

## **Drake University Information for Search Committees**

### **Introduction**

This resource is designed to assist departments, schools, and the search committees they appoint with the interview and selection process. This is not a policy or procedure statement, but a source of information on the “best practices” in conducting faculty searches.

### **Writing the Recruitment Advertisement**

Do not underestimate the power of a well-written advertisement. **See the section in this binder entitled “Advertisement for Faculty Positions Guidelines, Requirements and Templates”**

#### **Required vs. Preferred Qualifications**

Each Search Committee should consider carefully the implications of any qualification being required versus preferred. Required qualifications should reflect minimum qualifications. Keep in mind that if an applicant does not possess the minimum qualifications they are to be eliminated from consideration. Accordingly, ensure that listed required qualifications truly are minimum thresholds. Use preferred qualifications to further articulate desired qualifications or experiences.

### **Initial Screening**

The goal of the initial review of applications should be to identify those candidates who meet the minimum qualifications for the position as articulated by the recruitment advertisement. From the list of qualified applicants, determine which applicants have “preferred” skills or experiences as listed in the advertisement or job description.

The initial screening may be done by the committee chair or a sub-group of the committee so long as all that is being reviewed is whether the candidate possesses minimum qualifications of the position.

Once this process is complete, letters may be sent to those who did not meet the minimum qualifications informing them that their application is no longer being considered.

### **Narrowing the Field of Candidates**

From the candidates with minimum qualifications, a group of finalists can be identified. Review professional work, writing or other submitted materials to distinguish among qualified candidates. The Committee may elect to take notes on its discussion of each candidate. As with any discussion, however, notes should be limited to only qualifications for the position.

## **The Telephone Interview**

Telephone interviews can serve to provide clarity with respect to the exact depth and nature of qualifications. Another important goal of the telephone interview is to gauge the candidate's interest in the position and Drake University. Here are some recommendations for an effective telephone interview:

- ◆ Schedule the telephone interview in advance
- ◆ As a committee develop a list of questions that will be asked of each candidate
- ◆ At the beginning of the telephone interview, introduce each committee member
- ◆ When asking a question, begin by identifying yourself

A majority of search committee members should be present for all interviews, including the telephone interview.

## **Preparing for the Interview**

When bringing candidates to campus be mindful that the candidate is also going through an assessment of Drake University. Ensure each candidate is presented with a favorable, yet accurate impression of the University, Des Moines and the position. It is critical to be clear about expectations and any particular challenges associated with the position.

Here are some other best practices for on-campus interviews:

- ◆ Provide each interviewee with a schedule
- ◆ Inform the applicant of who will be at each interview and social event
- ◆ Answer as many questions as possible prior to interview
- ◆ Ask the candidate if there is anyone with whom they wish to meet during the campus visit

## **Conducting the Interview**

Each candidate should be treated similarly. While interviews may vary, each candidate should be afforded similar opportunities to share information about their professional qualifications. Here are some recommendations regarding the interview process:

- ◆ Focus on knowledge and skill necessary for the position
- ◆ Prepare open, behavioral and hypothetical questions covering the essential functions (see "Types of Questions" section below)
- ◆ Cover each area using follow-up technique to probe, reflect and summarize
- ◆ Question the answer. Seek contrary information to confirm or correct your first impressions. If the candidate recites an accomplishment, ask "Tell me about an occasion when things did not go well," or "and what did you learn from an experience that did not go as well?"
- ◆ Leave time for the candidate to ask questions
- ◆ Do not make statements that can be construed as promises or guarantees, either express or implied

### For Search Committee Chairs

As Chair, you serve as the primary contact for each candidate. Accordingly, you are in a unique position to convey information about the position and Drake University. Here are some things to consider:

- ◆ Inform the candidate of the process and how long it will take before a decision is made
- ◆ If the candidate asks about assistance in obtaining authorization to work in the United States, contact Human Resources to discuss and assure the candidate a response will be obtained (See Section entitled Citizenship Status Questions).
- ◆ If the candidate has questions about benefits, contact Human Resources to secure an answer. A “*Benefits Summary for Candidates*” should also be provided to each candidate.

### Types of Questions

Well thought-out questions aimed at gleaning particular information can provide the maximum amount of useful information from a brief conversation with the candidate.

**BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS** ask about what the candidate is doing currently or has done in the past. **It asks for examples of current or past performance**, based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. Phrase questions in the present or past tense, but not the future tense. Examples: *Describe a classroom situation that did not go well. How did you handle it? Describe a time when you had to take extra steps to engage a student. What did you do? How well did it work? What would you have done differently? Describe the process you have used to identify the objectives in your courses.* The answers to these questions, and to the follow-up questions that one would ask, provide important and specific information regarding the candidate’s experience and approach.

**OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS** encourage the candidate to give more than one or two word responses that require an explanatory response and allow a candidate to show communication skills in an indirect way. Open-ended questions begin with: what, how, why, describe, explain, tell me. Example: *"Describe your experience in teaching first-year students."* Or, *"Tell us about your area of research; how did you get interested in your dissertation subject?"*

**HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS** ask the candidate to respond to new or unfamiliar situations, providing insight to the candidate's ability to analyze and solve problems. It is recommended that hypothetical questions be limited. Because prior performance is the best indicator of future performance, it is recommended that the majority of questions seek information about what the candidate has accomplished (and how she/he has accomplished it) in the past rather than hypothetical situations or untested responses.

**COMFORT/RAPPORT QUESTIONS** are questions asked the candidate to put them at ease. Typically, it is good to start and end an interview with comfort questions. Examples: *Tell us why you are interested in Drake University and this position. What positive professional and academic experiences have influenced you the most?*

### Seeking Contrary Evidence

If you start to form a one-sided impression of the candidate, start to seek contrary evidence. As Dr. Richard S. Deems notes in his book Interviewing: More Than A Gut Feeling “Asking for

contrary evidence can prevent you from forming erroneous assumptions or first impressions.” (Deems, 1994, p. 35). A copy of this book is available to check out from Human Resources.

### **Making a Decision**

It is advisable to have the search committee meet as soon as possible after the on-campus interview process is complete. As the committee discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate, the focus should be on professional and academic qualifications. Assumptions or feelings about personal situations—such as health conditions, age, relationships, race, ethnicity etc. should be disregarded. In addition, avoid “projection”. That is, seeing your own value system, feelings, and ideas in the candidate and thus exaggerating the qualifications of that candidate. This may happen when the interview closely identifies with the candidate in such things as age, appearance, education or ethnic background.

### **Unsuccessful Searches**

If the committee concurs that none of the finalists are acceptable candidates, notify the dean and Provost. The search may be closed, re-evaluated or postponed. Do not recommend a candidate that the committee does not feel will ultimately be successful in the position. Instead, discuss possible alternatives with the Dean as soon as it becomes evident that none of the candidates are acceptable.

### **Reference Checking**

The importance of reference checks cannot be over-emphasized. Verifying the accuracy of the facts of a candidate’s background is one key goal of reference checking. Another is to try and learn information that may be helpful to the committee in selecting a candidate. Keep in mind the following:

- ◆ Use the same questions for each contact and each candidate focusing on job and academic performance. *Examples: What are the candidate’s strengths? What are the candidate’s weaknesses? Describe a time you were particularly impressed by the candidate’s work. In what topics or areas might the candidate need particular development?*
- ◆ Ask the candidate if you can seek references from individuals not listed on his or her reference list if individuals on the reference list identify such individuals. Then ask each reference if there is anyone else they would recommend you speak with about the candidate’s professional qualifications.
- ◆ Check the same number of references for each finalist
- ◆ Verify education and work history
- ◆ Generally, to maximize efficiency references are only checked once a group of finalists have been identified. Accordingly, reference submissions need not be required as part of the application process, but can be requested once the candidate is identified as a finalist.

### **After the Search Process is Complete**

Once the search process is complete, search committees are encouraged to:

- ◆ Compile notes into a single file: keep for three years after the offer is extended
- ◆ Search files should be maintained in the Department conducting the search and destroyed after three years.