Interviewing – Best Practices

It is important to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for applicants during the interview process. While the search committee's purpose is to evaluate the applicant for the position, the applicant also is assessing the University and determining if this opportunity is right for him/her. Positive interactions with the search committee and the interviewers may be the deciding factor for the best candidate to accept an offer.

The goals of an interview are to further evaluate candidates ranked as "Interview" based on their application materials; collect additional information on the candidate's job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities; and identify the most qualified candidate for the position. Collecting information accurately and consistently from each of the applicants gives the search committee the necessary information to objectively and equitably evaluate the candidates. Therefore, it is important to provide each applicant with substantially similar interview experiences.

Interviews via Phone/Skype:

Phone or Skype interviews are an inexpensive way to assess the qualifications of a larger group of "Interview" candidates and can be used as a first round to narrow the list of candidates to bring to campus. By using these "screening" interviews, the search committee has a larger interview list to refer back to if the first choice candidates are not selected or decline the interview or offer.

If the search committee decides to conduct phone/Skype interviews for the first round, all candidates must be interviewed using the same or comparable method. Except where unusual circumstances are present as described in the next paragraph, it is not permissible as a first round, to interview some candidates via phone or Skype and some face-to-face during the same round. For example, if a Skype/phone interview used to determine which candidates will be brought campus, local candidates must also be interviewed via Skype/phone, and not in person.

If a candidate requests an interview via phone/Skype due to geographical or other circumstances after an invitation for an in-person interview, the search committee may change interviewing methods for that candidate.

The same best practices listed below apply to a phone/Skype interview.

Preparing for an interview:

- Notify each applicant about the interview and logistics. Send a letter or e-mail confirming the interview. Sample confirmation letters are included in Recruiting Solutions and on the Office of Institutional Equity website.
- At the same time, send a decline letter or e-mail to applicants who were ranked as "Unqualified" and will not be invited for interview. Decline letters to "Qualified" applicants also may be sent

at this time for those candidates that will not be moved into the "Interview" group regardless of the outcome of the interviews.

- Provide all applicants with an interview itinerary, including names and titles of the search committee and any other individuals that the candidate will be meeting or interviewing with. Ensure that applicants are provided with parking and building locations and accurate directions to both.
- Make sure that all candidates are provided with comparable travel, transport and/or hotel arrangements. Arrange for hosts or escorts to and from campus where appropriate.
- When developing an itinerary, allow sufficient time for each candidate's interview and time to travel to different campus locations if needed. Arrange a representative from the department or committee to accompany the candidate to other locations.
- If scheduling multiple interviews for one day, allow time between each interview for the search committee to review their notes and have an initial discussion about the candidate, and for the candidate to take a break.
- Give all candidates equal opportunity to meet with the entire search committee, department members, and other stakeholders. E.g.: If candidates coming to campus will have time meet with the department head, faculty in the department and/or the Dean, make sure that each candidate is given that same opportunity to meet with the same or substantially-positioned people.
- If the candidate will be expected to provide a job talk or presentation, ensure in advance that all technical needs are discussed at the time of scheduling and can be accommodated.
- If a candidate requires an accommodation for a disability, contact OIE for further assistance.
- Offer the candidate the opportunity to meet with a Recruitment Ambassador during the campus visit.

Developing interview questions:

- Review OIE's interview guidelines to ensure that all questions are non-discriminatory and legally permissible.
- Devise a core group of questions based on job related criteria to evaluate candidates' qualifications. Ask questions that are related that are related to the candidate's qualifications. Develop questions that address all the qualifications for the position.
- Craft open-ended and behavioral questions that prompt the candidate to offer information about his/her skills and "do the talking", as these will provide the best insight in to a candidate's qualifications for the position. Avoid questions that merely require a "yes" or "no".
- Develop questions that will allow the committee to make an objective assessment of each candidate and minimize bias.
- Ask the same core group of questions of each candidate. This will allow for a comparative evaluation and ensure that the interview process is consistent for all candidates. Follow-up questions can be asked to clarify answers or address a candidate's individual experience or skills.
- Determine how questions will be posed by the committee and assign questions to members, where appropriate.

- Consider developing a standardized form with qualification-related criteria for non-committee members to use (e.g. department members, students or those attending a job talk) for consistent candidate evaluation.
- Contact OIE for further guidance or for troubleshooting.

The Interview:

- Plan for someone to greet the candidates upon arrival. Prepare a designated area where candidates can wait for the interview to begin and where the candidate will not encounter other candidates if multiple interviews are scheduled in one day.
- Introduce search committee members to the candidate prior to beginning the interview.
- Describe the format of the interview and the interview process as a whole.
- Share pertinent background information about the job, department, and University.
- Remember that the candidate should do the majority of the talking during an interview.
- Keep your reactions to a candidate's answers to yourself. Try not to influence other search committee members as they are evaluating the applicant.
- Keep the interview moving and on time.
- Leave time for candidate questions.
- At the end of the interview, inform the candidate that you will be checking references and ask if you can pursue references not provided by the candidate.
- Describe the remainder of the search process, how candidates will be notified of the University's decision, and the anticipated timetable.

Ensure that every University employee involved in the interview process has reviewed OIE's guidelines and is aware of inappropriate topics. It is very important to remember that all time spent with the candidate, whether in a formal interview or in an informal social setting, spent with the candidate is considered part of the interview process. Questions that are inappropriate or illegal in an interview context must also be avoided in a social setting (i.e.: coffee, meals, car rides, one-on-one meetings).

Post-Interview
Shortly after all interviews have been completed, the search committee should meet to discuss the candidates' qualifications based on the interviews. Evaluations of the candidates must be qualification related and based on the candidate's performance in the interview and/or presentation combined with the strength of their written application materials.

Depending on the charge given by the hiring manager, search committees either recommend a candidate for hire or provide a ranked/unranked list of the top number of candidates specified.

Each candidate, especially those that were interviewed, has made an investment of time and resources to the search process and it is important that the candidates are treated in a manner that acknowledges that effort. Candidates that will not be considered for employment should be contacted as soon as the hiring decision is made. A decline letter should be sent from the search chair or hiring manager. Applicants in the "Qualified" group (who were not notified earlier) also should be sent a decline letter at

this time. If a decision is delayed, all candidates should be notified about the change the search's timetable. By the end of the search, each applicant should have received a communication from the search committee or hiring manager regarding his/her status.

Following the selection decisions, the members of the search committee should discuss and evaluate the search process. Evaluating the process and results and noting successes and failures will be helpful for future searches and search committees.