

Guidelines for Departmental Policy: Creating an Effective Faculty Search Process

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on a range of considerations for conducting effective faculty searches, including authority during the search, the role of participants not on the search committee, efforts to attract a broad and inclusive applicant pool, and fair and equitable evaluation processes. Most of these topics should be discussed prior to launching a search, and ideally departments will develop a set of standard practices that reflect core values and agreed upon goals.

Authority during the search process

There are a number of points during the faculty search process where it is important for departments/schools to have pre-established practices for the level of autonomy given to the search committee, and for the level and timing of inclusion of the department chair and the department/school faculty during the search process.

- **Agreement on the purpose and scope of the search:** An important role of the search chair is to ensure that the committee has a shared understanding and agreement on how the position is conceptualized and defined. Any differences of opinion should be examined and managed prior to evaluating any candidates. A disagreement regarding the focus of the search is a common reason that searches fail.
- **Search description in the advertisement:** Typically, the search committee has the authority to write the description of the position consistent with the approved language in the FTE allocation. This authority may also be given to the department chair per department policy. In some units, the description is shared for discussion with the full department prior to the search. It is important that the advertisement description clearly reflect the goals of the search in terms of area, scope of the position, and desired qualifications.
- **Consideration of applicants by faculty not on the search committee:** Each department should have a process that specifies who can give input and at which stages of the search. It is strongly advised that the search committee not accept input on candidates until a long list of candidates for serious consideration has been established. Faculty who are not on the search committee often want to advocate for a candidate known to them, or conversely to highlight a candidate they feel is not well qualified. But unless faculty members have reviewed all candidates at that stage and used the criteria established by the search committee, input of this type might give an unfair advantage or disadvantage for certain candidates.

- **Creating the “long list”:** It is typical for the search committee to have the autonomy to create the long list (those under Serious Consideration). If the long list is presented to the full faculty for discussion, it is expected that each department faculty member will review the complete files for all the long list candidates using the same criteria as the search committee before offering feedback on any candidate. A process for gathering input for selecting candidates to be invited for an interview should be determined in advance.
- **Creating the “short list”:** The practices regarding generation of the short list are more varied. In some units, the search committee is given this authority, and sometimes their deliberations are confidential. In other units, there is extensive discussion with the full faculty, and sometimes a vote is taken. The practice should be determined in advance, and common selection criteria used.
- **After campus visits by candidates on the short list:** It is necessary to be clear how feedback will be gathered from all faculty who participated in the candidate visits. In many departments, the faculty convene to discuss the candidates, while in others a rating tool such as a survey is used to gather input from all faculty. It is important that faculty who participate in discussions attend all candidate interviews, and that remarks focus on evidence related to the established selection and evaluation criteria rather than general impressions or hearsay.
- **Voting:** It is important that there are transparent voting policies and procedures. In some units the search committee makes a clear recommendation for a first choice candidate (sometimes with an alternate), while in other departments, the faculty discuss the pros and cons of each finalist and then vote. If the faculty meet to discuss more than one candidate, there should be two separate considerations. First, each candidate should be considered independently to determine if she/he meets Berkeley’s standards for appointment. For those that do, there needs to be further discussion and voting regarding the top choice.

Other roles in the search process

It is important to consider the extent to which department chairs, departmental Equity Advisors, and graduate students will be involved in the faculty search process, and what specific role they will play.

- **Department chair:** The rights and responsibilities of the department chair should be clear. It is advisable that the chair moderate the full faculty discussion of candidates without stating his/her opinion. The chair’s letter on the case should express the sentiment of the faculty; faculty members are entitled to review the letter the chair writes. If the chair has a different opinion from that of the faculty, he or she may write a personal letter.

- **Equity advisors:** Departmental Equity Advisors may or may not serve on the search committee. If the Equity Advisor is not a search committee member, one member of the committee should be appointed as the “equity liaison” for the search, and communicate with the Equity Advisor throughout the search process. At a minimum, Equity Advisors must sign off on Search Plans, applicant pools, short lists, and Search Reports; ideally they are consulted throughout the search process. Proactive discussion with the search committee about unconscious bias and fair search practices should be standard practice. When evaluating applicant pools and shortlists, Equity Advisors should consider if sufficient effort was made to attract a diverse pool of candidates, especially for the long list.
- **Graduate students:** Graduate students are involved to some extent in the majority of faculty searches at Berkeley. It is recommended that one or more graduate students serve on the committee. Practices vary as to whether or not the graduate student is a voting member of the committee (if committee votes are taken) and if he/she has access to letters of recommendation. A common practice is for the graduate student to poll the full graduate student population in the department/school and present summary results to the committee. It is advisable that a graduate student serving on the committee not be an advisee of one of the search committee members.

Efforts to attract a broad and diverse applicant pool

Women and underrepresented minorities under-apply for most of our faculty positions relative to their national availability. Proactive efforts are necessary to achieve a representative pool of highly qualified candidates.

- **Advertisement:** There are a number of federal requirements that must be included in the ad; there are [advertisement templates](#) with these requirements (department AP analysts can assist with this). It is recommended that the advertisement include statements about Berkeley’s commitment to diversity near the beginning of the advertisement, and in addition, many searches are now requesting a statement from applicants on their past and future plans for contributions to diversity. These statements provide useful information for the search committee, while also communicating clearly the search committee’s commitment to these values (see <http://ofew.berkeley.edu/recruitment/contributions-diversity> for more information and examples).
- **Cultivating a diverse pool of applicants:** It is not easy to cultivate a diverse applicant pool of qualified candidates. Search committees that are successful typically employ multiple active strategies such as personally inviting promising women and underrepresented minorities to apply for the position. Sending an advertisement and marketing email to peer institutions will likely be insufficient. A practice that often works well to diversify the applicant pool is to generate a list of promising candidates (e.g., by contacting colleagues at other institutions to ask for recommendations,

identifying candidates at conferences, using fellowship directories such as the President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, expanding the list of institutions to contact beyond the top tier, and identifying individuals who may be excelling at less prestigious institutions), and then sending a personalized message to candidates on the list inviting an application. Federal affirmative action law expressly allows for outreach that targets women and minority candidates (however, California State Proposition 209 does not allow for selection of a finalist on the basis of identity characteristics).

- **Demographics of the applicant pool:** Search committees should evaluate the applicant pool initially to determine if it meets the benchmark availability for demographic groups and if there is a sufficient number of strong candidates. An initial evaluation of the pool for demographics and other marker categories can help the committee determine if the application deadline should be extended to conduct additional efforts to encourage applications from women and minority candidates.

Fair and equitable evaluation processes

Once applicants have applied to our faculty positions, there are a number of important considerations to ensure that all are fairly evaluated. By federal law and University policy we must ensure that our employment processes are fair and equitable, and offer equal employment opportunity. *We also have a vested interest in hiring outstanding faculty who will make extraordinary contributions in their research, teaching, and service while sharing our University values of equity and inclusion, and our public mandate to serve a diverse student body. There is little that is of greater importance for Berkeley's future than careful selection of new colleagues.*

- **Unconscious bias:** It is important that those involved in the selection of a new colleague reflect on stereotypic preconceptions, unrelated to quality and talent, which might play a role in choosing one individual over another. Most faculty work hard to overcome such preconceptions.
- **Conflicts of interest:** It is important to establish a standard protocol for handling consideration of an applicant who was a recent graduate student or postdoc in the department or who has been a close collaborator of one of more departmental faculty. Information on likely applicants should be taken into account when establishing the membership of the search committee. In an ideal process, a candidate's formal advisor, or other faculty members who have worked closely with a candidate should not serve on the search committee for the period during which the candidate is under consideration. When departmental discussions of finalists occur, those who have worked closely with a candidate should not attend or participate in voting for any candidates. Should there be appropriate reasons for a different process, the Office for Faculty Equity & Welfare is available to consult on appropriate modifications consistent with the goals of conducting a process that is fair to all applicants, and approve any such modifications as part of the Search Plan or as situations arise during the process.

- **Personal characteristics:** Faculty should not ask candidates for certain types of personal information, especially such questions that might be perceived as a criterion for appointment (gender, marital status, race, ethnicity, family status, religion, national origin, age, etc.), including during informal conversations such as those that often take place at candidate dinners or other gatherings. Nor should they use information they know about individuals' personal characteristics in any deliberations or assessments. For example, potential spousal/partner issues should not enter into the decision to put forward a candidate for appointment.
- **Selection criteria and evidence:** It is important to apply a set of specific criteria and gather evidence systematically to evaluate applicants. A holistic approach – “we know the best when we see it” – ignores consideration of a nuanced and complex set of values and candidate characteristics that will truly add distinction to Berkeley. If applicants applying will be at different career levels (e.g., starting the first assistant professor position versus being a current assistant or associate professor), it is important to create a clear plan for how to evaluate candidates with such different experience (for suggestions about how to set up an open-rank recruitment in AP Recruit, see <http://ofew.berkeley.edu/recruitment/senate-searches>). It is also important to consider the relative weighting of the established criteria, and whether the weighting will change at the different stages of evaluation.

General questions for selection criteria consideration include:

- What kind of questions is the candidate asking in his/her research?
- Has the candidate adopted a distinctive approach?
- What would the impact be if the candidate is successful?
- How wide-ranging is the impact? Does the impact span the subfield, field, and/or bridge into other fields?
- What are the qualities of mind revealed by written and oral presentations by the candidate? What is the evidence for creativity, rigor, leadership, defining new research, etc.
- What evidence is there that the candidate will engage in productive research collaborations within or beyond the Department?
- What is the evidence that the candidate will engage productively with undergraduate and graduate students in lecture sections, seminars, and as research mentors?
- Is there evidence that the individual will work well with a diverse group of students and make contributions to the university mission of access and inclusion?
- Is there the promise that the candidate will work effectively to build and sustain Berkeley as a strong institution. For example, Berkeley is strong when it supports academic excellence through faculty leadership, promotes a diverse

range of scholarly inquiries, and creates equal opportunities for faculty colleagues and students.

- **Implementation of the selection criteria:** It is important to determine at the outset how the established criteria will be used and candidates evaluated, including providing enough time to evaluate each applicant without rushing, ensuring that strong candidates are not overlooked, particularly if their work falls between more than one discipline (we recommend at least two reviewers for each application), and considering what criteria need to be met to move candidates onto the long list and the short list. It is especially important to use evidence to support assessments of candidates, and to avoid generalities such as “poor fit.”
- **Informal information:** It is nearly impossible to avoid receiving informal information about candidates outside of materials submitted by candidates with their application. Indeed, certain types of informal information are quite valuable in identifying promising candidates, or following up on identified concerns. There are a few important guidelines for consideration of such information:
 - Some types of information should not be shared, especially hearsay.
 - Every effort should be made to gather similar information for all candidates at a given stage.
 - If references are contacted, there should be a consistent set of questions asked for all candidates.
 - If additional letters are obtained, the committee should obtain consent from the candidate.
- **Confidentiality:** Candidates have the expectation that their application is shared on a need-to-know basis. This means that faculty members who have access to applications should not be discussing candidate information outside of the faculty in the department/school, and especially not with colleagues at other institutions. In addition, search committee members have an expectation of confidentiality during committee deliberations.