Guide to Diversifying Faculty Searches

Search and Hiring Tips

Introduction

This resource includes search and hiring tips to consider during the faculty hiring process, focusing on recruitment, search committee composition and roles, navigating conversations about fit, unconscious bias, offering the job and onboarding new hires, and ways to review and track success while advancing diversity in the faculty hiring process.

Tips to Consider Throughout the Search Process

Recruitment

- Once in communication with potential candidates, be sure to inquire about their interests and needs to thrive in an intellectual home. Be responsive to their needs and desires by describing relevant resources at Brown for research, scholarship, and teaching networks as well as supporting work-life balance.

- Avoid making assumptions when considering academic job prospects and candidates (e.g., assuming a candidate is unavailable or unmovable; speculating spousal hiring needs will not work out). People's circumstances change, so do their responses. Let the candidate decide whether your department is an appealing academic home. Do not pre-judge someone's situation.

- Candidates who are being seriously considered are likely in high demand and may be considering multiple jobs. Be sure to express genuine and serious interest in each candidate's scholarship. Ensure search committees learn what candidates' needs and desires are throughout the interview process and campus visit, and keep these preferences in mind when presenting an offer and onboarding faculty.

- Research has found that when there is just one woman or historically underrepresented scholar in the finalist pool, there is little chance of that scholar being selected. Conversely, when more than one woman or historically underrepresented scholar is in the finalist pool the chances significantly increase.[1]

Search Committee

- Appoint a search chair with a demonstrated commitment to advancing faculty diversity.

- Appoint search committee members who represent all types of diversity in the department.

- Research suggests historically underrepresented faculty are often overtaxed with diversity and inclusion service commitments that have not counted toward their tenure and promotion.[2] Keep this in mind when seeking to assemble a diverse search committee. As the department identifies colleagues to serve on the search committee, consider offering flexibility to colleagues who may identify as historically underrepresented and overtaxed with service commitments, allowing them to instead to offer input during key points throughout the process or opting out altogether.

- Make sure all members of the search committee receive training on implicit bias and are familiar with the Departmental Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan goals.

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[1] Johnson, Hekman, & Chan, 2016
[2] Jimenez, Laverty, Bombaci, Wilkins, Bennett, & Pejchar, 2019

- Power dynamics play a strong role in faculty hiring, especially between senior and junior faculty due to concerns about career progression. Consider how you can create practices that avoid these dynamics, such as independent evaluations of materials and anonymous voting.

- In the first meeting, in addition to issues pertaining to the position and the hiring process, provide committee members with a chance to discuss general 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 follow it.

- Do not assume that a committee with many faculty members from historically underrepresented groups or women will be a committee biased in favor of historically underrepresented groups or women since evidence suggests these same groups can hold implicit attitudes much like their historically overrepresented counterparts.[3]

- Do not assume candidates holding terminal degrees outside of highly selective or even AAU institutions may not thrive at Brown. Resist excluding candidates with qualifications primarily based on institutional pedigree and focus on the candidate's qualifications for the job. Consider non-traditional experiences and career pathways.

- Establish expectations for attendance, active involvement, decision-making, communication, confidentiality, treatment of candidates, and more.

- Candidates can be hired by other institutions running concurrent targeted or regular searches if search committees move too slowly. Agree to a timeline and ensure timely and consistent follow-up and status updates with candidates.

- Consider openly how every candidate will or will not contribute to your equity goals.

Reviewing Candidate Materials

- Spend sufficient time evaluating each candidate.

- Evaluate each candidate's entire application; don't depend too heavily on one element, such as letters of recommendation or the prestige of the degree-granting institution.

- Be able to defend every decision for eliminating or advancing a candidate.

Interviews

- Pay attention to the climate of the interview process, including nonverbal and verbal communication. Become familiar with common patterns of micro-messages in formal and informal conversations that may convey bias. Examples include: mispronunciation of names, "othering" comments (e.g., "That's an interesting accent."), or stereotypical assumptions.

- If feasible, provide an unscheduled opening in the itinerary to allow candidates to have flexibility to schedule as they wish. For example, a candidate may want to talk with someone about local faith communities or with someone from a specific group (e.g., Faculty of Color Network, LGBTQ community) about what it is like to live/work here. Offer the name of a person not associated with the search to arrange for meetings and/or tours during the open time.

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[3] Steinpreis, Anders, & Ritzke, 1999

- Identify whether the candidate needs any special accommodation for the interview and arrange for necessary accommodations.

- Create a process and atmosphere that welcomes candidates. Every candidate should leave Brown University with a positive regard for the institution, whether or not they are hired.

- Use a standard protocol for each campus visit to ensure a consistent review process for each candidate.

- Develop interview questions in advance of the interview and be as consistent as possible for all candidates (e.g., same person assigned to each question, interviews conducted in a consistent setting, same time allotment).

Fit

- Be vigilant about statements concerning "fit," which can directly or indirectly advert diversity. This euphemism of "fit" is often used to exclude individuals whose demographic characteristics do not match the dominant demographics, ideas, and/or behaviors of the department or field.

- When a committee is ready to vote on and recommend a candidate for a position, dominant discourses tend to emerge related to fit and merit, which often serves as a mechanism to signal race without explicitly naming it. Consequently, too often "candidate fit" means one's ability to keep white people racially comfortable and their likelihood of leaving whiteness (or the status quo) undisturbed. Therefore, discourses and the assumptions that come with it when discussing "fit" and "merit" should be interrogated.

Unconscious bias

- Historically underrepresented groups, women, and candidates affiliated from institutions other than Ivy+ peers are often and mistakenly 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 achievements.

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

- Letters of recommendation often reflect stereotypical views of demographic groups. Research indicates that men's research is often described as seminal, while women's scholarship is often described as warm and collaborative. These implicit cues can influence decision-making.

- Research has found that academic psychologists as well as physics and biology faculty have given men, Whites and Asians better evaluations for teaching, research, and service than faculty with identical applications materials who identify as women and/or from a historically underrepresented group. The bias was worse when accounting for intersectionality (e.g., Black women). Therefore, to counter unconscious bias, search committee members should be attentive to their individual thought patterns when stereotypical identifiers emerge in their review of files.

- Recent studies document the achievements of historically underrepresented groups and women tend to be evaluated less positively than white men of equal accomplishment. Ask yourself whether you unconsciously read the dossiers of candidates differently.

- Research suggests that a candidate's race plays a powerful role in whether and how candidates are held accountable to engage with the complexities of race and racism. For example, oftentimes, while candidates from historically underrepresented groups are expected to be able to naturally speak about topics related to diversity and inclusion, White candidates (and White men in particular) are permitted ignorance and may be assessed as honest, even charming, but certainly not unqualified. Search

committee members should place weight on racial literacy and engagement with diversity, equity and inclusion, not excuse naivety based on identity.

- There is an established record of research that demonstrates how historically underrepresented and/or women scholars experience marginalization and disadvantage, often subtly, in higher education broadly and in search processes specifically. In the end, while there is no single "best" candidate, the search committee should be mindful about their diversity goals, affirmatively consider these groups, and resist thinking of underrepresented scholars as being or needing to be "a diamond in the rough," "rare breed," or "unicorn."

Raising Questions during Individual and/or Group Deliberation

Periodically evaluate your judgements to determine whether the pool of candidates is one that will enable the search committee to be on track with advancing the department's faculty diversity goals. One strategy is to consider whether evaluation biases and assumptions are influencing your decisions. Good questions to raise may be:

- What evidence supports our decision to include or exclude a candidate? Where might we be speculating?

- How do demographics of our shortlist compare with demographics in our qualified pool, and with the national pool?

- Have we generated an interview list with more than one finalist who will also diversify the faculty in alignment with our departmental DIAP?

- If a higher percentage of historically underrepresented candidates are weeded out, do we know why? Can we reconsider our pool with a more inclusive lens, or extend our search?

- How have we ensured that women and HUG candidates are not subject to different expectations or standards in order to be considered as qualified as whites in general and white men in particular?

- How have we controlled for potential bias given that research makes clear we have the potential to undervalue or unfairly attribute the accomplishments, ideas, and research findings by women and HUG candidates to their colleagues engaged in the same research?

- How do we know the ability of women or HUGs to run a research group, raise funds, and supervise students and staff are not being underestimated?

- Are assumptions about possible family responsibilities and their effect on a candidate's career path negatively influencing evaluation of a candidate's merit, despite evidence of productivity?

- Are negative assumptions about whether women or HUG candidates will "fit in" to the existing environment influencing evaluation?

- Have members of the search committee played an active role in challenging subjective evaluations, such as the following examples?
    - "Her priorities didn't seem to match up with ours very well."
    - "His personality didn't seem like a good match for us."
    - "She hadn't worked with any of the real leaders in the field."
    - "I've just never been all that impressed with graduates of their alma mater."
    - "He was lucky that he got his degree under Professor X at Ivy+ University."

Soliciting Feedback

To avoid "groupthink" and the possibility of overlooking an excellent but unique candidate, search committee members should not share their impressions with others until each has evaluated all candidates. Consider using a Google Form or another electronic process to solicit feedback from everyone who met with the candidates. Open ended questions could include:

- Strengths - open ended answer

- Reservations - open ended answer

- How, if at all, do you think the applicant could be successful in and an asset to the department? – open ended answer

- Other - open ended answer

Job Offer and Onboarding

- Maintain communication with all final candidates until an offer is accepted. The terms of offer should be responsive to needs of the candidate. Ask the candidate what is important for them to come and experience an intellectual environment that is affirming and supportive and entice them to stay with Brown for as long as they desire.

- Women and men faculty tend to rate applicants more competent, worthy of mentorship, and deserving of higher salaries when applicants have male-sounding names despite identical application materials. To this end, senior deans should consider salary equity across intersectional identities; offering compensation that balances, as opposed to widens salary or compensation equity gaps.

- Develop an initial mentoring plan for new hires, based on the candidates needs and interests and ensure the new hire is connected to relevant and appropriate colleagues and offices consistent with their professional and personal needs and interests.

Applicant Review and Tracking

- The search chair should require detailed notes of exclusions for credible candidates, especially historically underrepresented faculty candidates, based on clear criteria that takes into account research on bias.

- Monitor the applicant pool to ensure it mirrors the national pool of availability in the discipline and the applicant pool mirrors the long and shorts lists.

- When evaluating the long list, especially applicants from historically underrepresented groups, ensure more nuanced readings of less than typical CVs.

Search and Hiring Tips: References and Resources

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Note: Links are provided for ease of access to the above information. Because websites are updated regularly, a link may turn inactive. If that occurs, we encourage you to try and retrieve the information through a general search.