



# DIVERSE HIRING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Best Practices in Donor Relations and  
Stewardship in Higher Education

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In the following brief, Hanover Research discusses good practices for recruiting and hiring a workforce of diverse faculty and staff. Also included is a toolkit of considerations for inclusive interviewing practices.





## INTRODUCTION

As higher education institutions focus on recruiting a diverse student body, it is equally important that they consider the diversity of their faculty and staff. Not only has it been [shown](#) that diverse workplaces improve [business outcomes](#), but employee diversity is also a primary contributor to increased student diversity. U.S. colleges and universities have made strides in recruiting more diverse workforces in recent years. For example, [in 2019](#), 66 percent of all college and university employees – and more than 70 percent of instructional, research, and public service employees – were white. However, new hiring that year demonstrated an increased emphasis on diversity, with 45 percent of new hires being people of color. Similarly, nearly 50 percent of newly hired instructional, research, and public service employees were people of color.

While improving, colleges and universities should continue to encourage inclusive hiring practices. This brief summarizes some approaches that can be used to improve your hiring process and to evaluate the inclusiveness of your interview questions.



Effective strategies for recruiting diverse candidates include alternative outreach methods; creating an inclusive hiring team comprised of individuals with diverse backgrounds; including, as opposed to excluding, applicants, disregarding assumptions about a candidate's "culture fit;" and offering financial incentives (e.g., relocation assistance, signing bonuses).



Inclusive job postings and descriptions contain language that welcomes all individuals regardless of background. Historically, women and people of color are less likely to apply to a job unless they meet all of the qualifications. Additionally, inclusive job postings only include the needed minimum requirements and education, and avoid gender, racial, or ability-biased language. For example, instead of requiring candidates to have "4-5 years of teaching experience," a job posting could state, "candidates must demonstrate teaching scholarship relevant to the position."



A standard interview format with identical questions for all candidates reduces interviewer bias and promotes diversity. Standardized questions focus on employees' past performance and remove employers' preconceptions of candidates. Standardized formats also allow employers to quantify interviews through methods such as rubrics and scorecards.



Behavioral interviewing enables institutions to learn about and assess diverse candidates' previous employment experiences in a structured and inclusive manner. Common question themes include the candidate's commitment to diversity; handling uncomfortable workplace environments and situations; and collaborating with diverse colleagues.

## IMPROVING JOB DESCRIPTION WORDING

Job descriptions should be worded in a way that appeals to minority candidates while also fulfilling the institutional mission.

The wording of job postings can have a significant impact on a candidate's decision to apply to a faculty position, and "can depict campuses as places of inclusivity or exclusivity" ([INSIGHT](#)). Institutions should ensure that they do not discriminate in postings, and confirm that job requirements are not too specific. [Higher Ed Jobs](#) echoes this, noting that search committees "need to be careful that the minimum qualifications are really job-related and do not screen out diverse applicants."

[James Madison University's](#) report on strategies for expanding and retaining a culturally diverse faculty adds to this notion that candidates may self-select out based on the wording of job criteria. To this end, the institution provides the following recommendations:

- ✓ To attract the largest candidate pool, define positions as broadly as is reasonable, given the departmental needs
- ✓ Decide when a qualification is "preferred" rather than "required"
- ✓ Limit use of the terms "must" and "required" to characteristics that are truly essential
- ✓ Be flexible with numerical measures (such as required years of experience)
- ✓ Within submitted application materials, consider asking applicants to describe their experience with diversity issues, working with diverse students, and/or working in multicultural environments

Source: Reproduced nearly verbatim from [James Madison University](#)

As an example, instead of requiring candidates to have "4-5 years of teaching experience," a job posting could state, "*candidates must demonstrate teaching scholarship relevant to the position.*" By defining positions more broadly, it is possible to attract a larger candidate pool.

### JOB REQUIREMENTS

*By determining what skills and experience are essential to the role and focusing on those, schools can open themselves up to more diversity. [...] In higher education, there's a temptation to hire applicants who resemble the person who previously filled the position. However, by broadening criteria and contemplating the definition of merit, institutions can cast wider nets.*

*-[INSIGHT Into Diversity](#)*

Institutions should go beyond the required Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statement in job postings.

It is important that institutions include the required EEO statement about not tolerating harassment or discrimination. However, in order to ensure that candidates are fully aware that the department values diversity, [James Madison University](#) advises a further step: "make it clear that the department values diversity (broadly defined) and expertise regarding diversity concerns within the context of the subject-matter domain."

Example: "The History department at [Institution] is especially interested in qualified candidates who can contribute, through their research, teaching, and/or service, to the diversity and excellence of the academic community."

[Arizona State University](#) agrees that academic units may want to include more general diversity statements to encourage a diverse applicant pool. The institution provides several examples of statements that might be used:

- [Institution] encourages and supports diversity among applicants and employees.
- Diversity is a key component of excellence at [Institution], and the [Name of Hiring Unit] supports the value of diversity among faculty, staff, and students.
- The [Name of Hiring Unit] actively seeks diversity among applicants and supports the diversity of employees.

## MITIGATING BIAS ON SEARCH COMMITTEES

Institutions should equip search committees with the resources necessary to facilitate an effective and equitable faculty search process.

[INSIGHT Into Diversity](#), an organization dedicated to advancing the conversation on diversity and inclusion in higher education, notes that frequently, search committees can hinder the hiring of minority candidates. Though not business school-specific, the organization explains that committees often lack the training to complete a fair search and hiring process. In order to reduce bias that commonly emerges in these decisions, institutions should advocate for:

- ✓ Implicit bias training for search committee members
- ✓ Anti-discrimination training

Indeed, the [AACSB](#) also emphasizes the importance of ensuring search committee members are aware of their own implicit or unconscious biases. The organization highlights the benefits of having committee members complete an Implicit Association Test in order to uncover hidden stereotypes or prejudices related to gender, age, race, or religion, among other factors.

[Higher Ed Jobs](#) further advocates for the importance of equitable search committees, suggesting that there should be “broad representation” on committees from various minority groups. A diverse search committee sends a “positive signal” to candidates, suggesting that the institution is serious about attracting a diverse faculty.

**Additional strategies for addressing unconscious bias on faculty search committees are presented in the figure on the right.**

### STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS ON SEARCH COMMITTEES

- ✓ Review research on biases and strive to minimize their influence on recruiting and screening candidates.
- ✓ Create the role of “search advocate” to help the committee reduce the effects of unconscious bias (see [Oregon State University's search advocate program](#)).
- ✓ Build a diverse applicant pool.
- ✓ Establish a specific set of evaluation criteria—a refined, shared understanding of the minimum and preferred qualifications—and create a matrix for evaluating candidates.
- ✓ Suspend judgments about candidates based on their educational pedigree or current institution.
- ✓ Allow adequate time for the committee to review and evaluate each candidate's application materials.
- ✓ Provide a structured interview process by asking all candidates a set of core questions.
- ✓ Encourage open airing of ideas and opinions and pay attention to every perspective, especially when there are differences of opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of a candidate.
- ✓ Be able to defend every decision to reject or advance a candidate. For a search to be compliant the search committee must be able articulate, at each stage of the search process, why a candidate is advancing or not based upon the agreed upon evaluation of skills, experiences, and qualifications.
- ✓ Consider whether unconscious biases and assumptions are influencing the committee's decisions regarding qualified women and members of underrepresented groups.

Source: Reproduced nearly verbatim from [AACSB](#)

## EXAMPLE BIASES THAT MAY INFLUENCE HIRING DECISIONS

| BIAS                         | DESCRIPTION  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>First Impressions</b>     | The tendency to make snap judgments about a job candidate upon meeting or speaking with them.  |
| <b>Non-Verbal Behaviors</b>  | Misreading, misinterpreting, or placing too much emphasis on non-verbal behaviors that have nothing to do with a candidate's ability to perform the job for which they have applied (e.g., eye contact, firmness of handshake, presence of a smile). |
| <b>Personal Discomfort</b>   | Allowing discomfort with a candidate—based on factors such as race, ethnicity, physical appearance, or disability status—to influence one's own interactions with and assessment of that candidate.  |
| <b>Affinity Bias</b>         | The tendency to view those like oneself positively regardless of their qualifications.   |
| <b>Racial or Ethnic Bias</b> | The impact of stereotypes based specifically on race and ethnicity on one's assessment of a candidate's ability and qualifications.  |
| <b>Gender Bias</b>           | The influence of stereotypes based specifically on sex or gender identity on one's assessment of a candidate's ability and qualifications.   |
| <b>Confirmation Bias</b>     | The tendency to seek and assign greater weight to evidence that supports one's initial assessment—positive or negative—of a job candidate at the expense of considering contradictory evidence.  |

Source: [Turner Consulting Group](#)

## INTERVIEW QUESTION EVALUATION RUBRIC

**Directions:** Use the following rubric to score each interview question according to its inclusivity. Circle the appropriate response on a scale of one, least inclusive, to five, most inclusive, for each of the seven criteria.

**Question #:**

| Criteria                 | 1<br><i>Least Inclusive</i>  | 2  | 3   | 4   | 5<br><i>Most Inclusive</i>  |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Screening</b>         | Interview question explicitly “screens out” diverse candidates by only focusing on prior experience.   | Interview question potentially “screens out” diverse candidates.   | Interview question may eliminate diverse candidates.  | Interview question avoids unnecessarily eliminating candidates.   | Interview question “screens-in” diverse candidates through a growth-mindset.  |
| <b>Behavioral</b>        | Interview question does not elicit the candidate’s experiences or behaviors.   | Interview question does not directly elicit—but leaves answer option open for—the candidate to potentially share example of past behavior.   | Interview question may elicit the candidate’s experience or past behavior.  | Interview question partially focuses on candidate’s behaviors and, as relevant, teaching philosophies.  | Interview question uses a behavioral approach focusing on candidate’s attitude and philosophy.  |
| <b>Language</b>          | Interview question uses multiple gendered, racially-coded, or ability-coded terms.   | Interview question uses a few gendered, racially-coded, or ability-coded terms.  | Interview question has a slightly biased slant with some non-inclusive language.  | Interview question uses mostly neutral language.  | Interview question uses neutral, un-coded language, inclusive terminology, and avoids gender, racial, religious, ethnic, or ability bias.   |
| <b>Bias</b>              | Interview question includes direct references to biases or assumptions based on candidate identity.  | Interview question includes some indirect biases and assumptions about candidate’s identity.   | Interview question includes slight assumptions about candidate’s identity.  | Interview question has room for biases and assumptions.   | Interview question does not show any biases or assumptions based on candidate identity.   |
| <b>Relevance</b>         | Interview question does not relate to the skills, abilities, and experiences that the position requires.   | Interview question mostly includes content unrelated to the skills, abilities, and experiences that the position requires.   | Interview question partially relates to the skills, abilities, and experiences that the position requires but may mention content unrelated to the position requirements. | Interview question mostly relates to the skills, abilities, and experiences the position requires but answer options could elicit content unrelated to the position requirements. | Interview question directly relates to the skills and abilities the position requires and avoids content unrelated to the position requirements.  |
| <b>Answer Options</b>    | There is one “correct” answer for the interview question with one expected way to answer where candidates who answer differently are screened out.                                     | Interview question includes one preferred answer but candidates with alternative answers may still be considered.  | Interview question has one preferred answer but allows for alternatives.  | Interview question includes more than one appropriate answer.   | Interview question includes multiple appropriate answers or acceptable means of answering the question.   |
| <b>Off-Limits Topics</b> | Interview question directly asks about the candidate’s personal life, race or ethnicity, genetic information, gender, sexual orientation, religion, family status, age, or disability. | Interview question indirectly asks about the candidate’s personal life, race or ethnicity, genetic information, gender, sexual orientation, religion, family status, age, or disability. | Interview question indirectly touches on one off-limits topic.  | Interview question does not explicitly ask about off-limits topics but invites answers that could touch on these topics.  | Interview question avoids asking about the candidate’s personal life, race or ethnicity, genetic information, gender, sexual orientation, religion, family status, age, or disability. <sup>2</sup> |

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING INCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS

**Directions:** Use the following discussion questions to reflect upon and discuss attributes and behaviors that may contribute to or prevent an inclusive interview. Prior to the start of the discussion, the facilitator should introduce that the purpose of these discussion questions is for the panel to discuss strategies to ensure that the interview is inclusive and comfortable for the incoming candidate.

? What hiring prejudices and biases might we possess related to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability within the recruitment process?

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? How might our implicit biases impact the interview and hiring process?

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? What are some examples of how confirmation bias or affinity bias may emerge during the interview?

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? What practices and behaviors do we need to “unlearn”?

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? What strategies can we use to address any instances of implicit bias that may surface during the interview?

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? What does it mean to “screen in” candidates? How can we “screen in” diverse candidates rather than screening them out?

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? What criteria might we be looking for that are not critical to this position? How can we let these go?

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? Are we using the same interview questions and process for each candidate? Why is this important?

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? How can we make the candidate feel comfortable and welcome during the interview? What kinds of behaviors, language, and non-verbal cues could make them more comfortable? What could make them less comfortable?

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? Do we need to like the candidate personally? Why or why not? Should likability be part of the hiring criteria? If so, how would we define this?

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