

SUGGESTED BEST PRACTICES FOR FACULTY SEARCH COMMITTEES

Endorsed by Faculty Caucus of Academic Senate March 27, 2013

In lieu of an official campus search committee policy, a list of advisory best practices in faculty search committee processes was formulated in 2011 by: The Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Human Resources; the Office of Equal Opportunity, Ethics, and Access; and the Office of the General Counsel. This document reflects consultation with the Faculty Affairs Committee of the Academic Senate and has the endorsement of the Faculty Caucus of the Academic Senate.

This document is not University policy, because the University is composed of a variety of disciplines such that one universal policy could not accommodate all unique departmental needs. It compiles advisory best practices based on the professional expertise of University staff well-versed in the relevant legal and regulatory standards. Therefore, individual departments are encouraged to review and discuss these suggested best practices, and to develop departmental practices consistent with these best practices, tailored to fit their individual needs. Because these recommended best practices may be based on legal requirements or considerations, the Office of General Counsel should be consulted before any substantial changes are made and adopted as departmental practice.

Some of the best practices in this compilation are mandated by existing University policies or by law and are included for completeness; these are identified by references to those policies and laws.

General Statements

1. A Search Committee should be established for all tenure/tenure-track appointments. If feasible given the number of faculty available to serve, the Search Committee should be separate and apart from the DFSC/SFSC. (*University ASPT Policies, VI.A*)
2. Departments/Schools should establish written processes defining the selection process of Search Committee members. (*University ASPT Policies, VI.A*)
3. The Department Chairperson/School Director, as the responsible administrator in the hiring unit, should have an active and clearly defined role in the entire search and recruitment process. This role should be delineated in the written processes adopted by the Department/School. (*ISU Policy 3.3.6, Academic Department Chairperson/School Director Responsibilities, Appointment, Compensation, Terms, and Evaluation*)

4. The solicitation of student input in the faculty hiring process is strongly encouraged. Because there are important limits to the legal protection the University can provide students as opposed to faculty and other employees, the inclusion of students as members of Search Committees is not recommended as a best practice. Departments/Schools are encouraged to seek student input outside the search committee structure. Departments/Schools may address student membership in their own policies regarding the composition of search committees.

If Department/School policies allow inclusion of students as Search Committee members, the following practices should be followed:

- a) It is recommended that students not be voting members of Search Committees, as voting status increases their potential legal liability.
- b) Like other members of the Search Committee, students appointed to search committees must be fully included in search committee training conducted by Human Resources.
- c) It can be beneficial to the student for faculty mentors well-versed in search policies, but not involved in the search or having any other basis for a real or apparent conflict of interest, to be available to students serving on Search Committees on an optional basis.
- d) Faculty should uphold their ethical obligations to model fair and professional conduct during all phases of the search/recruitment process. Faculty have a responsibility to avoid exploitation of the naturally-occurring status and power differential between themselves and students by not exerting undue influence on students (*ISU Policy 3.3.12, Code of Ethics*, and *ISU Policy 3.3.12a, Faculty Responsibilities to Students*).

5. Search committees should be established early in the recruiting process to permit the search committee ample time to establish advertising, interview, and other procedural elements of the recruiting process.

6. It is critical to observe the confidentiality and the security of materials throughout the search process (*University ASPT Policies, I.D*). Failure to observe confidentiality presents a legal liability to both the individual faculty member and the institution. It also represents a violation of the Faculty Code of Ethics, and thus is subject to individual penalties, including being barred temporarily or permanently from participation in future searches. Various elements of recruiting materials may contain sensitive information or information that could be used for identity theft. As such, those elements should be secured and held confidential to as few people as possible (*ISU Policy 3.3.12, Code of Ethics*).

7. In the “Application” stage, and until approval is granted and invitations for on-campus interviews are issued and accepted, the names of applicants are confidential and should only be available to the Search Committee members and the Department Chair/School Director. The Department Chair/School Director, all members of the DFSC/SFSC, and all members of the Search Committee are expected to participate in current search committee training from Human Resources. Once finalists accept invitations for on-campus interviews, their curriculum vitae and other application materials may be available to others in the department or school.

8. All appropriate parties who review credentials at a given stage should review all of the credentials of all the individuals being considered at that stage to assure fairness.

9. All persons involved in any aspect of the search and recruitment process should receive current training from Human Resources in appropriate search processes and impermissible search activities and questions.

10. The term “credentials,” as used in these Guidelines, includes any correspondence indicating interest in the position, nomination materials forwarded by any person, the curriculum vitae of the individual, unsolicited recommendation letters, and samples of work supplied by the individual. Under Illinois law, recommendation letters solicited by the search committee may not be shared with the individual seeking employment without a written waiver (*820 ILCS 40/10*).

11. All applicants selected for further interviews, including telephone or campus interviews, should be treated alike as far as reasonably possible in terms of schedules, persons met, and information provided.

12. Interested persons, applicants, and candidates who are at different phases of career development generally have different concerns in the search and recruitment process. For example, early-career applicants are often less concerned about the timing of reference checking than applicants considering mid-career or administrative positions. Nonetheless, all processes within a search, including reference checking (both on- and off-list), must be consistent across individuals.

Step-by-Step Recruiting Process

I. Organization Stage:

1. A Search Committee should be selected according to Departmental/School procedures (*University ASPT Policies, VI.A*).

2. All DFSC/SFSC and Search Committee members, including the Department Chair/School Director, should complete current search committee training prior to the initiation of any search procedures.

3. Prior to review of any credentials, the Search Committee and the Chair/Director of the Department/School (if not a member of the Search Committee), with appropriate input from the faculty and with the advice of the Provost's Office, should determine the required and preferred qualifications for the position and the criteria to be used to select the final candidate. At that time, the Search Committee should plan the entire search process, including the preparation of appropriate interview questions. (Follow-up questions need not be planned or uniform across candidates, but may respond to the applicant's individual credentials and responses.)

4. The Search Committee should prepare appropriate advertising and requests for indications of interest.

5. The Search Committee should determine what materials and information must be submitted by all individuals to be considered an applicant for the position advertised.

6. The Department Chair/School Director shall provide administrative support for the search through the Department/School Office, and shall assist with or conduct communications with the Dean, the Provost's Office, the Office of Equal Opportunity, Ethics and Access, Human Resources, or other administrative contacts.

II. "Indication of Interest" Stage:

It is important to note that word-of-mouth hiring is strongly discouraged, as it leads to the potential for a claim of discrimination. However, open and engaged recruitment of all qualified candidates and efforts to publicize positions in multiple venues likely to reach a maximally diverse pool are encouraged.

7. Indications of interest, in the form of nominations, letters, vitae, and other desired materials, should be directed to and accumulated by the Search Committee.

8. Any person, including all faculty, may be involved in the solicitation of indications of interest including informal recruiting discussions with potential applicants at conferences. Special effort should be made to provide consistent messages and questions to all who provide indications of interest. In the event that Search Committee members are unable to be involved in any recruiting discussions at conferences or elsewhere, the involved faculty should fully inform the Search Committee of the content of those discussions, refer unanswered questions to them, and check with them about consistency in their messages and answers to potential applicants.

In order to avoid potential legal pitfalls, all individuals who are involved with informal recruiting efforts should receive search committee training if at all possible.

9. The Department Chair/School Director and/or the chair of the Search Committee should promptly communicate with all persons who have submitted indications of interest or who have nominated individuals, thanking them for their communications and outlining the process and timeline for the search and the process for submitting applications.

10. The Search Committee should review all indications of interest, communicate with interested persons, and determine whether interested persons should be considered “applicants” for the position. The Search Committee should review the credentials of all interested persons and determine the list of applicants from all available indications of interest. If necessary, the Search Committee should solicit from interested persons submission of the materials and information determined in I.5 above. During the “applicant stage,” the Search Committee should evaluate all applicants using the criteria developed in I.3 above.

III. The “Applicant” Stage:

11. NO REFERENCE CALLS, INCLUDING ON-LIST OR OFF- LIST CALLS, SHOULD OCCUR UNTIL (1) THE INITIAL CUT FOR INTERVIEWS (EITHER PHONE OR ON CAMPUS INTERVIEWS) HAS BEEN MADE, AND (2) APPLICANTS HAVE BEEN ADVISED THAT CALLS MAY BE MADE. The referencing process should be the same for all applicants.

12. The list of applicants, together with their application materials, should remain confidential and secure during the Applicant stage. Only the Search Committee should have access to that list and those application materials.

13. The Search Committee should review the list of applicants and all materials submitted and determine a list of applicants selected for initial interviews. The Search Committee may conduct in-person, phone, or video interviews and make on-list referencing calls (after notice to the applicant).

14. The department/school written search processes established under University ASPT Policies VI.A may allow review of applicant materials selected for initial interviews by faculty other than those appointed to the search committee. Any individuals not on the Search Committee must complete the relevant module(s) of Search Committee training prior to being allowed access to applicant materials and adhere to all legal requirements regarding the search and recruitment process.

If the department/school written search processes do allow review of applicant materials selected for initial interviews by faculty other than those appointed to the search committee,

the posted position announcement(s) must include the following statement to comply with State and Federal Law: “Application materials provided by individuals selected for interviews will be available for review by all tenured and tenure-track faculty in the department/school.”

15. Applicants being considered for selection as “candidates” (finalists invited for on-campus interviews) should be informed that the committee may undertake reference checking before their selection as candidates is finalized. If off-list reference checking is to be used, applicants should be informed that the committee may undertake such reference checking. Off-list referencing calls should not occur until candidates have agreed to off-list calls. This notification may take place at the conclusion of the initial (in-person, phone, or video) interview, or in a separate communication subsequent to the initial interview.

IV. The “Candidate” Stage

16. All tenured and tenure-track faculty members shall be given an opportunity to review candidates’ credentials. Individuals reviewing credentials should review the credentials of all candidates (*University ASPT Policies, VI.B*).

17. The Search Committee in consultation with the DFSC/SFSC (including the Chair/Director) should determine the on-campus interview processes together with the schedules and issue invitations to candidates.

18. Following completion of all on-campus interviews, the Search Committee should review comments from tenure-line faculty and other appropriate individuals, assess the candidates and make its formal recommendations to the Chair/School Director and the DFSC/SFSC. The Search Committee should recommend all acceptable candidates and it should communicate its perception of strengths and weaknesses of each acceptable candidate relative to the criteria developed in item I.3 above. If the DFSC/SFSC disagrees with the Search Committee’s recommendations and/or discovers that a strongly recommended candidate has not garnered the approval of the majority of the tenured faculty, the Search Committee shall meet confidentially with the DFSC/SFSC to discuss the recommendations. Under ASPT policies, “[i]nitial appointments of probationary or tenured faculty members shall ordinarily have the approval of the majority of all DFSC/SFSC members and the majority of the tenured faculty members of the Department/School.” (*University ASPT Policies, VI.B*)

V. Final Stages

19. The DFSC/SFSC, including the Department Chair/School Director, shall review the recommendations of the Search Committee and determine the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates.

20. No offers or negotiations shall take place with the selected candidate (or, if that candidate declines the offer, the next selected candidate(s)) until approval has been obtained from the Dean's Office, the Provost's Office, and the Office of Equal Opportunity, Ethics, and Access.

21. All negotiations with the final candidate should be carried out by the Department Chair/School Director, who should keep the DFSC/SFSC, Dean and, as appropriate, the Provost's Office, informed.

22. "A letter of intent should issue from the Department/School upon final approval setting forth all of the essential terms of employment for the prospective faculty member and providing the candidate with information regarding the department/school, college, and university policies. The letter of intent should be approved by the relevant college dean and the Provost. Employment will not begin until an appointment contract is issued by the University." (*University ASPT Policies, VI.I*)