

## SEARCH COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

Search committees play a critical role in shaping the professional landscape and missional future of our institution. As with each facet of the hiring process, it's important to be thoughtful and strategic about selecting a search committee dedicated to Whitworth's mission and commitments to educational excellence, diversity, equity and inclusion. We want a great colleague who can build upon Whitworth's strengths while also enriching the community because of their unique expertise and diverse experiences and identities. The primary seeker should have strategic conversations with the Equity Advocate and head of the unit (e.g., Dean/Provost or Supervisor) about who is on the committee.

Most search committees will have between three to six members. When selecting members of the search committee, consider the following questions to guide the search committee selection process:

### Essential Questions:

- What essential voices and expertise should be on the committee? Why are they essential?
- Does our committee composition reflect the diversity of our student body or the diversity we're trying to recruit in our hiring processes?
- Which voices and perspectives are absent from our committee? Should student voices be included? What other segments of our community will interact regularly with the person we are trying to hire?

### Best Practices

1. Every search and committee must have an *Equity Advocate* (EA). This person will have additional training from the offices of DEI and human resource services to integrate equitable hiring strategies as well as maintain diversity, equity and inclusion language and issues at the forefront of each stage of the search process. The EA will work with the search chair to discuss the composition of the committee and the steps of the search process to best promote equitable and inclusive practices.
  - a. Ideally, the EA will not be within the searching department or unit. This will allow the EA to minimize any conflict of interest that may arise between conducting an equitable search and individual interests in who is hired.
  - b. If this is not possible, it will be important to remind the search committee the role of the EA but also that it is everyone's job to support an equitable process.
2. Assemble a diverse committee with an expressed and demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Researchers suggest that racial diversity in group composition leads to improved performance regarding group decision-making (Sommers, 2006). Although racial and ethnic diversity can cause discomfort, studies have illustrated that diversity leads to greater creativity, innovation and problem-solving ability when differing perspectives are present in dialogue and deliberation (Phillips, 2014). When assembling the committee, be intentional to not rely solely on women and minority members of the committee to uphold and advocate for

diversity and equitable hiring practices. It is the role of every committee member to recruit diverse candidates and foster equity and inclusion throughout the process.

- a. Diversity matters across many spectrums (experience, gender identity, age, field of study, ability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.). Diversity is critical in the racial and ethnic composition of a search committee – not only because it enhances group performance, but because the optics of the group can send a powerful message to applicants. For instance, a search committee that appears gender or racially homogenous could communicate to candidates that the department or institution does not care about diversity, equity and inclusion and result in decreased interest in openings at Whitworth University (UCLA, 2018, p. 7).
3. When selecting committee members, it is important to be mindful of how biases, stereotypes and a tendency toward in-group favoritism can influence the perception of credibility and collegiality among staff members (UCLA, 2018, p. 7). Acknowledging the human tendency to favor one's in-group, be aware of how this inclination could lead to the exclusion of women and other historically minoritized and marginalized identities.
  - a. A way of combatting in-group favoritism is by including at least one individual from a different department/unit. Thus, we recommend that each committee invite an individual from a different department or unit, reducing in-group favoritism and assisting the committee in the task of thinking more broadly about institutional goals and needs.
4. Ensure that all search committee members have completed the training on schemas, biases and equitable practices for search committees. This will often happen as a group with HR and with a representative from the Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.
  - a. Equity-minded practices throughout the search are everyone's job! The EA is a guide and consultant throughout the process but should not be the only person advocating and intentionally monitoring equity throughout the process.
5. Once all committee members have completed the training, facilitate a discussion about how unconscious biases could impact the outcomes of the search process. Encourage each committee member to actively practice evidence-based strategies for minimizing the influence of unconscious bias on decision-making and collectively commit to implementing strategies like *stereotype replacement*, *counter-stereotypic imaging*, and *individuation* throughout the hiring process (Devine et al., 2012). See *Appendix E* for greater detail.
6. Prior to the start of the search, facilitate a conversation about why a diverse community (faculty and staff) is clearly in line with the institutional mission, enhances our educational excellence, and creates a more supportive and inclusive environment for our student body.
  - a. The Search Chair should identify the EA in the committee and remind the committee of the value that they are serving in the role. Reminding the group of the role and acknowledging the EA's importance will legitimize their presence and help the group intentionally pursue equity standards.

- b. The EA can help the committee understand what they are trying to do for the committee and what they are not trying to do. Give your elevator speech!
7. Once every committee member has completed the required DEI search committee training, discuss how different individual biases could impact the outcome of the search. Be explicit about potential power dynamics within the group and establish ground rules for mitigating biases and power differential.
8. Prepare the team for inclusive meetings and discussions.
  - a. Remind the team of positionality and positions of power.
    - i. Gender dynamics
    - ii. Racial dynamics
    - iii. Power differentials among students and faculty/staff
    - iv. Dynamics between faculty and staff
    - v. Dynamics between non-tenure and tenure
  - b. It might feel pedantic, but establishing community agreements about how discussions will go will help ensure that everyone feels safe and included in sharing their viewpoints, questions and challenges. Some ideas of community norms are:
    - i. Do not rush the process. Sometimes people need time to reflect before sharing their views. Allow people to come back to an issue if possible. Provide committee members an opportunity to submit views, questions and concerns in writing if needed.
    - ii. Be intentional about explicitly asking for different perspectives from those that are being shared.
    - iii. Be mindful of not closing discussion prematurely before sufficient discussion has taken place, particularly if you have a position of power within the group. (e.g., “Obviously, this candidate is ...”; “I think we should move on.”)
    - iv. When the group convenes, remind them of why they are there and why are valued for the group and this work.
    - v. Pay attention to group dynamics. Do you recognize people repeatedly speaking first? Having the last word? Being interrupted? Redress excluding practices quickly.