CALS Search Committee Process – Details

Please read before initiating the search

Items in italics found at: https://cals.cornell.edu/about/leadership/sad/appointment-procedures/academic-hiring

Department Chair Responsibilities
The Department Chair should assist with all phases of the search process. In general, the Department Chair should not be a member of the search committee because ultimately the Search Committee acts as adviser to the Department and Department Chair. Exceptions to this should be discussed with the Senior Associate Dean before Search Committee membership is finalized. Chairs usually arrange to have their offices handle all correspondence and files relating to a search. Administrative assistants can have valuable roles in maintaining records, establishing schedules, and arranging interviews. The Search Committee and Department Chair should determine specific applicant selection and interview procedures to be followed by the Search Committee to fit department needs.

Search Committee Structure
The Department Chair must propose the composition of the search committee to the Senior Associate Dean. After approval, the Chair invites the nominees to serve. Search committees for faculty positions should consist of at least four members, though committees are sometimes larger than this. At least one member should be from another department at Cornell. It is a courtesy for the Department Chair to contact the proposed external faculty member’s Department Chair before inviting him or her to serve on the search committee. The external member(s) should be selected based upon their personal expertise relative to the position and should represent a constituency external to the department. Other members from these external constituencies can be included during the interview process. For positions that encompass several departments and “department open” positions, committee membership should be balanced from these several departments. Search committees should include women faculty and faculty from underrepresented groups if individuals with appropriate backgrounds are available. A graduate student may be a full member of the search committee if the department desires. The committee should establish liaison with the undergraduate constituency in the department, if appropriate. For positions with extension responsibilities, it is appropriate to include someone to represent this constituency in the search process, most often through the interview process.

Search Committee Responsibilities.
The Search Committee has overall responsibility for managing the search process. This includes advertising, soliciting applications, evaluating the applications, organizing the interview process, evaluating the strengths and limitations of each person interviewed, and presenting a recommendation to the department faculty. The Search Committee works with the Department Chair to coordinate the process with the department. The Search Committee works with the department faculty to ensure that equal opportunity and affirmative action goals are met. The Chair of the Search Committee or the Department Chair must see that every application or inquiry is properly acknowledged and that all applicants are informed of their status in a timely and appropriate manner. All acknowledgement communications should be individually addressed and be sent by the Search Committee Chair, Department Chair, or a Search Committee Assistant noting he/she is communicating on the Search Committee Chair’s behalf. If you are collecting hard copy applications, the communication to
each applicant should include a reminder to use the HR website (www.hr.cornell.edu/jobs/applicant) to provide requested confidential demographic information. If you are using Academic Jobs Online, the candidate may enter the information directly on that site. Contact the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity (owdi@cornell.edu) for a sample acknowledgement letter.

The ultimate goal of the Search Committee is to locate an individual about whom there is substantial enthusiasm and no substantial concerns. The search should continue until this point is reached.

**Relation of the Search Committee to the Department: Department-based searches.**
In the usual case, the Search Committee acts as an executive committee of the departments/units conducting the search. The committee has the lead role in conducting the search. This includes soliciting and reviewing applications, and recommending candidates to interview. The search committee organizes the interviews, evaluates those interviewed and recommends to the department whom to hire. However, the department typically retains the right to modify recommendations concerning whom to interview and ultimately to hire. All search committees have members from outside the hiring department and these outside members should have an opportunity to be present at the hiring Department’s discussions of the candidates.

**Initial Search Committee Meeting**
The Senior Associate Dean or her/his designee will meet with the Search Committee, preferably at the first meeting of the committee, for the first 15-20 minutes of the meeting (see CALS Search Committee Kick-Off Meeting Agenda). The first meeting should take place soon after the position is approved to give the committee an opportunity to review and refine the search plan before it is put into effect. The Department Chair will arrange the meeting that provides an opportunity to discuss various aspects of conducting a successful search. The support person assigned to the Search Committee should distribute copies of the (draft) position description and (draft) search plan. If in draft form, the Search Committee finalizes the position description and the search plan, and the Department Chair requests final approval from the Senior Associate Dean.

**Position Description**
The position description may be written by the department (led by the Chair) or may be finalized by the search committee, depending on the culture of the department. Department faculty must agree with the final content of the position description. The position description (see Sample Position Description) consists of the position title, description of expectations, qualifications, and information about how to apply. The central component is a description of the job to be performed. The department should describe the major responsibilities expected including verbs describing the level of performance expected. This text provides the basis for conditions of employment. It should be described sufficiently well so that it is clear what the expectations are. So, for example, researchers should “lead,” “innovate,” “publish,” and “secure funding.” Teachers and mentors should “motivate and inspire.”

All professorial positions should have two areas of functional responsibility. One must be research and the other is teaching or extension. The percent effort in research, teaching, and/or extension should be specified.
The qualifications’ statement is the second most important part of the position description. This should contain the minimum set of experience essential for the position plus experience that may be desirable in the best candidates. The words “required” and “desirable” usually distinguish between the importance of particular experiences. Anything labeled as “required” must be a characteristic of anyone to whom the position is offered. This is an equal opportunity requirement. These qualifications should not be so restrictive to limit those who might apply, but not so general to give false hope to a large number of applicants.

Use a “soft” target date for receipt of applications. This may be phrased as “applications will be reviewed beginning (date) and continue until a suitable candidate is identified.” It allows the Search Committee to review applications received after this date while announcing a starting point for the review process.

The position description must be approved by the Senior Associate Dean before it can be advertised. Once approved, the search committee works with HR to ensure Cornell and College policy related to advertising positions is followed.

**Search Plan**
The search plan (see Sample Search Plan) outlines the process that will be used to advertise the position. It may be drafted by the Department Chair but is typically finalized by the Search Committee. It should include those advertising outlets required by Cornell and College HR policy, in addition to outlets that are particularly relevant to the search and field in question. The Committee or Department Chair or designee should contact CALS HR to assure appropriate advertising outlets are included. An effort should be made explicitly to identify outlets that may have a strong chance of reaching minority and women candidates. The search plan may also include a list of individual contacts that will be made – for example, to colleagues in related disciplines at other universities, or to group list serves for pertinent scientific or professional societies. Search committees are encouraged to identify the top scholars in the field who are women or under-represented minorities and contact them for possible candidate suggestions (or to invite them to apply if the position is appropriate).

The search plan must be presented to and approved by the Senior Associate Dean before the search and advertising begin. CALS HR must be contacted by the Department Chair or designee to ensure the search is duly entered in the TALEO system.

**Search Actively**
An active search process usually produces a better pool of candidates. The Search Plan required by the university, which the Committee should review and revise, if needed, deals primarily with advertising. The Search Committee should extend this by making personal contacts with individuals who might be good candidates or who might know of good candidates. It also should encourage faculty not on the Search Committee to make such contacts. Diversity is a key attribute of a healthy, productive faculty. A key component in maintaining or increasing diversity begins with the search process. Please give careful consideration to female and minority candidates, especially those who are well-established (maintaining sensitivity to rank advertised; hire must be at rank advertised unless special exemption is obtained from CALS HR). Established individuals may require personal invitations and encouragement to apply; existing professional networks should be exploited.
Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action
Cornell needs the substantial presence among its faculty of women, individuals of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and differently-abled persons. A university that lacks a diverse faculty is deprived of skills, perspectives, and insights that are essential to the effectiveness, balance, and comprehensiveness of a great institution of higher education. Applicants from underrepresented groups should be actively sought.

Potential applicants should have equal opportunity to hear about the position. Application review and the interview process should be structured to treat all equally. The final decision must relate directly to the needs of the position and not ad hoc factors unique to one candidate.

Each applicant to an academic position should be provided an acknowledgement letter that conforms to the University Template. For a sample acknowledgement letter contact the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity (owdi@cornell.edu).

Treat Applicants with Respect
The Search Committee is ultimately responsible for communications with applicants and candidates, though an administrative assistant or department chair may be directly involved. We would like all applicants to have a good experience in responding to the position announcement. Although only one will get the job, others are or will be colleagues and we will benefit from maintaining good relationships.

Selection Criteria
The position description typically includes only the most basic job responsibilities and does not include all the characteristics necessary to be a successful scholar, teacher, mentor and colleague. The Search Committee is encouraged to discuss and detail the selection factors that are likely to characterize the best candidates before evaluating applications. Early in the process the Search Committee should determine its process for evaluating applications (see Candidate Evaluation Tool as an example of what can be used). Factors that contribute to excellence and leadership in research, teaching, extension, mentoring, collegiality and other major components of faculty responsibility should be identified. Attitudes, such as initiative and optimism, along with communication and relationship skills that faculty bring to their roles are critical to success. Identifying these factors early in the selection process allows them to be used consistently for all candidates.

Keep Notes on Decisions
Searches are subject to audits. As decisions are made, detailed notes should be attached to each applicant file documenting reasons for dropping him or her. It is easier to do this when the decision is made rather than later. Records must be kept to document evaluations of applicants. AcademicJobsOnline.org is an excellent tool for gathering this information, as well as EEO statistics.

Recruitment Costs
The College provides funding for recruitment for approved professorial positions. The College reimburses for:

- Advertisements that are described and approved as part of the search plan.
• The actual cost of travel, meals, and lodging for up to three interviewees. Costs for additional candidates are the responsibility of the department.
• Dinners with each candidate (limited to $75 per person, not to exceed a total of $375 per dinner without prior approval). (A list of attendees must be included with meal receipts).

The cost of breakfast or luncheon meetings with interviewees is the responsibility of the department.

For positions in Ithaca, please contact Kathrynne Teeter (kwt2@cornell.edu; 607/255-1504 or 85-1504 from Geneva with a tie line) to receive an account number to charge search expenses covered by the College; for positions in Geneva, please direct questions to Kimberly Moyer (kam48@cornell.edu; 315/787-2272 or 49-272 from Ithaca with a tie line).

**Candidate Selection for Interview**

The Search Committee recommends to the Department applicants to be interviewed. Telephone or video interviews with several semi-finalists may be helpful in selecting applicants for on-campus interviews. The Search Committee Chair usually leads the faculty discussion and reaches agreement on the preferred list of candidates. The Department Chair seeks approval from the Senior Associate Dean to invite the preferred candidates (usually three – see below) to interview. Approval must be secured before extending any invitations for on-campus interviews. The following general information is required when permission to interview is requested:

- Number of applicants
- Number of male and female applicants

Use the Academic Search Summary Form (Part I Demographics) at [http://cals.cornell.edu/about/leadership/sad/appointment-procedures/academic-hiring/](http://cals.cornell.edu/about/leadership/sad/appointment-procedures/academic-hiring/) to organize this information when sending it to the Senior Associate Dean.

The following information is required for each candidate proposed for interview and for each female candidate (and each minority candidate, if identifiable from application materials), who will not be interviewed in the initial round:

- Name
- Sex (and ethnicity/race if known)
- Ph.D. institution
- Current position
- Brief statement describing why the person will or will not be interviewed.
- For those recommended for interview, a copy of the CV

Please provide this information electronically. The Senior Associate Dean will review this information to confirm that affirmative action goals are met and to approve extending interview invitations.

**Number to be Interviewed**

The strength of the applicant pool determines how many will be interviewed. The College will fund up to three interviews at a time. The Department must pay the cost of additional interviews if it wishes to interview more than three applicants. The Senior Associate Dean will consider funding subsequent groups of three candidates, if the first group fails to impress. The Search Committee may bring in fewer than this number. Circumstances in the applicant pool, such as one candidate being far superior to the others or an inadequate number of
suitable candidates, may reduce the number interviewed, but we strongly encourage interviewing at least two candidates for purposes of comparison. The Search Committee is not obliged to interview anyone from a group of applicants.

**Plan the Interview Process**
The purpose of the interview is to evaluate the candidate’s qualifications and experience in the context of position requirements. Thus interview questions and approach, whether those of the Search Committee or of other individuals, should be planned around job requirements. The interview should be thoughtfully constructed to fully reveal critical applicant strengths and to give applicants a full appreciation of opportunities available at Cornell. We need to sell ourselves to the best candidates, so this is not a one-way selection process. The detailed screening criteria should be used to construct a set of interactions. Repetitive questions and answers can be avoided if assignments are made to explore different areas of competence in different parts of the interview. We encourage involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in the interviews. Presentations relating to student mentoring and teaching or extension are encouraged in addition to the research seminar.

The interview is a time to involve faculty from affiliated departments who may have an interest in the position and how it is filled. Attention should be paid to the unique interests of each candidate; these may suggest appropriate modifications to the basic interview schedule.

**Present Cornell and CALS Positively**
This is an opportunity to sell the candidates on the opportunities available at Cornell. It is not an appropriate time for individual faculty to complain about specific personal grievances they may have. The Department Chair and Search Committee should foster a positive, supportive atmosphere for the candidates throughout the search process.

**Interview and Interview Questions**
The interview should be a stimulating, positive experience for all involved. We need to learn more about the candidates and the candidates will need to learn about us.

Research has determined that interviewers make their decisions within an average of four minutes from the beginning of the interview, but also that longer interviews lead to more accurate evaluations. Therefore it is vital to give the interviewee your complete attention for the entire interview session.

The Search Committee and those directly involved in interviews should develop a list of questions before the interviews. This is to insure a thoughtful approach to this process as well as a consistent treatment of all candidates. Questions should be developed around the written responsibilities and requirements of the position. Desired capabilities, qualities and attitudes that the search committee has agreed are important can be explored. To stimulate thinking about specific questions, consider the following:

- The essential functions (research, teaching, extension, advising) of the position.
- The “hidden” expectations, such as general leadership, budget and personnel management, collegiality (being effective in groups), program development, grantsmanship, recruiting students, etc.
Particular qualities or specific experiences necessary to be successful. These might include integrity, initiative, leadership, cooperation, creativity, optimism, ability to resolve conflicts, communication effectiveness, listening skills, etc.

In developing interview questions, each question should be examined by asking:

- Will the answer to this question create a disadvantage for individuals from under-represented groups? If “yes,” then rephrase or don’t ask the question.

- Does this question really relate to the skills and abilities needed for this job?

The interview process includes both formal and informal situations for asking questions. In formal interview situations, the individual or committee should ask all interviewees the same questions in the same sequence. Interviewers should probe incomplete answers and problem areas while maintaining an atmosphere of trust. Open-ended questions are the most useful.

In addition to direct questions, consider asking about how candidates would deal with situations. Simple examples of situational questions are: What do you do when a manuscript or a grant proposal is turned down? What do you do if you conclude that a student advisee is not capable of meeting quality expectations? (The clarifying questions an interviewee asks can be as important as their answer, so some vagueness can be useful). More complex situations can be developed from real events or issues.

Also consider scenario interviewing. Scenario interviews refer to placing the candidate in a situation similar to a real job situation. The research seminar, a lecture in the course the successful candidate will teach, or an extension presentation to an extension audience are examples. Another example may comprise a questioner engaging in “role play.” Examples would be taking the role of a student with a problem or an uncooperative colleague.

Summarize information after each interview so that it can be accumulated and integrated when the placement decision is made.

Some topics are not appropriate, or are illegal, to ask candidates. See http://facultydevelopment.cornell.edu/recruitment/ for a helpful resources, including a list of legal and illegal questions for job candidates. CALS HR can be invited to meet with department faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students to review this information prior to hosting candidates on campus.

**Interview with College Administration**

A meeting with CALS administration (your Senior Associate Dean) is a required part of the search process. A half-hour meeting should be arranged. The administrative assistant working on the search should arrange this meeting before arranging other meetings for the candidates as the Sr. Assoc. Dean’s calendar is likely the most difficult to schedule. This meeting is probably most valuable on the second day of the interview so that the candidate can ask questions of the College leadership representative but timing is flexible.

Prior to this meeting, each office should receive material to include:

- Position description
- Schedule of the visit
Legal Vulnerability
Searches at institutions receiving federal funding are subject to federal audit for compliance with equal opportunity laws and affirmative action policies. As decisions are made, the search committee should record reasons supporting them. These notes should remain with the applicants’ files. The reasons should be specific enough to each candidate that an auditor can find confirming evidence in the application materials or by comparing reasons for selecting among those interviewed.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its additions prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. Questions relating to these factors should be avoided as they usually have no bearing on ability to perform the job. Planning interview questions, as previously described, is a good way to consider beforehand whether a question presents legal vulnerability. Remember that questions asked in informal sessions (e.g., meals) should still adhere to these standards.

Established and Senior Applicants
Our positions often attract the attention of established individuals even when the position is advertised for individuals starting at the assistant professor level. Except for affirmative action hires, we must employ an individual at the advertised level. This is required by equal opportunity policies. However, we can agree to initiate review for promotion sooner than would be the case for someone on her/his first faculty appointment.

If the senior applicant contributes to the affirmative action objectives of the college, we have the option of suspending the search and undertaking a directed search. A proposal to take this approach must be discussed with the Senior Associate Dean. If this directed search is unsuccessful, the original search can be resumed.

Any exceptions to the normal process of hiring at the advertised level must be discussed by the Department Chair with the Senior Associate Dean, especially before any promises are made to an applicant.

Dual-Career Couples
A significant percentage of our appointments involve dual-career couples. Equal opportunity requires that a candidate’s marital status not be a consideration in hiring. However, if a top candidate has a spouse/partner who might require a university appointment, the Senior Associate Dean should be contacted. The College has good success in arranging suitable dual-career appointments. The sooner we can begin to think about possible solutions the better our opportunities are to recruit such individuals. General information about institutional support for dual-career couples may be found at https://www.hr.cornell.edu/jobs/dual_career.html. Additionally, new university resources have been made available to support dual career needs involving professorial faculty. Information on “Cornell Dual Career Protocol and Support” is shared in the search committee kick off meeting with the Senior Associate Dean and available at https://cals.cornell.edu/about/leadership/sad/appointment-procedures/academic-hiring/.
International Candidates
Candidates must have a visa status that permits employment and must be US citizens or have permanent residency status to be awarded tenure. Candidates who are not US citizens cannot receive special consideration under affirmative action policies. As Cornell is a major international university, foreign-born faculty do enhance our international role and meet some diversity objectives. Therefore, foreign-born applicants should be considered in any faculty search.

Reaching a Decision
The Search Committee should gather information from the interviews, evaluate each candidate, and report their assessment to the Department faculty. All members of the Search Committee should be allowed to be present and to participate in the faculty discussion of the candidates. The Search Committee typically spends more time with each candidate so its insights and analyses need to be heard.

The Department faculty should consider the Search Committee recommendations, then vote on whether to offer the position to a candidate, and if so, which candidate. The faculty vote may result in a ranking of candidates, and may determine if any candidates are totally unacceptable, should priority choices turn down the position. The Chair conveys the faculty’s recommendation to the Senior Associate Dean.

In making the recommendation to the Senior Associate Dean, the Department Chair should provide a thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate interviewed. The report should include the vote of the Department faculty and the vote of the Search Committee. The recommendation of the Department usually prevails and thus must be made with the greatest care.

The Department recommendation should be sent to the Senior Associate Dean in electronic form. Usually this provides sufficient information. In some instances, there may need to be a meeting among the Senior Associate Dean and the Chair of the Department and Search Committee before the Senior Associate Dean reaches a final decision.

Communicating with Candidates/Making an Offer
Generally applicants and those interviewed should be kept advised of the status of their application as the process proceeds. Applicants eliminated from further consideration should be so informed when the decision is made.

When a final choice is made by the department and approved by the Senior Associate Dean, the Chair can inform the candidate verbally of the department decision. Any proposed salary and start-up offers should be approved by the Senior Associate Dean prior to the offer. The Department Chair initiates negotiations with the candidate on salary, start-up, conditions of employment, etc. Start-up costs must reflect real need. Start-up estimates should include all functional areas associated with the position. Agreement on salary and start-up costs is necessary before there is a written offer. A template of an offer letter is available from the Senior Associate Dean at http://cals.cornell.edu/about/leadership/sad/appointment-procedures/academic-hiring/ All components of the offer letter should be reviewed and approved by the Senior Associate Dean before it is sent. The Department Chair and Senior Associate Dean will work together during the negotiation process with the candidate selected.
Electronic copies of the signed offer/acceptance letter, candidate’s full CV, and the final position description are sent to Senior Associate Dean’s office by the Chair’s office. Please complete Parts II and III of the Academic Search Summary form available at http://cals.cornell.edu/about/leadership/sad/appointment-procedures/academic-hiring/ and submit copies to the Senior Associate Dean and Tam Shollenberger, CALS HR. Once the candidate has signed the offer letter, please work with your HR representative to appoint the person in the position. Your HR representative can advise what materials are needed to process the appointment.

**Travel Reimbursement**
Moving expenses are paid for by the College using University guidelines and policies. Financial support will be provided to cover reasonable travel costs associated with up to two house-hunting trips and/or lab renovation meetings in Ithaca prior to the candidate’s relocation. The College will provide a flat $3,000 one-time payment, which will be subject to taxes and withholdings in offsetting travel costs associated with house-hunting trips in Ithaca prior to relocation. The person providing administrative support for the search should be in touch with CALS-HR to request these funds. There will be no expectation to provide receipts. This payment is separate and distinct from the expenses associated with one’s final move to Central New York.

*Upon the candidate’s acceptance of the position, all further reimbursements will be taxable according to Federal law with the exception of the one-way move.* Cornell University engages Coldwell Banker Relocation Services to support faculty in relocating to the area. These services are outlined fully on the CALS Finance & Administration website: http://cals.cornell.edu/about/leadership/ofa/bsc/frr-funding/

**Thank You Notes**
The Department Chair should be sure to thank everyone involved in the search process, especially the search committee members and the administrative support staff.

**Post-Search Data Reporting**
After the candidate has accepted the offer, a complete appointment package, and search data must be submitted (usually by the Chairs Assistant or the Department Manager) to CALS HR, including Parts II and III of the Academic Search Summary Form (http://cals.cornell.edu/about/leadership/sad/appointment-procedures/academic-hiring/). Note that the form requires at least names and addresses of all applicants.