Faculty Hires: Fostering fair and equitable evaluation processes, and success in building diversity.

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 mission to serve a diverse student body. There is little that is of greater importance for Cornell'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. All members of the search committee are required to participate in the Office of Faculty Development and Diversity's (OFDD) programs addressing unconscious bias in faculty searches. This includes “Effective Search Practices I: It depends on the lens” and “Effective Search Practices II: The interview.”

• 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 hiring unit 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 nor participate in the discussion nor the voting for any candidates. The Senior Associate Deans are 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. The seemingly holistic approach of “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 CALS. 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. Finally, 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.

General questions for selection criteria consideration include:
• What kind of questions is the candidate asking in their 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? Is it local, or national, or international?
• What are the qualities of scholarship 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? Will their research generate a vibrant group of colleagues, collaborators and students? Will this positive impact be felt in our classrooms?
• Is there the promise that the candidate will work effectively to build and sustain Cornell as a leading institution? For example, Cornell is ‘leading’ when it supports academic excellence through faculty and academic leadership, promotes a diverse range of scholarly inquiries that cross disciplines, 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, and ensure similar letters exist for other applicants under consideration.

• **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.