

3.00 RESPONDING TO APPLICANTS

3.01 RESPONDING TO DOSSIERS

A thank-you letter should be sent promptly to all applicants upon receipt of their materials. This letter should state that unless confidentiality is requested in writing, information regarding the applicants and nominees must be released upon request; finalists cannot be guaranteed confidentiality. It may also contain information about the search committee's time frame, since candidates will undoubtedly be anxious to know when they will be hearing about possible interviews. Additional information, e.g., papers or publications or a statement on his or her philosophy of education, may also be requested at this time (Appendix I, sample letter #1). In addition, applicants should be asked to complete the Affirmative Action Data Questionnaire and return it to the Equity and Diversity Resource Center (Appendix M).

3.02 EVALUATING CANDIDATES

Although evaluation procedures vary, the search committee may want to either develop a rating form based on job-related criteria or keep the notes that the search committee generates. A rating form may consist of a series of job-related questions or issues that the committee believes are crucial to the position. Written comments reflecting the judgment of each member of the committee should be made for each candidate. Not only will this allow the search committee to determine which candidates are to be interviewed, it will also save time if it becomes necessary to return to the applicant pool at a later date.

It should also be added that no nominee for a position is a candidate until he or she has made direct contact with the search committee by letter, telephone, or submission of documents. Only bona fide candidates should be evaluated by the search committee.

Most selection processes involve more than one screening. Generally the first screening determines if candidates meet the minimum criteria for the position. Subsequent screenings become increasingly qualitative and increasingly difficult.

In searches that involve a large number of candidates, not all members need to read all dossiers. It is advisable, however, for the chair of the committee to read all dossiers rejected in this screening. Polite letters of rejection should be sent at this point to candidates who do not meet the minimum qualifications for the position, rather than waiting until the entire search has been concluded (Appendix I, sample letter #5).

It is not difficult to get a committee to agree that it should hire the best candidate. Determining the criteria for establishing who is "the best" is more difficult. The search committee may wish to evaluate its selection criteria in terms of their validity as predictors of future success. For example, in a faculty search, to what degree does publication in

research journals, for example, predict performance as a faculty member? Are there other predictors of future performance for women and minorities whose educational, social, and cultural background is significantly different from that of a white male?

The committee may wish to examine a candidate's entire career when applying its criteria. A woman who has earned her degree and entered the academic profession after taking time out to raise a family will undoubtedly have employment gaps and/or fewer publications than a male of the same age whose career has been uninterrupted. If one evaluates her publication record in terms of the time period over which it was produced, however, she may well be the stronger candidate.

While publications may be a significant indicator of future success for a faculty position, it is not the only indicator of the value of a candidate to a department. A search committee should carefully examine all of an individual's accomplishments, his or her potential for growth, the diversity of perspective that he or she will bring, and any unique contribution the candidate would make to the unit. Non-traditional career patterns should not exclude or inhibit otherwise qualified candidates from being considered for administrative or other appropriate positions.

Search committees must also be on guard at all times against biases which may unconsciously intrude into their evaluation of a candidate. Degrees, for instance, from women's colleges or southern universities must not be automatically seen as inadequate; reference letters from individuals not known to search committee members should not be given less credence and importance than letters coming from cronies in the "old boys' network"; scholarship on feminist or minority issues should be evaluated on its academic merits not devalued because some may believe that it is not "in the mainstream."

Likewise, it is vital to eliminate from the evaluation process any stereotyped ideas based on the candidate's race, color, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, disability, or gender (e.g., the notions, for instance, that women are more transient than men, or that individuals with disabilities are not interested in long-term careers). Applicants with disabilities must be evaluated in terms of the actual job requirements, with no thought given to accommodations.

UW-Madison has a Disability Accommodation Policy for classified, academic staff and faculty applicants and employees. Any questions about disability issues involving applicants and employees should be directed to the Equity and Diversity Resource Center.

Whatever criteria are used, it is important that they be applied equally to all candidates. Based on their evaluations, the committee either decides as a whole, or in consultation with the chair/supervisor which candidates will continue to be considered.

References should be checked at this point to determine who will be interviewed. Another option is to proceed with the interviews first in order to narrow the pool of candidates and then do reference checks.

A letter should be sent to the applicants who are still viable candidates but not being brought in for an interview at this time (See Appendix I, sample letter #7).

3.03 REFERENCES

Some candidates will ask their references to submit letters on their behalf; some will simply list the names and addresses of references willing to be contacted.

It is often advisable to state in the advertisement for the position that letters of reference should be sent directly to the Chair of the Search Committee.

The committee is not obligated to write to all the references submitted by the candidate; it may choose to contact only those whom it believes have the most pertinent information. When writing to a reference, it is advisable to send a copy of the position description along with whatever questions concerning the candidate's experience, qualifications, and accomplishments the search committee wishes the individual to address. The reference should be informed that the recommendation will be treated confidentially only if he/she requests confidentiality in the reference letter.

If the search committee wants additional information or if the time line is brief, telephone recommendations may be obtained. This is a valuable means of obtaining information about a candidate, for members of the search committee are able to cover issues and explore areas that are of interest to them. Specific job-related questions should be developed for the telephone interview. Occasionally, references will prefer not to respond by telephone.

You may not ask questions of a reference which you are not permitted to ask of the candidate at an interview (refer to Appendix J). Please note that previous employers are often unwilling to give referrals to prospective employers for fear of negligent referral. In these cases, previous employers may do one of the following:

- \$ Get a legal release of liability;
- \$ Give no information; or
- \$ Give only limited information, such as the employee's title, dates of employment, and salary.

In giving references, a previous employer should give only truthful and job related information about an employee, which includes anything in an employee's personnel file that is signed by the employee. However, it is the prospective employer's obligation to investigate, not the previous employer's obligation to reveal information. To obtain meaningful references, prospective employers should:

- \$ Get the basics: verify dates of employment, type of work done, job title, earnings, honesty, who the applicant worked for; and

- Get information on job-related characteristics the prospective employer is interested in, such as: honesty, integrity, work ethic, reliability, etc.
- \$ Convince the applicant that references will be checked by stating in the application and at the interview. Ask the applicant about his or her eligibility for rehire, quality of work, attendance, and what his or her previous employer will say about the applicant.

Notes should be taken during the conversations with a candidate's references so that a written record of the conversation may be placed in her or his folder.

The search committee may request general personal and work references not relating to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or age. If there are select individuals whom the committee would like to contact about the candidate's qualifications, it may inform the candidate of its wishes. It is not necessary, however, to have the candidate's permission to make such calls. All questions asked and issues raised must, as with all references, be job-related and similar for all candidates. In addition, this information cannot be "off the record" or held confidential.

Occasionally, members of a search committee will receive unsolicited calls about a candidate. When this happens, it is advisable to ask the caller to restrict his or her remarks to job-related issues. The names of individuals who have provided information about a candidate to the search committee should be retained.