not withhold information from the committee that is relevant to the search and evaluation of a candidate.
11. Build in regular "pauses" to ask questions, assess the potential impact of bias and determine if the committee's judgments are impacting whether qualified women and underrepresented individuals are being included/excluded from the pool (Fine & Handelsman, 2012).
12. Review applicant pool and candidate shortlist checking for adequate representation of women and underrepresented minorities. The office of human resources can assist the committee with this task (Columbia, 2016).
13. Document the reasons why each candidate did not advance. The hiring manager will record these reasons in the online system.
14. The EA will collect notes that are taken during the search process as a way to archive and document the search process.
 - a. Notebooks will be given by HR for notetaking for each member on the committee before the search begins. All notes should be taken on these notebooks.

Note: Sometimes our best efforts result in a less diverse pool than desired. Remember that doing the work leads to a cultural shift toward a more inclusive community. Stay focused on the long-term strategic planning, and you will eventually see the desired outcome. As an institution, we need to keep working toward our goals.