

Fairness and Equity in Assessing Internal Candidates

1. Importance of fairness and equity in assessing internal candidates

- Assessing internal candidates requires particular attention to equity, transparency and related principles to ensure that the search builds a stronger unit. A poorly executed process can create division and discord.
- Given UVic's values of equity, diversity and inclusion, processes that apply these values and that seek candidates that can uphold these values are more likely to be successful long-term.
- By creating fair, equitable and inclusive processes and criteria, a search committee is better able to fairly assess each candidate's fit for the position and to appoint someone who meets these high qualifications.

2. Overview of key elements of being fair and equitable

- **Establish good processes.** Set guidelines for discussion and decision-making. Many problems come from discussions that veer from criteria, where power is used unfairly, where biases are introduced, where some candidates are clearly favoured or not seriously considered.
- **Learn about bias:** acknowledge that it exists; work on personal biases; identify types of biases that could affect the search; implement processes to reduce their impact.
- **Use strong criteria:** Develop them well and thoroughly and use at each stage in process.
- **Be consistent.** Use comparable and consistent processes at each stage of the search and for all candidates.
- **Prepare:** Take time before search to assess needs, composition, future development and specific skills needed; to learn about bias; to develop criteria; use transparent, consistent processes; and to align job descriptions and ads with what is developed.

3. Addressing unconscious bias

- Unconscious bias is widespread in higher education, with significant impacts on all stages of hiring from setting job criteria through candidate assessment and salary offers. Bias results in under-evaluating applicants who are members of groups which have negative stereotypes, and over-evaluating applicants who are members of groups with positive stereotypes. We all have biases; they are part of human brain functioning; and most are unconscious. To identify and address biases, consider the following questions:
 - What assumptions might you have about desirable personality type, gender, dis/ability, type of academic background, public profile, and other characteristics?
 - Are these assumptions legitimate, based on the work required for the role? Or do they simply reflect what you have seen in previous candidates, or drawn from other sources?
 - Through group discussion, separate questions of identity from the skills required for the work
 - Create a list of the types of skills required to do the work, ensuring that these do not reflect identity or other personal biases. Set aside assumptions which are not part of criteria.
- Individual ways to reduce bias:
 - Reflect on your own biases
 - Counteract your biases through counter-examples and reflection
 - Listen with curiosity to information you learn in a search
 - Engage meaningfully with the materials as an individual before group discussions
 - Take and refer to good notes to ensure use of criteria rather than biases in making recommendations

- Committee work to reduce biases:
 - Be careful in discussions of fit and in reviewing letters of support as these are places where bias often appears
 - Set ground rules for the search committee about processes and behaviours to support equity
 - Attend to power and establish good working processes so everyone in group can participate fully and freely
 - Focus on objective, job-related criteria, set at the start of the search
 - Use the criteria as touchstones for discussion, rather than personal opinion. Take time in processes and don't jump to decisions
 - Compare assessments across candidates to ensure you are weighting similar accomplishments in a similar manner
 - Provide comparable treatment to all candidates: ask same questions, question materials in same way, provide them with the same information
 - In reviewing materials, be aware of the **negative impacts of advocating for diversity, particularly for women and non-white persons: Women and nonwhite executives** who were reported as **frequently engaging in diversity-valuing behaviors** were **rated much worse** by their bosses, in terms of competence and performance ratings, than female and nonwhite counterparts who did not actively promote diversity (Hekman et al., 2016).

Note: Examples of ground rules include a commitment to attend all the meetings; keep personal biases out of the discussion; use the criteria as touchstone for discussions; we will maintain strict confidentiality; we will refer to evidence, not rumour, in discussions and decision-making (see Moody, 2012, pp. 116-120).

4. Criteria: How to formulate or review criteria for fairness

- Fair, clearly articulated criteria are possibly the most important element of an equitable hire.
- Consider the current and future (next 5-10 years) needs of the institution, the position role, and the abilities required to move the unit towards its future.
- From this assessment, work towards a common understanding of the criteria. As a group, flesh out a description of each criterion; examples of what it looks like; and details on what evidence will you seek to show the presence of this. Such discussions ensure that assumptions are fully discussed, and that bias is neutralized. Watch for vague criteria which allow multiple interpretations and bias to creep in.
- Review criteria for unnecessary barriers and to ensure they are broad enough to address diverse experiences and identities.
- Develop and review criteria before and without considering any potential candidates.
- Choose which criteria are most important. These will be weighed more heavily in assessment.
- Use criteria to review materials and guide discussion at every stage of the process.

5. Use good processes throughout the search:

- Transparency: Clear steps, followed diligently and recorded
- Consistency: Apply processes consistently across candidates
- Individual responsibility: Assess as individuals before group
- Openness and power sharing within the committee
- Care and deliberation: Take time to ask questions and review materials to ensure common understanding

- Full engagement: Attend all meetings; share one's views; work to understand other perspectives
- Impartiality: Develop a collective process to address conflicts of interest and make an honest, unbiased decision
- Time: Take sufficient time to review and consider materials to allow a shift from gut responses to critical thinking
- Power sharing: Dynamics of a group affect ability to fairly evaluate colleague. Pay attention to questions of power, ways to make sure everyone can be heard, etc. are vital to benefiting from the expertise of a diverse committee

6. Principles to support being fair in a review—general

- Ensure that context for reviewing or developing criteria is the planned direction of the faculty and institution rather than individuals.
- Remember that there can be advantages as well as disadvantages to being an internal candidate. Unless the search committee has clearly identified a preference for one or the other in reviewing criteria, individual member's preferences need to be put aside in discussions and decisions.

7. Principles to support being fair in a review—using criteria and information

- Stay aware of the context and bias of each source of information
- Connect each piece of information with criteria to reduce the emotional impact of information and focus on its relevance to what the committee has chosen to assess
- Review criteria before and without considering the candidates, and use them at each stage of the review
- Attend to entire portfolio and avoid being swayed by any single item or one's personal experience with a candidate
- If information comes up which is outside of that provided by the candidate:
 - If it is a rumour or otherwise unsubstantiated but concerning information, consult with the committee chair about its appropriateness for the committee.
 - Other knowledge you might have can be brought up for discussion with the chair. The point of the discussion is to discern if the information is related to the evaluation criteria. If it is, then the committee can discuss when and how to weigh it into the discussion. If it is determined that it is not, then it needs to be set aside.

Summary

- Constantly attending to and setting aside biases is vital for fair searches at all levels
- A fair process is based on criteria which reflect the needs of the institution, and reviews candidates through multiple methods on their ability to meet these criteria