Faculty Search Committees
Leading a Proactive Search without Bias

Summary

This collection of desirable faculty search procedures was compiled from discussions with Rice faculty and applicants seeking faculty positions at Rice. The purpose of this guide is to disseminate to all Rice faculty some important features of a search effort that can help Rice hire the most outstanding faculty possible. The information contains two major foci: (a) **organizational processes** that support faculty in proactively recruiting a competitive applicant pool and leading an organized, fair search, and (b) key concepts of **implicit bias and how to avoid allowing these to influence hiring decisions.**

A. Organizational Processes in a Faculty Search

An effective faculty search process can be viewed as being divided into six stages, each with specific goal(s).

B. Implicit Biases in Evaluation

Research shows us that all of us — both women and men, no matter how egalitarian or well-intentioned — inadvertently behave in ways that can let implicit biases creep into an evaluation process. Both men and women have biases developed from their life experiences and cultural histories. Being aware of these biases is the first step to preventing their negative impact on faculty search processes. Adjusting the search process can be a second step to preventing these negative impacts.

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Discussion

Passive versus Active Searches

Faculty searches identified as "active" are those in which faculty identify candidates early in their Ph.D. studies and maintain a relationship until these candidates go on the market. This strategy is considered more effective than a "passive" search, where the faculty wait for candidates to apply to an advertised opening. Table 1 displays a continuum of searches from passive to active.

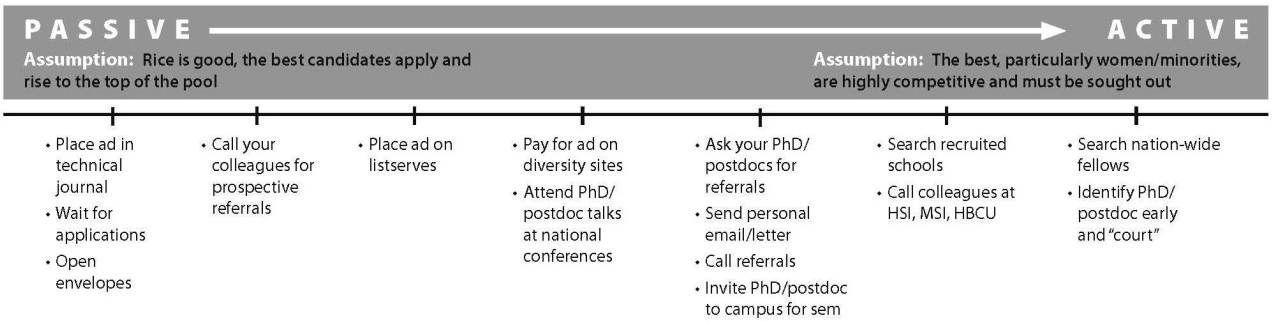

Table 1: Faculty Search Continuum - HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution); MSI (Minority Serving Institution); HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities)

Faculty Search Process

The Chair of the Faculty Search Committee is responsible for planning and leading a well-organized search that creates a pool of outstanding faculty candidates, evaluates them fairly, and leads the department/committee to a decision on top candidates. There are 6 key phases in the faculty search process. Table 2 displays a sample timeline with approximate time needed for each of these phases. Though a discipline may have its own somewhat unique timing for faculty searches, many searches are more successful if the candidates visit campus early and selected candidates are extended offers early. Therefore, before the committee is called together, it is recommended that the Chair draft a timeline for the committee's consideration.

As recommended in the WISELI materials on this subject (WISELI: Fine & Handelsman, 2012), committee members are urged to "learn about and discuss research on biases and assumptions and consciously strive to minimize their influence on your evaluation. Experimental studies show that greater awareness of discrepancies between the ideals of impartiality and actual performance, together with strong internal motivations to respond without prejudice, effectively reduce prejudicial behavior (Devine et al., 2002)."

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	Jun-Aug	Sept-Nov	Nov-Jan	Dec-Feb	Feb-Apr	Feb-Apr	*All year*
Stage #	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Search Timeline	**Decide on search criteria** **Place ad**	**Evaluate applicant packages**	**Select the short-listed candidates**	**Campus Interviews**	**Select the top candidates**	**Close the deal**	***Develop the candidate pool***
Active Search Behaviors	**Actively seek out female and minority candidates to recruit potential applicants**	**Be aware of non-conscious biases in package and recom-mendation letters**	**Strive to invite at least two qualified female and/or minority candidates**	**Present the WorkLife brochure**	**Be aware of possible gender differences in communi-cation style**	**Work on non-professional aspects of offer package**	***Go beyond what our peer institutions are doing***

Table 2 – Sample Timeline for Faculty Search Phases

Pre-Search Phase

Search authorization begins each spring when the Deans ask Department Chairs for their departmental faculty hiring requests. The faculty requests then go from the Deans to the Provost by early June. During June and July, the Provost considers all faculty requests and considers financial commitments. August is typically when the Provost meets individually with Deans to discuss requested faculty positions. In late August/early September, the Provost verbally approves hiring and the Deans typically receive official, written approval to search.

Assembling a Search Committee and Selecting the Chair

The Department Chair will typically select a senior faculty member to serve as the Search Committee Chair. Additional guidelines when selecting search committee members include:

- Have at least 5 members total
- Name 1 chair, 1 co-chair (1 of the chairs should ideally be in or have knowledge regarding the research area being targeted)
- Include 2-5 faculty in, or knowledgeable about, the targeted research area
- Include at least one non-department member as part of the committee
- Diversify the committee, to the degree possible, by race, gender, culture, research, teaching, other perspectives, etc.
- Designate one committee member as the “diversity designee”. This faculty member will monitor the search process for fairness and complete the Provost’s online departmental Search Committee report.

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Stage 1 – Proactive Planning

The Department decides if the search will be broad or narrowly tailored to a specific research area. One consequence of defining a narrow search is that it is likely there may be fewer underrepresented female and ethnic minority candidates in the pool. It is recommended to keep the search as broad as possible to identify a diverse pool of applicants.

The search committee should discuss the search process and the search timeline. It is important to discuss details such as:

- How will the applications be pre-screened (will all committee members read all of them, will the Chair will pre-screen, will a staff member pre-screen)?
- How many candidates will be brought to campus for interviews?
- Will the committee interview by phone before deciding campus interviews?
- How will dedication to diversity be weighted if two candidates are otherwise of equal technical merit?
- How will the committee measure 'total impact' of hiring a non-majority faculty member?
- How will final candidates be ranked (all departmental faculty vote, all committee members, majority vote, silent vote)?

During a search, faculty typically ask for recommendations from their colleagues at other universities. As these conversations occur, faculty should specifically ask for female and ethnic minority candidates who may be qualified for the position. An especially effective practice to identify candidates is for faculty to attend Ph.D. and postdoctoral scholar presentations at national meetings and continually watch for potential faculty candidates. Early relationships with rising scholars increase the chances that these scholars will apply for a faculty position at Rice.

One way to combat implicit bias, as indicated by WISELI: Fine and Handelsman (2012) is to "strive to increase the number of underrepresented women and minorities in your applicant pool. Research shows that gender assumptions are more likely to negatively influence evaluation of women when they represent a small proportion (less than 25%) of the pool of candidates (Heilman, 1980)."

Other than seeking information from colleagues, you can proactively seek out potential women and ethnic minority candidates by asking Rice Ph.D. students and postdoctoral scholars for names of their friends and colleagues. A staff person in the departmental office can do an internet search for fellowship holders such as the Mellon Mays Fellows, NSF (National Science Foundation), NIH (National Institutes of Health), GEM (National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering and Science), AGEP (Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate), IGERT (Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship), and the Sloan Foundation. Staff can also search highly sought after schools for postdoctoral scholars and Ph.D. students in your discipline. Each of these identified potential candidates can be sent a personal letter and/or contacted personally by phone asking them to apply for your open departmental faculty position.

The Office of Faculty Development has a National Database of underrepresented minority and female Ph.D. students and postdoctoral scholars in the sciences, mathematics, engineering, and psychology. It can be found at http://futurefacultydb.org. The OFD also subscribes to the Diverse Scholar doctoral directory (http://minoritypostdoc.org/directory.html). Most fields also have resources – listservs, email groups – that can help you broaden your applicant pool by identifying potential women and ethnic minority candidates. Are there female and/or ethnic minority-focused listservs and organizations where you can post your faculty ad? Female or ethnic minority colleagues in your discipline can also lead you to targeted resources through which you can publicize your ad.

Stage 2 – Evaluating Applications

The goal of Stage 2 is to filter out those who do not meet the stated qualifications in the ad and to select a group of outstanding applicants. Before the committee begins receiving applications, the Committee Chair should lead a conversation with the committee members on criteria they want considered when reviewing the applications. It is important the criteria be broad and not just publications, research grants, and letters of recommendation. Other considerations can be: experience with teaching, mentoring graduate and undergraduate students (including mentoring students who have been underrepresented in the discipline), community outreach, fit with the department, and self-presentation.

Developing evaluation criteria prior to evaluating candidates and applying them consistently to all applicants helps to reinforce the fairness of the process and diminish any implicit biases (WISELI: Fine & Handelsman, 2012)**.** Research shows that differing standards are sometimes used to evaluate male and female applicants and that when criteria are not clearly articulated and agreed upon before reviewing candidates, evaluators may alter or emphasize criteria that favor candidates from well-represented demographic groups (WISELI: Fine & Handelsman, 2012; Biernat & Fuegen, 2001)

As an example, a faculty search may receive around 250 applications. Half of these will be cut in the pre-screening process. These applicants are not in the correct research area, are a misfit for the position, and/or present themselves so poorly they are not competitive.

Another tool for diminishing implicit bias is to evaluate each candidate's entire application; without selecting a single item in the dossier for focus, such as the letters of recommendation, the prestige of the degree-granting institution, or postdoctoral program (WISELI: Fine & Handelsman, 2012).

- A detailed study of letters of recommendation for applicants to a U.S. medical faculty found that letters written for women differed in specific ways from those written for men. The differences encompassed length, absence of expected features of such letters for women, the presence of more statements that were "doubt raisers" (a category that can include "apparent commendation"), and mention of terms related to higher status more frequently for men. Further, the use of possessive phrases in these letters tended to portray women as teachers and students and men as researchers and professionals (Trix & Psenka, 2003).

- In an academic psychology study of curriculum vitae altered to be "male" or "female" applicants, both men and women reviewers were more likely to vote to hire putative male job applicants than putative female job applicants, even with an identical record. Further, the reviewers (both male and female) reported that the male job applicants had adequate qualifications compared the female applicants (Steinpreis et al., 1999).
- An examination of the peer review process for postdoctoral fellowships in Sweden — often noted for its leadership in providing equal opportunities for men and women — found that evaluations of female applicants were harsher than those for male applicants. The study demonstrated that female applicants received lower average scores than male applicants on all criteria. However, examination of the applications indicated that male and female applicants displayed similar records of productivity. The exception to this pattern was for female applicants who had a direct connection to a reviewer, in which case these applicants were rated similar to the male applicants (Wenneras & Wold, 1997).
- Also be cognizant of *letter reader biases* (Did we overrate men and under rate women based on the gender of letter-writers?)
- Look at the candidates work history: Avoiding weighing "actual work" for women and weighing "potential" for men.

Even at this stage, you should ensure that all applicants receive an acknowledgement letter thanking them for applying.

Stage 3 – Choosing Candidates for Campus Visit

Out of an applicant pool of approximately 250, with a significant portion removed by the pre-screening process, the Stage 3 screening will typically provide a group of 40-60 candidates. The committee actively discusses this reduced pool to determine campus interviewees. Avoid ranking this group of candidates. Instead, just select the top 5-6 for campus interviews, un-ranked.

Be sure to allocate focused and undistracted time to evaluate each application carefully. Time and attention were shown to be important in a study in which subjects read a depiction of work behavior (designed to be similar) for a male or female police officer and then rated performance (Martell, 1991). The results demonstrated that the subjects whose attention was distracted by additional tasks or who were under time pressure evaluated men more favorably than women. *When subjects focused only on the performance ratings without distraction, the sex bias was diminished* (Martell, 1991).

As the committee discusses the strengths and potential of each candidate, be sure not to rank-order the candidate pool. As soon as possible, contact candidates and arrange for interviews to occur in a short time frame. This integrated process may mean you need to host two campus interviews a week. The shorter time frame provides for fresher comparison of candidates and more rapid decisions about an offer. When considering the on-campus interviewees, if at all possible, strive to invite two or more female and/or ethnic minority candidates. Do not assume women and ethnic minorities cannot be convinced to relocate to Houston.

Periodically evaluate your judgments, determine whether the committee's efforts have brought qualified women and underrepresented minorities into your pool, and guard against evaluation biases and assumptions influencing your decisions by asking yourself, and the committee, the following questions:

- "Are women and minority candidates subject to different expectations in areas such as numbers of publications, name recognition, or personal acquaintance with a committee member? (W*enneras & Wold, 1997)*
- Are candidates from institutions other than major research universities being undervalued?" (section paraphrased from WISELI: Fine & Handelsman, 2012)

Stage 4 – Conducting a Campus Visit

From the time you call the candidate and invite them to campus, their impression of Rice University becomes personal and etched in their memory. The search committee should consider and plan this highly personal, interactive campus visit, which must respond to the needs and interests of the candidate and highlight the many strengths of Rice University. When scheduling the on-campus visit, be as flexible as possible with the dates to best accommodate the candidate.

Begin by designating a faculty member as the host for the candidate. Have this designated person pick them up at the airport (or arrange for a car), serve as a guide during the visit, and assign individual(s) to:

- host each meal,
- walk them between individual/group interviews.

Most candidates like to receive an agenda with the names of people they will be meeting. This information allows them time to prepare and feel confident for the visit. Ask them, before you plan the complete agenda, if there are any groups or individuals they would like to meet while on campus. Some candidates would appreciate the opportunity to meet with women, Hispanics, African Americans, undergraduate students or others. Before their visit, send the agenda, any requested information, and general campus information to allow time for them to review the materials in advance. Include information such as:

- Agenda for the visit
- Rice University information
- Rice Work Life information (http://www.worklife.rice.edu/emplibrary/HRWorklifebrochure-f.pdf)
  - This can be used as a way for the candidate to ask questions or seek information on work-life balance
  - Have it in convenient view during one-on-one meetings
- Information on relevant Rice Institutes and Centers
- Department information
- Houston information (arts, drama, sports, demonstrate diversity and culture with these materials), cost of living. Think strategically about what you send. Don't just send a big packet because you can get the information.

- If there is interest from the candidate, you can also provide information on faculty support policies, such as Primary Caregiver Leave and tenure clock extension (http://professor.rice.edu/IndependentPage.aspx?id=696).

Before the campus interviews, it is very important for the search committee to develop a list of questions, then divide the questions among the faculty. This strategy ensures that candidates aren't asked the same questions repeatedly and allows people to ask each of the candidates the same questions providing a better basis for comparison. A standard set of questions also provides common information about all the candidates which makes comparison easier.

Structured interviews tend to limit the influence of biases and stereotypes. When looking at ethnic minorities and the impact on how the interview is structured, researchers found more structured interviews limit the influence of biases (Huffcutt and Roth, 1998; King et al., 2006).

We like people who are like us. When people are like us, a similarity effect can be present. The similarity can be in research area, personal interests, common identity in-group cues (same school, same state, same sports fans) or even people who were trained in the same field as us or who do research similar to us. There is also a matching phenomenon – people even date and marry individuals who look similar to themselves.

Verbal and Nonverbal cues. If interviewer does a lot of talking and there is less silence, applicant is often liked more (Cascio & Agunis, 1998). Smiling and nodding, attentiveness, and smaller interpersonal distance all increase comfort and interest, and potentially indirectly increases performance in an interview. Research indicates that Whites are often nervous in interactions with Blacks. Moreover, there can be a cross-race reliance on nonverbal cues. This research reveals that there is a great deal of mistrust, misperceptions, and miscommunication that continue to occur between the races (Dovidio, 2001). We are more likely to have awkward interpersonal behaviors if there is bias.

Appearance bias can also exist, particularly with regard to an individual's perceived attractiveness, weight (obesity) or age. As Cascio and Aguinis state: "The interview is sometimes a search for negative information". Appearance bias can be present, albeit unconsciously, as a search for negative information.

Stereotypes of a "good applicant." We all have stereotypes of what a "good applicant" looks like, how they act, and what sort of background that they have. If the applicant does not fit the stereotype, it can result in an implicit bias against that applicant.

Contrast effects – if person before or after is good / bad, it makes difference. If the first interview is not very strong, the second candidate can look much better in comparison. This is true even if the second candidate would not have been seen as positively if he/she stood alone.

Similarly, there is a concept called "shifting standards." Research reveals that stereotypes seem to prompt lower minimum standards for women (i.e., getting them into the pool) but prompt higher confirmatory standards (i.e., actually hiring them) than for men (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001).

Remind the entire faculty for each visit to NOT ask impermissible questions. Prior to interviews, committee members and departmental faculty should review the General Counsel's guidance regarding impermissible questions. See the additional handout on interview questions or contact the General Counsel's Office for advice. It is understandable the faculty want to know about family, spouses, partners, and children, but questions about these topics are inappropriate and potentially illegal. You should not initiate discussion of areas that are otherwise impermissible. But, if the candidate brings up these subjects, feel free to discuss the issues openly with them at that time. Being asked about family issues before an offer is made yields resentment on the part of the candidate. They feel these questions are irrelevant to the hiring decision and are also illegal. (University of Michigan ADVANCE).

There are many good, relevant questions that lead to open discussion with a candidate. Some examples of these questions, which can be standardized for your interviews, are:

- "How will your research be different from your advisor(s)?"
- "What are the future opportunities for your research field?"
- "What do you want to be recognized for?"
- "How will your research fit into Rice?"

Also, don't imply a woman or ethnic minority is being interviewed for any reasons other than their scholarship.

If the candidate arrives early enough, arrange a pre-interview dinner or breakfast with strong and enthusiastic representatives of the department. This group will set the tone for the campus visit. It has been suggested, by many departments, that the first and last person the candidate meets should be the Department Chair. The Department Chair can talk about the "big-picture" and opportunities at Rice and in the Department. It is also good to have the Department Chair visit briefly at the end of the campus visit to address any questions or correct misinformation that may have been acquired during the visit. In this meeting, if there is a sense that this candidate might move forward, the Chair should also begin asking (without of course making any commitments) about the elements of the startup package and discussing space issues.

If there are faculty members who might not best represent the Department or Rice University, don't put them on the interview schedule. The campus interview is your opportunity to "put your best foot forward" and leave a lasting impression on the candidates, whether you hire them or not.

The interview schedule may include:

- Department faculty – these can be individual meetings or small group meetings
- Faculty outside the department who may be doing similar research or with whom the candidate might want to collaborate

- Other non-departmental faculty members as appropriate
- Graduate students, post-docs – often as a group
- Undergraduates (doing research), if possible – often as a group
- Meetings that resonate with a candidate's commitment to diversity, if the candidate wishes.

Ensure a good turnout at the department seminar and post-seminar reception. Seeing a strong level of department interest in the candidate is encouraging to them and conveys that the department is truly interested in them coming to Rice. Encourage graduate students to ask thoughtful questions, both out of interest and to demonstrate the high quality of graduate students at Rice. Be sure to have the candidate give a "chalk talk" or research/teaching plan.

It can be useful as part of the visit to host an informal dinner at a faculty member's house with assistant professors, though different departments have different strategies.

The Department Chair (or Search Committee Chair, as determined by the Chair) should immediately correspond with each candidate and thank them for coming to Rice University. It sends a positive impression if several of the other faculty also send thank you notes.

Stage 5 – Evaluating Finalists

The committee (or full department, if that is how the decision is reached) should meet *as soon as possible* upon the completion of campus interviews. If the committee decided on a standard set of questions and developed a rating sheet, use this information to gauge each candidate's potential. If any of the committee members know of an impact from bias that showed up during the campus visit, they should share this information at a minimum with the Committee Chair, and possibly the entire committee. Rating sheets can be used as individual faculty notes and do not necessarily need to be collected and aggregated. Spend time discussing each candidate and keep a lookout within the committee discussion for implicit bias in evaluation. If you call references, create a list of questions and ask the same questions of every reference on each candidate. At the end of the discussions, decide on the top candidates. The Department Chair will decide how best to proceed if the top candidate declines.

In masculine-stereotyped occupations (i.e, sciences and engineering), men's performance is evaluated more positively than women's, even after controlling for the performance itself. This bias shows up in scores of studies and is consistent (i.e., Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988).

When women act in non-communal ways, they are penalized by evaluators; however, when they act in communal ways, they don't get the job (Heilman et al., 2004; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Stage 6 – Informing the Top Choice(s)

The Department Chair and Search Committee Chair should decide who will inform the candidates and on what time frame. The Department Chair should have gathered information

during the campus visits to be able to move quickly to finalize the offer package. The Department Chair should have very clear idea of what the candidate needs to accept the offer, where they are in their search process, and any personal commitments that might influence their decision. Many young scholars are selecting their first position for more than the reputation of a university, start up package, and salary. They are looking at how their entire life fits at Rice University and in Houston, Texas.

A second visit for the lead candidate to whom an offer is being tendered is sometimes very helpful. It typically lasts two days and can include a spouse/partner who will also participate in the decision process. The offer to include someone else in the second visit can be part of the invitation to return to campus. It is helpful to offer a car or a driver to show them neighborhoods, schools, and set them up with a realtor or other amenities to help them make their decision. Be sure to mention all the diverse opportunities of Houston and not just pick the ones you like best. Music, arts, theater, sports, rodeo, parks, restaurants should all be mentioned. Remind the candidate that Rice University works very hard to be a place where people can have work-life balance. Throughout this stage, it is critical to stay engaged with the candidate(s).

If the candidate needs partner placement, the Department Chair can work with their school's Dean, the Provost, and Human Resources. This issue is critical for most young academics. As soon as any faculty member recognizes there is a partner involved in the recruitment, they should contact their Department Chair so there is time to resolve placement and/or services to help place the partner.

Many departments find the most useful arrangement is to give a deadline (14 days as an example – offered as a specific date to the Dean) for the candidate to respond to the offer. This arrangement allows the department to move on to the next candidate in a timely fashion. The number of candidates in the "line" will depend on the strength of the pool of candidates and input from the Dean. If you have given the candidate a deadline, be sure to keep up with the deadline; if you have not heard by the deadline, contact him or her for a decision. It is also helpful if a junior faculty member stays in contact with each candidate in case there are questions, but care should be taken not to give contradictory messages.

The offer letter is generated by the Dean and generally provides the following information:

- Title of position
- Date of appointment
- Salary for first year
- Amount (and sometimes breakdown) of start up package
- Summer salary information and number of years
- How long the candidate has to spend the start up
- Graduate student support (if any) as part of start up package
- Period of initial appointment (4 years for junior faculty) prior to review
- Moving expenses reimbursements
- University benefits information as an enclosure

Chairs usually have the opportunity to review the offer letter before it is sent from the Dean's Office.

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