Best Practices in Faculty Recruitment and Hiring

For more information, email OFDD@cornell.edu or VPAA@cornell.edu.
Step 1: Develop a Position Description

- Develop a position description that includes strategic scholarly areas, desired experience, and disciplinary background.

- Write the description that appeals to a broad applicant pool. Avoid narrowing the field so much that highly qualified applicants would be deterred from applying.

- Do not write a “replacement” ad for a faculty member who has left or retired from the department.

- Use precise language about excellence. Superlatives such as “exceptional” or “distinguished” should be linked to scholarship, teaching records and promise.

- State explicitly Cornell’s and your department’s commitment to diversity. In addition to the Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity language, articulate the department’s commitment to diversifying the faculty. Examples include:
  - Cornell University is committed to supporting the work-life balance of its faculty.
  - We seek applicants whose record in research, teaching or service has prepared them to contribute to Cornell’s historical commitment to diversity.
  - The department is looking for candidates who can support our growing diverse student body through advising and inclusive teaching approaches.
  - Make sure your department website features and promotes an inclusive environment and articulates commitment and understanding of the value of diversity.
  - Ask prospective job candidates to include a statement on how, through their research, teaching and/or service, they can contribute to diversity and inclusion in support of Cornell’s mission of “any person… any study”. Doing so provides useful information and signals the committee’s interest in recruiting a diverse pool of applicants (see example in the new required statement attached).

Step 2: The Search Committee

2.1 Assembling the Search Committee

- The search committee should include, when possible, faculty from diverse backgrounds who may bring a broad array of ideas and expertise. This should include sub-disciplines, gender, and race/ethnicity.

  - Be aware that women and minorities underrepresented in their fields are frequently asked to sit on various committees and may be overburdened by administrative commitments, resulting in them declining participation. Ask for their input at other points in the search, if they are willing.
• Consider including faculty from outside your department, especially if you’re searching in a field in which your department lacks deep expertise or that is emerging or interdisciplinary.

• Reach out to faculty members with relevant expertise even if they are not members of the search committee to get their perspectives.

• Appoint a Search Committee Chair who is committed to faculty diversity.

• The entire search committee should be attentive to issues of unconscious bias and active recruitment, detailed below. Assigning specific members of the committee as diversity advocates can also ensure that these issues are raised. Any member of the committee should feel free to advocate for any issue that would reduce unconscious bias.

• Consider including graduate students and postdocs in your search process. Graduate students, who may be interested in faculty positions can benefit from insights into the academic job market. Students and postdocs may also know emerging scholars.

2.2 Search Committee Ground Rules

• **Confidentiality.** All search committee members must be sure that they can confidentially share their views with colleagues. Set ground rules about what can be discussed with other members of the department outside the meetings.

• **Legal and Illegal Question.** Ensure the search committee members and anyone else participating in the search process is aware of the legal and illegal interview questions. (See Appendix 1.)

• **Recordkeeping.** The committee should keep complete records about job postings, lists of candidates and candidate nominators, candidate dossiers, ratings, long and short lists, and interview notes. This will help evaluate the success of the search.

• **Consensus or Votes.** The committee should decide how decisions will be reached, either by consensus or by voting. If the latter, then the committee should also decide if absentee votes will be allowed, and if the votes will be open or confidential.
2.3 Possible Issues for Untenured Colleagues

- Faculty hierarchy and power structures among committee members can silence some members while allowing for others to control the search process.
  - Senior faculty may intimidate untenured faculty on the committee. Untenured faculty may feel uncomfortable disagreeing with their senior colleagues who later will be evaluating them.
- The chair and senior committee members should draw junior colleagues into the discussion.
- The chair can reach out to untenured colleagues outside official committee meetings to ask if they have concerns or views they felt uncomfortable sharing with the entire committee.

2.4 Ensure Meetings are Productive

- In the first meeting, in addition to issues pertaining to the position and the hiring process, provide committee members with a chance to discuss concerns, responsibilities, and ground rules.
- Set meeting dates in advance, so people can hold the dates for search committee meetings and attend as many as possible.
- Offer a clear agenda for every meeting, review it with the committee, and then try to stick to it.

2.5 Meeting with the Associate Dean in the College/Oversight Committee Chair

- As per the protocols for search accountability the search committee should meet with either the associate dean in the college or a college oversight committee to discuss the search plan.

Step 3: Develop a Search Plan

- The department and the search committee should sketch a search plan, based on the approved position description.
- The search plan should outline outreach activities (outlined in section 4.4. below).
- Develop a realistic timeline for recruiting and interviewing, working backwards from a target completion date or offer letter date, recognizing that some fields have specific job market periods. Be sure to account for holidays, grading periods, and other times when it will be difficult to get faculty members’ attention.
Step 4: Developing a Broad Pool

At this step, the committee should focus on expanding the applicant pool by approaching and encouraging candidates to apply. Reaching qualified candidates and convincing them to apply requires proactive outreach.

4.1 Who’s Responsible for Forming a Robust Pool?

- Committee members should all be engaged in the process of developing a pool; they should also rely on experts in the department and in the field.

- All committee members should engage in matters related to the diversity of the search.

- Consider giving at least one committee member (e.g. the diversity advocate) the task of keeping track of efforts to develop a broad pool of applicants.

- The search committee chair should consult with HR’s Department of Workforce Diversity and Inclusion to learn if there is an affirmative action (AA) placement goal for faculty positions at the advertised level. A goal is an indication that current faculty demographics are below the national Ph.D. recipient demographics in the field.

4.2 Review Process and Outcomes of Previous Searches

- Examine the lists of applicants to the searches in the past five years.

- Explore whether candidates who have achieved success elsewhere were overlooked in past searches.

- Discuss how the search committee can avoid such outcomes.

4.3 Examine National Availability Pool Data

- Analyze the relevant national Ph.D. graduate, postdocs and early career faculty potential pool data. This provides a benchmark for what your pool demographics should look like. The Faculty Pipeline Tool helps committees identify schools with a high number of potential underrepresented candidates (women and minorities).

  - Professional societies may also distribute relevant information about programs with high proportion of women and minority Ph.D. candidates (see Appendix I: advertising resources).

- If your pool’s diversity is weaker than the availability data suggests, additional outreach is needed.
4.4 Strategies for Developing the Applicant Pool

- Develop lists of names of potential candidates and a list of names of people who can **nominate** potential candidates.

- People highlighted early in the search process often show prominently in the search; ensure that the early lists include women and minorities.

- Ask faculty members who are not serving on the search committee, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to provide lists of potential candidates and potential nominators.

- Review journal editorial boards, early career award winners (e.g. NSF CAREER, Presidential CAREER, Pew, HHMI faculty Scholars, HHMI Gilliam Fellows, etc.) to identify rising stars.

- Examine lists of award winners in relevant professional societies, including lists of women speakers in STEM (See Appendix I).

- When you read your professional literature, identify scholars you do not yet know.

- At conferences, attend sessions given by younger, up-and-coming researchers whom you may not yet know.

- Committee members should attend receptions hosted by special interest groups for female and minority scholars at professional annual meetings.

- Identify and consult with individual from institutions that are especially successful at recruiting and graduating female and minority doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows in your field. These institutions are identified in the Faculty Pipeline Tool.

- Ask individuals who were nominated and who are not interested in the position to nominate others.

- Examine your faculty diversity in comparison to your peers: Peer departments that are more diverse will, generally, have more diverse graduate student and postdoctoral populations from which to recruit. Ask colleagues in these departments to nominate candidates for your position.

- Consult with alumni and visiting faculty.

- Develop and nurture a pipeline. Ask colleagues in your field to identify candidates who are “not quite ready.” Many departments maintain a standing committee that cultivates a diverse slate of potential candidates over time beyond the specifics of any search.

- Advertise in publications that target female and minority scholars.
• Advertise in field-specific associations, journals, listservs and websites (see appendix I for a list of advertising resources).

• Advertise in publications affiliated with diversity-focused associations. Cornell is a member of the Higher Education Recruitment Consortium (HERC). Check for discounts here.

4.5 Actively Recruit Candidates to Apply

• Search committee members need to work proactively to recruit candidates, such as those from the LBGTQ community, First Generation/low socio-economic family income, veterans, refugees, older applicants who managed to obtain training late, including those candidates who may have had opportunities only after childrearing.

• Personal outreach is the single most effective tool for building and diversifying the pool. Such activities can include outreach by those who may not be members of the search committee.

• The best candidates generally have multiple offers and options. Increasingly, highly qualified candidates have to be personally invited to apply, especially if they do not see themselves as a natural fit for Cornell, for your department, or for the specific position.

• Placing ads alone does not produce the applicant pool you want (e.g. an MIT report indicated that the majority of their underrepresented minority faculty members applied to MIT only because they were actively recruited (in comparison to just over one third of majority faculty; MIT, 2010).

• E-mail and follow up with a phone call to potential candidate inviting them to apply. Talk with the candidate about their scholarship and achievements. Not about their identity. Describe the resources available at Cornell for research, scholarship teaching and supporting faculty work-life balance.

• Avoid making assumptions about candidates; don’t assume anyone is unavailable or unmovable. People’s circumstances change, so do their responses. Let the candidate decide whether your department is a good fit.

4.6 Resources for Applicants with Disabilities

To ensure the largest, most diverse pool of candidates, including candidates with disabilities, the search and hiring process should integrate the following major accessibility elements: effective communication, access to facilities, and procedures and protocols for reasonable accommodations. The University Disability Information page provides resources, initiatives, and procedures.
Step 5: Candidate Evaluation

5.1 Develop Evaluation Criteria

- Prior to evaluating applicants and at the outset of the search, the search committee should agree on the criteria to be used to evaluate applicants. Without explicit criteria, evaluators tend to use criteria that support their favored applicants.

- Define broad yet clear criteria around the following qualifications:
  - Scholarly impact (avoid substituting journal impact factors for your actual evaluation of the impact of the work)
  - Research productivity and potential for continued productivity
  - Research funding and potential for research funding
  - Ability and potential to attract and mentor graduate students
  - Ability and potential to teach and supervise undergraduates
  - Ability to attract, work with, teach, and advise diverse students (the requested diversity statement should be helpful in evaluating this criteria)
  - Commitment to collaboration with colleagues
  - Relationship to department strategic directions
  - Potential to making a positive contribution to the department’s climate
  - Potential to be a conscientious department citizen

- Use a conventional five-point scale to rate applicants: outstanding, excellent, good, fair, and poor (as well as N/A or don’t know when insufficient information is available). You can use the candidate evaluation tool or adapt it to your specific needs.

- In each domain, consider both past accomplishment and future trajectory.

- Evaluate all candidates, including those who might seem an uncertain fit.

5.2 Reviewing Dossiers

- If possible, all committee members should review all applications.

- Ensure every application is reviewed by more than one person

- If there are hundreds of applicants, the chair should assign subsets to each committee member. Vary the pairings of committee members with dossiers so that you don’t inadvertently create “mini-committees of two.”
Ensure each relevant candidate’s work is thoroughly reviewed.

Identify strong applicants, looking for reasons to keep candidates under consideration rather than to exclude them. This ensures candidates are fully considered.

Use evidence-based evaluation – use consistent information about candidates (solicit recommendations at the same point in time for all, read all materials, etc.)

Beware of rating candidates to heavily for their pedigree (institution or advisor)

Use consistent standards and expectations for all and apply the same criteria to rank candidates.

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5.3 Be Aware of Unconscious Bias in the Evaluation Process

Search committee members often give preference to applicants they know, whose advisors or mentors they know, or who hold a degree from their own alma mater or one of a small number of elite institutions (Clauset, Arbesman and Larremore, 2015).

Women, minorities, and candidates from institutions other than traditional peers can be held to higher standards. Search committee members may scrutinize their records in an unconsciously dismissive way, evaluate the same achievements as others to be less important, and fail to notice unexpected achievements.

Search committee members—and sometimes letter writers—can inadvertently, or even overtly, minimize the contributions by women and minorities, and may unfairly attribute success to mentors and collaborators.

Letters of recommendations often reflect stereotypic views of demographic groups. Research indicates that men’s research is often described as seminal. Women are often described as warm and collaborative (Dutt et al., 2016, Madera et al, 2016; Trix and Psenka, 2003). These implicit cues can influence decision-making.

Be especially vigilant about statements concerning “fit.” This euphemism is often used to exclude individuals whose demographic characteristics don’t match the demographics of the department or field.

Be cognizant of “hiring for cultural fit” which can exclude promising candidates who might not look, think, or act according to the norms and expectations with which we are familiar.
• Recognize your own unconscious biases (we all carry such biases, and awareness of them can help mitigate their influence, or ensure that we ask whether we are making decisions based on them).

• Spend sufficient time on evaluation to reduce the influence of assumptions that may not be warranted.

• Consider all aspects of diversity, including new fields or technologies, geographic regions, style of work, and intellectual or political points of view, alongside other dimensions you are working to improve.

• Any use of Google to obtain information on candidates should be judicious and job-related. For example, candidates’ online presence might help assess how active they are in their disciplines. But searches should not be done to elicit information that could not be appropriately obtained directly from a candidate. Remember that information found online is not always accurate or up to date.

5.4 Identifying the “Long List” of Credible Candidates

• Long lists” typically have 8 to 10 candidates.

• Hold a committee meeting to assess all applicants with a goal of generating the “long list.”

• The chair (or an administrator) should assemble rating data from committee members in a spreadsheet that sorts the list by the criteria and share it with the committee.

• The committee should decide whether the ratings will be shared anonymously or with committee members’ names. Anonymity sometime lends itself to more frank discussion.

• Monitor the composition of the long list:
  • Does the representation of women and minorities reflect the applicant pool?
  • Bring forward female or minority applicants who might deserve a “second look.”
  • Pay special attention to individuals just below the “long list” cutoff. Also look out for applicants who excel on one or two criteria, but not necessarily all.

• Ask colleagues not on the committee confidentially to review the “long list” to see whether strong candidates are missing. This is an opportunity to reach out to potential candidates who may not have yet applied to ask if they would submit an application.
• If the timing allows, interview “long list” candidates remotely (conference/Skype/Zoom) to provide more information for setting the “short list.” All interviews should be conducted in the same format (i.e., in person or via Skype).

5.5 Identifying the “Short List” of Candidates to be Interviewed

• A strong diverse “short list” is crucial since your hire will be made out of this group of individuals.

• Schedule a meeting to select the “short list” of candidates to come to campus for a visit.

• Restate the criteria for evaluating candidates, reminding committee members to apply uniform clear standards in choosing people.

• Review and read the complete dossier of the candidates on the long list.

• Beware of tokenism on the short list: one woman, one minority member, and an otherwise all-white, all-male group. Studies show that interviewers evaluate women and minorities more fairly when more than one is interviewed.

• Meeting with the associate dean in the college/oversight committee chair. As per the protocols for search accountability the search committee should meet with either the associate dean in the college or a college oversight committee to present the short list and confirm that the committee and the dean are satisfied with the quality and diversity of the pool.

5.6 Planning Campus Visits

• Careful planning helps ensure that all candidates have a similar, high quality visit.

• Develop and provide in a timely manner, an information packet to share with each candidate, with a detailed schedule identifying the name and affiliation of each person they will meet. Photographs, websites, and a map make it easier for candidates to orient themselves before arriving.

• To ensure that each candidate has an equally high-quality experience, standardize the schedule as much as possible while also providing customized opportunities for each candidate.

• Include a common set of instructions to help candidates prepare for their visit. Common instructions help level the playing field and improve the quality of interactions and talks. This is especially important if some candidates have degrees from programs different from yours (e.g., disciplinary PhD candidates interviewing at professional programs; individuals with degrees from one field interviewing for a position in a related but different field).

• Describe the format of the job talk: Are questions dispersed throughout the talk or is there a Q&A period? How long should the talk be and how long will the Q&A period
take? Is there a chalk talk or a sample lecture expected? If so, what are the formats for these? Will a committee member moderate the questions or the candidate?

- Determine who will escort the candidate around campus to meetings and meals?
- All candidates should interact with faculty and students in multiple venues, including talks, individual and group meetings, and meals.
- Candidates should meet with each person for roughly the same amount of time. Strive to treat internal and external candidates with consistency.
- When possible, candidates should meet with diverse faculty including those from outside the department if warranted. The Office of Faculty Development and Diversity (e-mail ofdd@cornell.edu) can help arrange such meetings.
- Have candidates meet people not on the search committee who can serve as “independent resources” to provide a broader sense of the faculty experience (write ofdd@cornell.edu if you need assistance in setting up such meetings).
- Consider having people meet with a representative from the Office of Faculty Development and Diversity. The office can inform candidates of helpful resources and services to manage work and life, including on matters related to diversity, housing, benefits, and dual-career assistance. Refer candidates to the Human Resource and OFDD websites for more information.

5.7 Ensuring a Successful Campus Visit

- Remember that candidates evaluate the department as much as their potential colleagues evaluate them.
- Everyone meeting candidates should review the Legal and Illegal Interview Questions, you will need to enter your Cornell credentials to access this). Do not ask any direct or indirect questions that are on the illegal inquiries.
- All committee members should attend all job talks, if possible. Ideally, all voting members of the department should attend as well. Without consistent attendance, committee members and others may inadvertently give more weight to candidates whose talks they attended.
- To ensure job talks are well attended, free a 90-minute time slot during business hours (9-5), where no teaching is taking place.
- Enlist graduate students to attend and ask questions (and be sure to solicit their feedback).
- If possible, videotape or allow remote participation (through Zoom/Skype) of job talks to ensure that all voting members of the department who are unable to attend the talk in person have an opportunity to watch it. Make sure that the availability of remote viewing doesn’t decrease attendance at the talk itself.
• Immediately after each campus visit, email everyone who interacted with the candidate and ask for feedback, preferably on a standardized form. Appendix II has a sample form. The form asks to explain the ranking and sources of data and provides the search committee with additional information about how much contact—and how in depth—each evaluation may be.

5.8 Selecting the Preferred Candidate (and Possible Alternates)

• Hold a search committee meeting to select a preferred candidate (and possibly an acceptable alternate in case the first-choice declines).

• Refer back to the evaluation criteria to ensure that the candidates were evaluated thoroughly according to the agreed set of criteria.

• As per the protocols for search accountability the search committee should meet with either the associate dean in the college or a college oversight committee before extending an offer to present the selected candidate and ensure that all protocols and processes were adhered to.

5.9 Making an Offer

• While practices vary, the search committee or the department will present the selection to the chair/dean who will craft an offer letter. In order to quickly act on dual career and other potential issues, make the offer and ask the candidate if there is anything that would affect whether they can take an offer (e.g. if there is a spouse or partner that has dual career needs, the chair or dean should be quickly notified.)

• Once the offer is presented to the candidate, department members should be encouraged to contact the candidate, welcome her/him and offer information and help.

5.10 Develop an Initial Mentoring Plan for the New Faculty Member (Chair or Dean)

• Once an offer has been accepted have the search committee members who interacted most closely with the candidate, make recommendations to the Chair/Dean about strengths, and potential.

• Identify a faculty member in the department who agrees to serve as informal host for the new faculty member through the transition to the department, to Cornell and to Ithaca. Informal hosts can introduce new faculty to resources and offices and can check in with the new faculty to see that they feel engaged and cared for.

• For junior colleagues, discuss what could support the candidate’s promise.

• Write a proposed mentoring plan using the mentoring guidelines;

• Provide the candidate with the information about the Office of Faculty Development and Diversity which can help them set up a peer mentoring group and ensure they’re aware of the various professional development opportunities.
References


The links in this document are available on the website of the Office of Faculty Development and Diversity at facultydevelopment.cornell.edu. For more information, email ofdd@cornell.edu or vpaa@cornell.edu.
Appendix I: Advertising Resources

The following is a list of websites and job boards that you may consider as a resource for outreach to faculty candidates when you write up your search plan. The online copy of this guide includes hyperlinks to each of these websites. Note, however, that as is often the case, some links change. If you encounter an expired link, please let ofdd@cornell.edu know ASAP, and we will make the change. If you are aware of an organization that we have missed, please let us know, and we will add it to the online version and the next printed version.

General:

- Academic Keys
- The Chronicle of Higher Education Careers
- HigherEdJobs

Disciplinary Resources - General

- American Physics Society
- American Anthropological Association (AAA)
- American Chemical Society
- American Comparative Literature Association
- American Economic Association (AEA)
- American Historical Association (AHA)
- ASALH – Association for the Study of African American Life and History
- CLAH- Conference on Latin American History
- Coordinating Council for Women in History
- American Institute of Biological Sciences Diversity Scholars
- American Institute of Biological Sciences (member organizations are listed here)
- American Political Science Association
- American Psychological Association (APA)
- American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
- American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB)
- American Sociological Association (ASA)
- Computer Research Association
- Mathematics Association of America
- Modern Languages Association (MLA)
- Science Careers

Diversity-Related - General

- The American Indian Higher Education Consortium
- American Associate of Hispanics in Higher Education, Inc. Job Board
- Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education
- Diverse: Issues in Higher Education
- Diversity.com
- EOE Online: Promoting Diversity and Inclusion
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
IMdiversity
Insights into Diversity Career Center
Journal of American Indian Higher Education Job Board
The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education Faculty Jobs
HBCU Connect.com Career Center
The Hispanic Outlook on Education Magazine – Job Board
LGBInHigherED.com
Minority Postdoc
National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals Inc.
National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Science and Engineering
The National Registry of Diverse & Strategic Faculty
Nemnet: Minority Recruitment
Women in Higher Education Career Center

Disciplinary Resources – Diversity-Related

ABRCMS – Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students
Association for Women in Science – Career Center
Women Chemist Committee
ACS Women Chemists of Color Program
Chemists with Disabilities
ChemDiversity
National Organization for the Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers Career Center
American Physical Society – Minority Physics Profiles
American Economic Association – Committee on the Status of Women in the Economic Profession – Liaison Network
American Economic Association Minority Job Market Candidates
American Economic Associate Ad Hoc LGBTW Economics Working Group
APA CEMA (Committee on Ethnic and Minority Affairs)
APA Women’s Programs Office
Society for Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity, and Race (Division of the American Psychology Association)
American Sociological Association (ASA) – Minority Fellowship Cohorts
Computer Research Association - Women
Computer Research Associate -- underrepresented Minorities and Persons with Disabilities (URMD) Grad Cohort Workshop
Mathematics Association of America – American Ph.D. s in mathematics who are members of minority groups
Association of Women in Mathematics – Job board
MLA: Committee on the Literatures of People of Color in the US and Canada
MLA: Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession
American Indian Science and Engineering Society
National Society for Black Engineers Career Center
National Society for Black Physicists Job Board
The PhD Project – Business Schools
Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE) – Career Center
Society of Mexican American Engineers and Scientists (MAES)
Society for Women Engineers (SWE) – Career Center
Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science Career Center