SEARCHING FOR

EXCELLENCE & DIVERSITY

A GUIDE FOR SEARCH COMMITTEES

National Edition

"We need diversity in discipline, intellectual outlook, cognitive style, and personality to offer students the breadth of ideas that constitutes a dynamic intellectual community."

WISELI
Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Eve Fine and Jo Handelsman

Published by WISELI – University of Wisconsin-Madison
2107 Mechanical Engineering, 1513 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53706
http://wiseli.engr.wisc.edu

WISELI books and products are available through our online bookstore and through major booksellers. To place orders directly through WISELI please visit:
https://charge.wisc.edu/wiseli/items.asp.

Revised from the original: *Searching for Excellence and Diversity: A Guide for Search Committee Chairs.* Written and compiled by Eve Fine and Jo Handelsman, with contributions and suggestions from Molly Carnes, Bernice Durand, Randy Durand, Rosa Garner, Linda Greene, Steve Lund, Luis Piñero, Christine Pribbenow, Dean Pribbenow, and Jennifer Sheridan. Edited by Hilary Handelsman. (Copyright © 2005 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.)
Cover design by Rose Schneck

Tips and Guidelines: Running an Effective and Efficient Search Committee

Building rapport among committee members

1. **Gain the support of committee members**
   In productive search committees, the committee members feel that their work is important, that each of them has an essential role in the process, and that their involvement in the search process will make a difference. To generate such perspectives, the chair and each committee member can set the tone in the first meeting and can try to make sure that every member of the committee feels involved, valued, and motivated to play a significant role in the search. Some tips include:

   - Begin with brief introductions to get committee members talking and comfortable with each other. Do not assume that members already know one another—this assumption may not be correct, particularly if the search committee includes a student representative or members from outside the department. Provide and use name tags until you are confident that **all** committee members know each other.
   - Be enthusiastic about the position, potential applicant pool, and composition of the search committee.
   - Remember that in this age of tight budgets each position is precious and that it is up to the committee to ensure that the best candidate is in the pool.
   - Understand that the search process is far more idiosyncratic and creative than the screening process—each committee member can put his or her individual stamp on the process by shaping the pool.
   - Appreciate each committee member for the critical role he or she is playing by helping to select future faculty who will represent the department and the university for years to come.

2. **Actively involve all committee members in discussions and search procedures**
   Active involvement of every member of the committee will contribute to a more effective search. Such involvement will help the committee reach a broader base of applicants and conduct more thorough evaluations. To generate active participation, implement the following suggestions:

   - Look at each member of the committee while you are speaking.

- In the first committee meeting, engage in at least one exercise in which every committee member participates. This might be a discussion of the essential characteristics of a successful candidate or a brainstorming session about people to contact to help identify candidates.
- Try to note body language or speech habits that indicate someone is trying unsuccessfully to speak and then give them an opening.
- Be especially sensitive to interpersonal dynamics that prevent members from being full participants in the process. Many of us may assume, for example, that senior faculty are more likely than junior faculty to have connections or ideas about people to contact for nominations, or that students will be less critical in their evaluations. Sometimes these assumptions are correct, but we have all had our assumptions challenged by the junior colleague who nominates a great candidate or the student who designs an insightful interview question.
- Before leaving a topic, ask if there are any more comments, or specifically ask members of the committee who have not spoken if they agree with the conclusions or have anything to add. Be sure to do this in a way that implies you are asking because the committee values their opinion; try not to embarrass them or suggest that they need your help in being heard.

3. **Run efficient meetings**
   The first meeting can be a lot like the first class of a semester or the first day of rounds—it shapes committee members' attitudes about the process and their role in it. Strive to help committee members recognize that attending committee meetings and the committee work they do outside the meetings is a good use of their time and that their participation will make a difference. Some tips to achieve this include:

- Rely on an agenda with time allotted to each topic and generally try to adhere to the plan.
- Begin meetings by reviewing the agenda and obtaining agreement on agenda items. If one committee member is digressing or dominating a discussion, gently and politely try to redirect the discussion by referring back to the agenda (e.g., "If we are going to get to all of our agenda items today, we probably need to move to the next topic now").
- If you deviate from the agenda or run over time, acknowledge this and provide a reason (e.g., "I know we spent more time on this topic than we had planned, but I thought the discussion was important and didn't want to cut it off"). Doing so will help committee members feel their time was well spent, that the meeting was not a random process, and that they can anticipate useful and well-run meetings in the future.
- Try to end meetings on time so that all committee members are present for the entire discussion.

Additional advice on How to Lead Effective Meetings is available from the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW–Madison) Office of Quality Improvement and Office of Human Resource Development: http://go.wisc.edu/77c0c6.

Tasks to accomplish in initial meetings

1. **Discuss and develop goals for the search**
   Engage in a discussion of goals for the search and use the agreed upon goals to develop recruitment strategies and criteria for evaluating applicants.

2. Discuss and establish ground rules for the committee

Establishing ground rules for the committee at the outset can set expectations, maximize efficiency, and prevent conflicts from arising later. Ground rules should cover such items as:

- **Attendance**
  The work of a search committee is cumulative and it can be very frustrating when a member who has missed one or more meetings raises issues and/or questions already discussed at previous meetings. More importantly, evaluation of applicants can be compromised if one or more committee members are not present for the discussion of all applicants' qualifications. Establishing policies regarding attendance and participation of search committee members can help avoid these complications. Some committees require all search members to attend all search committee meetings and activities and stipulate that members who do not attend must accept decisions made while they were absent. Other committees recognize that complicated schedules can prevent members from attending all meetings and establish policies permitting absent members to reopen discussions of issues considered at meetings they missed. Establishing such policies in advance will clarify expectations and reduce frustrations. Committee chairs can also help prevent absences by scheduling meetings well in advance. If possible, establish a schedule of meetings at the outset.
- **Decision-making**
  How will the committee make decisions? By consensus? By voting? It is important to determine this at the outset. Each method has its strengths and limitations. Voting is quickest, but a simple majority does not always lead to effective implementation of or satisfaction with decisions. Consensus may take longer to reach, but can lead to greater support for and comfort with decisions.
- **Confidentiality and disclosure**
  "One of the biggest challenges of maintaining confidentiality within the search is avoiding off-the-cuff informal comments search committee members may make to colleagues," says John Dowling, Sr. University Legal Counsel, UW–Madison. He recommends keeping the process as focused and self-contained as possible and advises search committee members to avoid discussing the specifics of the search with anyone outside the search committee until finalists are announced. Most institutions agree that, at a minimum, search committee members should keep deliberations about the merits of individual applicants strictly confidential. Such policies not only respect and protect the privacy of applicants, but also that of the committee or hiring group. "Those making the selection must be free to discuss applicants during committee meetings without fearing that their comments will be shared outside the deliberations. The names of candidates who have requested confidentiality should not be mentioned even in casual conversations. This information should be held confidential in perpetuity, not just until the search is over."[1]

  While it is important to maintain confidentiality about search committee deliberations, it is equally important to share general information about the search with the larger department, especially if the department will later play a role in evaluating candidates. The search committee should make reports to the department that provide information about

1. University of Wisconsin-Madison, Office of Quality Improvement and Office of Human Resource Development, "Academic Leadership Support: Confidentiality," http://go.wisc.edu/3idbel, accessed 9/11/2012.

the stage of the search; recruitment strategies; the quality and general demographics of the applicant pool; the policies the search committee is relying on to conduct fair and equitable evaluations; the selection of finalists; and more.

Some search committees and departments choose to make applicants' materials available for review by departmental members who are not serving on the search committee and to solicit input from these reviewers. In such departments, it is important to ensure that each individual who examines applicants' materials is aware of his or her obligation to maintain the applicants' confidentiality, and that discussions and deliberations about applicants' merits are confined to committee meetings in which the commitment to confidentiality is clear. Search committees and departments that follow this procedure should also:

- Strive to make sure that all departmental members have equal opportunities to provide feedback.
- Be aware of the possibility that candidates known to departmental members may be advantaged or disadvantaged in comparison to candidates not known to departmental members.
- Account for the possibility that women or minority candidates underrepresented in their field may be less likely to be known by departmental members.

Efforts to balance requirements of confidentiality for applicants with openness about the search process can foster involvement and support from departmental members. Departmental knowledge about the progress of the search can also serve to hold a search committee accountable for recruiting and fairly evaluating a diverse applicant pool that includes women and members of underrepresented minority groups.

- **Other common ground rules**
  The committee may wish to establish other common ground rules including turning off cell phones, routing pagers to an assistant, being on time, giving all members opportunities to speak, and treating other committee members with respect even if there is a disagreement. Whatever ground rules the committee establishes should represent a consensus of the entire committee. They may need to be reviewed and updated periodically.

3. **Discuss roles and expectations of the search committee members**
   Committee members should know what is expected of them in terms of attending meetings, building the applicant pool, and evaluating applicants. **Committee members should also recognize that participation in a search will require considerable time and effort.** Some of the roles or expectations for search committee members include helping to:

- publicize the search
- recruit applicants
- develop evaluation criteria
- evaluate applicants
- develop interview questions
- interview candidates
- host candidates who interview on campus
- ensure that the search process is fair and equitable
- maintain confidentiality

It is important for committee members to understand precisely what role they will play in the selection of candidates. Will they be making the selection of finalists, ranking finalists for the department chair, or recommending finalists to the department or department chair? Will they select the candidate who receives a job offer? Or, will the department, the department chair, or the school or college's dean make the selection? There is wide variation—both across and within schools and colleges—in the roles search committees play in this process. Search committee members who discover late in the process that their role is not what they had originally expected may experience great frustration or believe that their time was not well spent.

4. **Review institutional policies and procedures for search committees**
5. **Raise and discuss issues of diversity**
   Use the material on pp. 16–19 and pp. 36–41 to guide your discussion.
6. **Discuss what "excellence" means for the position you are seeking to fill**
   Begin to discuss and build consensus about the qualities and qualifications needed for this position and about the relative weight of each criteria. In conducting this conversation, keep in mind the needs and desires not only of the individual members of the committee, but also the needs of the department as a whole, the institution, and the students. In addition to traditional criteria such as degree attainment, field of research, publication record, and teaching experience, consider including evidence of successful experience mentoring, tutoring, or engaging with diverse populations and other criteria that matter to your department or institution. In later stages of the search process, rely on the consensus you reached to develop job descriptions, announcements, and advertisements; to formulate interview questions; and to structure your evaluation of candidates.

   Resist the temptation to wait to develop evaluation criteria until after reviewing application materials. Failure to discuss and agree upon desired qualifications *a priori* may hamper the effectiveness of your recruiting activities and increase the possibility that individual search committee members will favor candidates for reasons not necessarily related to the needs of the department or the position (e.g., "I know the advisor," "I graduated from the same program," "I work in a closely related research area") and will develop or give preferential weight to evaluation criteria that benefit favored candidates. Be prepared to counter the argument that "we all know quality when we see it." All too often, nebulous definitions of quality or excellence prime us to recognize quality in those who look and act similar to the majority of members already in an organization and hinder us from seeing excellence in those who differ in some way from the majority.[2] The temptation to rely on such vague, but reportedly recognizable, definitions of merit may arise from a desire to save time. However, failure to take the time to discuss the needs of the position and the desired qualities of the applicants during the early stages of the search process may compromise the efficiency and effectiveness of the search at later stages. In the absence of a well-developed consensus about qualifications, the pool of applicants you attract may not meet your expectations and the committee's evaluation of candidates may become contentious.

---

2. Madeline E. Heilman, "Description and Prescription: How Gender Stereotypes Prevent Women's Ascent Up the Organizational Ladder," *Journal of Social Issues* 57;4 (2001): 657-674.

Anticipating problems

Despite good faith efforts to gain the support and active involvement of all search committee members, meetings and search activities may not proceed as smoothly or effectively as desired. It may help to anticipate problems and think about how to resolve them. Seek advice from your department chair or from past search committee chairs and members. Some common problems that former search committees have identified, along with resources that may help overcome them, are listed below:

1. **Resistance to efforts to enhance diversity**
   - Allow all members of the search committee to voice their opinions and participate in a discussion on diversity and the search committee's roles and responsibilities related to recruiting and evaluating a diverse pool of applicants.
   - Rely on the materials in Elements II and III of this guidebook to help facilitate this discussion of diversity and to respond to resistance.
   - Consider inviting someone with expertise on research documenting the value of diversity to your committee meetings (e.g., a representative of your institution's equity and/or diversity committee, a staff member of the campus equity and/or diversity office, or a prominent scholar on your campus who conducts research in this field).
   - Remind the search committee that they represent the interests of the department as a whole and, in a broader context, the interests of the university or college.
   - Stress that failure to recruit and fairly evaluate a diverse pool of applicants may jeopardize the search; that it may be too late to address the issue when (or if) you are asked, "Why are there no women or minorities on your finalist list?"
2. **One member dominates the meetings**
   - Review or establish ground rules that encourage participation from all members.
   - Implement the following advice from the "Dominant Participants" section of the UW–Madison Office of Quality Improvement and Human Resource Development's web resource, How to Lead Effective Meetings: http://go.wisc.edu/l52jiy.
     - Structure the committee's discussions by carefully framing questions to solicit multiple viewpoints. For example, instead of asking a very general question such as, "what you do think of the applications we have received?" ask each member to address a more specific question such as, "what are the strengths of each application received?" Very general questions invite wide-ranging, open-ended discussions that provide opportunities for highly verbal and/or opinionated individuals to control the direction of the conversation.
     - If someone is dominating the discussion, acknowledge and briefly summarize his or her viewpoint and then ask for alternative viewpoints from other members.
     - If necessary, talk privately with the individual about the importance of providing other committee members with opportunities to participate in discussions.
3. **Power dynamics of the group prevent some members from fully participating**
   Although a search committee composed of a diverse group of individuals is recommended for its ability to incorporate diverse views and perspectives into your search, it is important to recognize that this diversity also poses challenges. Differences in the status and power of

the members of your search committee may influence their participation. Junior faculty members, for example, may be reluctant to disagree with senior faculty members who may later evaluate them for tenure promotion. Minority and/or women search committee members may not be comfortable if they are the only members of the search committee who advocate for applicants from underrepresented groups. Search committee chairs should evaluate the committee's interactions to assess whether power imbalances are influencing the search and search committee members should bring their concerns about any power imbalances to the chair. Suggestions for improving group dynamics include:

- Review or establish ground rules that encourage participation from all members.
- Hold private conversations with relevant members of the search committee to discuss the role they can play in creating and improving group dynamics.
- Account for varying styles of participation by relying upon a range of forums in which committee members can communicate their thoughts. For example, instead of calling for general discussion of a question, proceed around the table giving each member an opportunity to speak, or ask the committee to take a few minutes to think about and/or write down their thoughts before opening up the conversation.
- If you notice that a member of the committee does not speak at all, you might talk with them after the meeting and mention that you are grateful that they are donating their time. Ask if they feel comfortable in the meeting and ask if you can do anything to facilitate their participation. This may be particularly important if your committee has a student member who is intimidated by having to speak in a room full of faculty.
- For more ideas about encouraging quiet members to share their views, see the "Silent Participants" section of the UW–Madison Office of Quality Improvement web resource, *How to Lead Effective Meetings*: http://go.wisc.edu/x3ityy.

Concluding meetings

1. **Assign specific tasks to committee members**
   For example, the chair could ask each committee member to:
   - list a specified number of qualities they would like to see in an ideal candidate
   - write or review a job description, announcement, or advertisement
   - identify or contact a specified number of sources who can refer potential candidates
   - suggest a certain number of venues for posting job announcements
   - review a specified number of applications
2. **Remind committee members of their assigned tasks**
   Before the next meeting, the chair should remind committee members of their assigned tasks. Committee members should accept responsibility for completing their assignments and be prepared to report on their activities at the next meeting.
3. **Hold committee members accountable**
   The chair should ask each committee member to report on his or her search activities at every committee meeting.

IV. ENSURE A FAIR AND THOROUGH REVIEW OF APPLICANTS

Minimizing the influence of unconscious bias (pp. 44–54)

Minimizing Bias: What NOT to do
Minimizing Bias: What to do

Minimizing the influence of unconscious bias

As the research presented in the previous section indicates, unconscious bias and assumptions can influence evaluation despite our best intentions and our commitment to an equitable search process. Our desire to be fair and objective, unfortunately, is not sufficient to ensure a fair and thorough review of applicants. Consequently, this section of the guidebook presents specific strategies for minimizing the influence of bias on evaluation. The strategies we recommend are grounded in research studies that demonstrate the role of specific interventions in overcoming bias. Following the presentation of these evidence-based strategies for minimizing bias, this section provides logistical advice for organizing and managing the evaluation of applications.

Minimizing Bias: What NOT to do

Surprisingly, research indicates that some common strategies may not be effective at minimizing the influence of bias and assumptions. These include:

1. **Suppressing bias and assumptions from one's mind (or trying to)**
   After becoming aware that unconscious bias and assumptions about groups of people can influence the evaluation of individuals, one common approach is to strive consciously to banish biased thoughts from one's mind; to avoid or suppress thoughts about group stereotypes. Paradoxically, research shows that such attempts can backfire. Attempting to suppress a thought can actually reinforce it and may unintentionally increase bias in evaluation.[1]

   In one research study, participants viewed a photograph of a smiling African American male and wrote a short essay describing a typical day in his life. Half of the participants received instructions not to rely on stereotypes in writing the essay. The other half received no such instructions. A pair of judges, blinded to the experimental condition, rated the extent to which the essays reflected stereotypes. They found that participants instructed to suppress stereotypes did indeed show less reliance on stereotypes than those who did not receive these instructions. In a subsequent task, participants read a story about "Donald" and evaluated him on a set of characteristics. Donald's behavior was intentionally ambiguous; it could be described as hostile or merely as assertive. Participants who had previously engaged in stereotype suppression were more likely to interpret Donald's behavior as hostile. Because Donald's race was not specified, researchers argue that these evaluators were no longer consciously striving to suppress racial stereotypes but that their interpretations of Donald's behavior reflected a rebound effect of suppressing stereotypes about African Americans.[2]

   Individuals highly motivated by their own personal commitment to avoid bias may be able to suppress biased thoughts successfully without experiencing a "rebound effect," but only if they can devote sufficient time and attention to the task. Unfortunately, minor distractions, multi-tasking, mood, and/or fatigue—common aspects of modern life—can hamper even the

---

1. Margo J. Monteith, Jeffrey W. Sherman, and Patricia G. Devine, "Suppression as a Stereotype Control Strategy," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 2;1 (1998): 63-82; C. Neil Macrae, Galen V. Bodenhausen, Alan B. Milne, and Jolanda Jetten, "Out of Mind but Back in Sight: Stereotypes on the Rebound," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67;5 (1994): 808-817.
2. Nira Liberman and Jens Förster, "Expression After Suppression: A Motivational Explanation of Postsuppressional Rebound," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79;2 (2000): 190-203.

most motivated individual's ability to control the influence of unconscious and unwanted thoughts.[3]

Despite the risks of engaging in stereotype suppression, at least one group of scholars points out that suppression of biased thoughts is not "necessarily bad." They argue that "in many situations [possibly including the evaluation of job applicants] inhibiting stereotypic thinking is critical." Nevertheless, they caution us to "be aware that these efforts may influence our subsequent social perceptions and behaviors in important and unexpected ways and may occasionally backfire if we lose the motivation or the ability to correct for a suppression-activated stereotype."[4]

Because of the potentially negative effects of relying on suppression of bias, it is critical to adopt strategies for minimizing the influence of bias as described in the section below, **"What to do."**

2. **Relying on a presumably "objective" ranking or rating system to reduce bias**
   Another common method of attempting to avoid the influence of bias is to rely on the objectivity inherent in mathematics and numbers to develop a system of assigning scores or points to applicants' materials and to rely on this "objective" measure to evaluate and compare applicants. Designing and relying on some type of numeric evaluation system can be very helpful in ensuring a fair and equitable process, but this practice in and of itself will not eliminate bias because each assigned score may be subject to bias. Even if the influence of bias on each assessment is minimal, adding these scores or points together can significantly increase the influence of bias. This is precisely what occurred in the evaluation of applications for prestigious fellowships from the Swedish Medical Research Council, a study described in the previous chapter. The complex scoring system evaluators relied on to promote fairness unintentionally magnified slight biases against women applicants.[5] Consequently, it is important to recognize that bias can play a role in assigning points or scores to various elements of applicants' materials and to rely on the advice provided below for minimizing the influence of bias and assumptions.

Minimizing Bias: What to do

1. **Replace your self-image as an objective person with recognition and acceptance that you are subject to the influence of bias and assumptions**
   In a study examining the role of evaluators' image of themselves as objective decision makers, researchers asked evaluators to assume the role of a company executive and to rate an applicant (identified as either Gary or Lisa) for the position of factory manager. Before conducting the evaluation, half of the participants took a brief survey designed to heighten their sense of objectivity. The survey, for example, asked them to assess the degree to which they "objectively consider all the facts" before forming an opinion and the extent to which they were "rational and objective" when making decisions. The other half of participants took this survey after completing their evaluation. Regardless of when they took the survey, most

3. Natalie A. Wyer, Jeffrey W. Sherman, and Steven J. Stroessner, "The Roles of Motivation and Ability in Controlling the Consequences of Stereotype Suppression," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 26;1 (2000): 13-25; Monteith, Sherman, and Devine, "Suppression as a Stereotype Control Strategy."
4. Wyer, Sherman, and Stroessner, "The Roles of Motivation and Ability," 24.
5. Christine Wennerås and Agnes Wold, "Nepotism and Sexism in Peer-Review," *Nature* 387;6631 (1997): 341-343.

participants (over 88%) believed themselves to be "above average in objectivity." Participants who took the survey after completing their evaluation gave similar evaluations to the male and female applicants. However, participants whose self-image of being objective was heightened by taking the survey prior to the evaluation showed a substantial preference for the male applicant. The researchers suggest that when people believe themselves to be objective, they naturally assume that their thoughts, beliefs, judgments, and decisions are based on an objective analysis of available information and, therefore, do not stop to consider alternative views or the possibility that they may have been influenced by unconscious assumptions and biases prevalent in society.[6]

2. **Strive to increase the diversity of your search committee**
   As discussed in Element I of this guidebook, a committee composed of diverse members can benefit from the variety of perspectives and new ideas each member provides. The presence and active involvement of diverse members of the committee can also improve efforts to recruit excellent and diverse applicants and can influence the evaluation of applicants. Members of diverse groups, however, do not necessarily evaluate applicants differently than do majority members. Rather, their presence alone may influence the responses of their fellow committee members. For example, an experimental study using the Implicit Association Test (IAT) for racial bias demonstrated that implicit bias towards African Americans decreased when an African American rather than a white person administered the test. One possible explanation is that the African American experimenter, an academician in a high-status position, may have provided participants with a powerful example of a counterstereotype and, thus, may have reduced their reliance on unconscious and common assumptions about African Americans. Alternatively, participants in the presence of an African American experimenter may have been more motivated not to exhibit bias or prejudice. Women and underrepresented minority members serving on a search committee may have a similar influence on their majority peers.[7]

3. **Strive to increase the representation of women and minority scholars in your applicant pool**
   Gender assumptions are more likely to have a negative influence on evaluation of women when women represent a small proportion (25% or less) of the applicant pool. In one study researchers asked participants to evaluate one application (that of a woman) for a managerial position (a male-assumed job), but informed them that in order to accurately evaluate the applicant, they needed to have a broader sense of the applicant pool. Hence, the participants reviewed a package of eight applications before evaluating the identified applicant. Researchers varied the proportion of women applicants in the review package. When 25% or fewer of the applicants were women, participants were less likely to recommend the targeted woman applicant for hire and regarded her as less qualified, as having lower potential, and as being "more stereotypically feminine" than when women's representation among the applicants was greater than 25%. These findings suggest that when women are well-represented in the applicant pool and gender is consequently less salient, evaluators are less likely to be influenced by gender stereotypes and more likely to focus on the individual mer-

6. Eric Luis Uhlmann and Geoffrey L. Cohen, "'I Think it, therefore it's True': Effects of Self-Perceived Objectivity on Hiring Discrimination," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 104;2 (2007): 207-223.

7. Brian S. Lowery, Curtis D. Hardin, and Stacey Sinclair, "Social Influence Effects on Automatic Racial Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81;5 (2001): 842-855.

its of each woman applicant. Though similar research has not yet been conducted for members of underrepresented minority groups, it is reasonable to extrapolate from these findings and to expect that a greater proportion of minority members in the application pool will cause evaluators to focus more on the qualifications of individuals than on group stereotypes.[8]

4. **Develop well-defined evaluation criteria prior to reviewing applications**
Ideally, discussion about evaluation criteria should begin at the earliest stages of the search process because identifying criteria will help search committees write effective job descriptions and recruit well-qualified applicants. The committee should continue to discuss and refine their criteria throughout the search process with the goal of reaching agreement about the priority and specific nature of each criterion before beginning to review applications.

   Well-defined criteria can help evaluators focus attention on the merits of individual applicants and on the degree to which they meet criteria, whereas abstract or vaguely defined criteria may increase the possibility for unconscious biases and assumptions to influence evaluation.[9] For example, search committees frequently rely on "excellence in research and/or teaching" as criteria for faculty positions. Although these criteria are perfectly acceptable—even necessary—for job announcements or advertisements, they provide search committee members with little guidance for evaluating applicants. To conduct a fair and effective evaluation, search committee members can discuss and develop consensus around some of the following questions:

   - What constitutes excellence in research and/or teaching? Is it number of publications, number of citations, innovation of the topic or approach, significance of results, ability to obtain research funding, or prestige of the journal or publisher? Is it courses taught or developed, results of teaching evaluations, success attracting and mentoring students, or innovation of the topic or pedagogy? Is it the prestige of the home institution and current position, or the applicant's accomplishments?
   - What other criteria will committee members rely upon—and how will they assess them? (Some examples of evaluation criteria are listed on Sample Form F, p. 67.)

   As the committee develops its evaluation criteria, understand that well-defined criteria are not necessarily narrow. Relatively broad criteria not tied to specific qualifications or a narrow specialty will generally lead to a more interesting and diverse list of qualified applicants. The committee will also want to balance its efforts to define evaluation criteria with the need to remain flexible. It is not always possible to think of all potential evaluation criteria. An applicant might bring interesting strengths or attributes to the department other than those originally sought. If such cases appear, reevaluate and possibly modify the review criteria

---

8. Madeline E. Heilman, "The Impact of Situational Factors on Personnel Decisions Concerning Women: Varying the Sex Composition of the Applicant Pool," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 26;3 (1980): 386-395. See also: Jos van Ommeren, Reinout E. de Vries, Giovanni Russo, and Mark van Ommeren, "Context in Selection of Men and Women in Hiring Decisions: Gender Composition of the Applicant Pool," *Psychological Reports* 96;2 (2005): 349-360.
9. Monica Rubini and Michela Menegatti, "Linguistic Bias in Personnel Selection," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 27;2 (2008): 168-181; Daniël H. J. Wigboldus, Gün R. Semin, and Russell Spears, "How do we Communicate Stereotypes? Linguistic Bases and Inferential Consequences," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78;1 (2000): 5-18.

and be sure to apply these revised criteria equitably to all applicants. If necessary, communicate with all applicants to request additional information or supporting materials.

The consensus different committees reach regarding their evaluation criteria will vary depending on the nature of the position, the standards of the institution and/or discipline, and the needs of the department. It is important to recognize that efforts to define criteria more rigorously will probably not result in completely objective standards that committee members can apply universally and equitably to all applicants. Discussions about criteria, however, will provide search committee members with greater clarity regarding the qualifications they prefer. In addition, they will highlight the subjective nature of definitions of excellence and increase the committee's awareness that this subjectivity creates opportunities for the influence of bias and assumptions.[10]

5. **Prioritize evaluation criteria prior to evaluating applicants**

In addition to developing well-defined criteria, deciding upon how to prioritize them before evaluating applicants is critical. Researchers demonstrated this importance in a series of experiments based on evaluating applicants for two positions: a male-assumed job as a police chief, and a female-assumed job as a women's studies professor.

For the position as police chief, researchers developed two descriptions of job applicants. They described one applicant as "streetwise" and the other as "well schooled and experienced in administration." Research participants read a description of a male or a female applicant who was either streetwise or well educated. They rated the applicant on a number of streetwise and educational characteristics, assessed the importance of each of these characteristics for success as a police chief, and made a recommendation to hire or not hire the applicant. Applicant gender did not influence evaluator's ratings of credentials: male and female applicants received equivalent ratings for their educational and streetwise credentials. Nevertheless, evaluators were more likely to recommend hiring the male rather than the female applicant. The discrepancy between evaluators' equitable ratings of credentials and their inequitable hiring recommendations resulted from the way they prioritized credentials to justify hiring the male. Evaluators rated educational credentials as more important when a male applicant possessed them and as less important when a male applicant lacked them, but made no such adjustments for female applicants.

For the position as a women's studies professor, researchers described applicants as having either good academic credentials or significant experience as an activist for women's issues. Results of the study were similar: evaluators' ratings of the credentials of male and female applicants did not differ, but they were more likely to hire the female applicant. Their hiring decisions were influenced by adjusting the importance of credentials in favor of the female applicant. Evaluators judged activist credentials as more important when female applicants possessed them than when they did not, but made no such adjustment for male applicants.

---

10. Madeline E. Heilman and Michelle C. Haynes, "Subjectivity in the Appraisal Process: A Facilitator of Gender Bias in Work Settings," in *Beyond Common Sense: Psychological Science in the Courtroom*, eds. E. Borgida and S. T. Fiske (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 127-155; Madeline E. Heilman, "Description and Prescription: How Gender Stereotypes Prevent Women's Ascent Up the Organizational Ladder," *Journal of Social Issues* 57;4 (2001): 657-674.

In a follow-up experiment, researchers asked evaluators to rate the importance of various credentials **before** conducting their evaluations. Under this condition, bias in hiring recommendations was not significant.[11]

This research demonstrates that prioritizing criteria before reviewing applications can prevent search committee members from unintentionally placing greater value on the qualities a "favored" applicant possesses and less value on credentials he or she lacks. The applicant may be "favored" because the committee members know him or her, know his or her major advisor, attended the same graduate programs, share common research interests, or because the applicant is of the same race, sex, or ethnicity as most members of the department.

6. **Engage in counterstereotype imaging**

Before reviewing applications, each individual member of the committee can strive to minimize the influence of unconscious assumptions about women and minority applicants by engaging in counterstereotype imaging; by taking time to consciously think about successful, highly competent, well-regarded women and minority members in their department, university, and/or discipline. They can remind themselves of the work these people do, of the research and/or teaching they are recognized for, and of the contributions they make to the department, college, university, and/or profession. Research indicates that these conscious thoughts can replace unconscious assumptions, thus minimizing their influence. A series of experiments used a variety of tests that measure unconscious or implicit bias to compare test scores participants received before and after engaging in a counterstereotype imaging task. Results demonstrated that counterstereotype imaging reduced implicit bias.[12]

Counterstereotype imaging can also operate at the unconscious level. As discussed above, a diverse search committee may help reduce the influence of unconscious assumptions because the presence and participation of women and minority colleagues on the committee may provide majority members with powerful counterstereotype examples. Similarly, the photographs and pictures in the room in which the committee meets to evaluate and interview applicants can serve to provide counterstereotype (or stereotype consistent) images. A room that showcases photographs and pictures representative of the diversity present or desired in the department or the discipline can provide the search committee with counterstereotype examples that may help mitigate the influence of unconscious or implicit bias. A room populated with photographs depicting only majority members of the department or discipline may reinforce such biases.

Researchers demonstrated this passive and unconscious influence of counterstereotype imaging in an experimental study that compared participants' scores on a test of implicit racial bias before and after viewing (a) pictures of admired black and disliked white public figures, (b) pictures of admired white and disliked black individuals, or (c) pictures of insects and flowers. Participants who viewed pictures of admired black individuals scored significantly lower on the post-intervention test of implicit racial bias, while the scores of those who viewed admired white individuals or insects and flowers did not change much. Researchers repeated this experiment to determine whether counterstereotype imaging was also effec-

---

11. Eric Luis Uhlmann and Geoffrey L. Cohen, "Constructed Criteria: Redefining Merit to Justify Discrimination," *Psychological Science* 16;6 (2005): 474-480.

12. Irene V. Blair, Jennifer E. Ma, and Alison P. Lenton. "Imagining Stereotypes Away: The Moderation of Implicit Stereotypes through Mental Imagery," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81;5 (2001): 828-841.

tive at reducing implicit age bias. Indeed, they discovered that exposure to pictures of admired elderly people reduced automatic or implicit bias in favor of younger people.[13]

7. **Spend sufficient time evaluating each applicant and minimize distractions**
Several research studies show that evaluators are much more likely to rely on unconscious biases or assumptions when they are pressed for time, engaged in multiple tasks, tired, and/or under stress. Unconscious bias thus serves as a mental shortcut when we cannot devote much time and attention to evaluation.[14] In one such study, participants rated the job performance of police officers (a male-assumed position) under two different conditions. Under conditions of "high attentional demand," participants conducted their evaluation while simultaneously responding to a second unrelated task. These participants also received instructions to complete the evaluation as quickly as possible and a clock that visibly displayed each passing minute was placed in the room. Participants in the "low attentional demand" condition focused only on the evaluation task and received no instructions about speed or time. All participants received a written description of the police officer's work behavior over a period of three days and a brief biography of the officer that included a photograph of either a woman or a man. There was no significant difference in the job performance ratings evaluators under "low attentional demand" gave to male and female officers. However, evaluators who faced "high attentional demand" rated the job performance of male officers as significantly superior to that of female officers. Indeed, male officers received higher performance ratings from evaluators working under "high attentional demand" than they received from evaluators who gave all their time and attention to the task.[15]

   This and other studies suggest that evaluators can reduce the influence of bias and assumptions by minimizing distractions and devoting sufficient time to their evaluation tasks. Some helpful practices include:

   - Break the evaluation task into several stages (see "Logistics for Managing the Review of Applicants," pp. 54-59).
   - Set aside a block/s of time for conducting evaluations.
   - Plan to spend at least 15-20 minutes when conducting a **thorough** review of each application. (Note: as suggested in "Logistics for Managing the Review of Applicants" on pp. 54-59, at certain stages applications may be divided between search committee members so that each member is responsible for **briefly** reviewing all applications and **thoroughly** reviewing a designated number of applications. The advice to spend at least 15-20 minutes applies to the thorough review.)
   - Conduct evaluations in a quiet space where you will not be disturbed by ongoing conversations or other interruptions.
   - Turn off e-mail and/or any other electronic notifications that provide visual or audio alerts that may disrupt your concentration.

---

13. Nilanjana Dasgupta and Anthony G. Greenwald, "On the Malleability of Automatic Attitudes: Combating Automatic Prejudice with Images of Admired and Disliked Individuals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81;5 (2001): 800-814.

14. JoAnn Moody, *Rising Above Cognitive Errors: Guidelines for Search, Tenure Review, and Other Evaluation Committees* (JoAnn Moody, www.DiversityOnCampus.com, 2010).

15. Richard F. Martell, "Sex Bias at Work: The Effects of Attentional and Memory Demands on Performance Ratings of Men and Women," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 21;23 (1991): 1939-1960.

- Indulge in a sweet drink or a snack. Research shows that low levels of blood glucose can impair efforts of self-control, including control of biased assumptions, but that consuming a glucose drink can strengthen self-control.[16]

8. **Focus on each applicant as an individual and evaluate their entire application package** Thoroughly evaluate each applicant's entire application. Do not focus too heavily on or be overly influenced by any one element of the application such as the cover letter, the prestige of the degree-granting institution or post-doctoral program, the letters of recommendation, or the applicant's membership in a particular demographic group. Focusing on the entire application provides a fuller picture of the individual applicant and the degree to which he or she meets your criteria. Research indicates that the more job-related information we have about an applicant and the more we focus on the applicant as an individual rather than as a representative member of some group (a group based on race, sex, ethnicity, or even on institutional affiliation), the less likely we are to rely on assumptions and biases.

   For example, a meta-analysis of research studies on the role of sex discrimination in hiring demonstrated that studies in which evaluators had more information regarding applicants' qualifications were less likely to find evidence of sex-discrimination than were studies that provided evaluators with less information. The absence of information regarding individuals' qualifications increased evaluators' tendencies to rely on biases and assumptions.[17]

   Another study, recently conducted in France, demonstrated that evaluators who focused on individual differences between members of a targeted minority group (Arabs) were less likely to discriminate against a highly qualified job applicant with an Arabic name than evaluators who concentrated on similarities between group members. In the first phase of this study, researchers engaged participants in a memorization task. They asked all participants to examine and memorize pictures of Arab individuals who varied in sex, age, and style of clothing. They advised one third of participants to take notes about differences between individuals in the group and one third to take notes about similarities between group members. One third of participants served as a control group; they received no advice and took no notes. After some distraction tasks, researchers asked participants to evaluate four applicants for a position as a sales representative. One applicant was highly qualified, two were of average quality, and one was clearly weaker. Researchers assigned a male Arabic name to half of the high quality applications and a male French name to the other half. They assigned French names to all remaining applications. When the name on the highly qualified application was French, participants clearly recognized the applicant's superiority and selected him to interview for the position. However, when the name on the highly qualified application was Arabic, only participants who had previously focused on individual differences between Arabic individuals recognized the applicant's superiority and routinely selected him for an interview. Participants in the control group and in the group that focused on group similarities were less likely to invite the applicant with an Arabic name to interview for the position

16. Matthew T. Gailliot et al., "Self-Control Relies on Glucose as a Limited Energy Source: Willpower is More than a Metaphor," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92;2 (2007): 325-336.

17. Madeline E. Heilman, "Information as a Deterrent Against Sex Discrimination: The Effects of Applicant Sex and Information Type on Preliminary Employment Decisions," *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 33;2 (1984): 174-186; Henry L. Tosi and Steven W. Einbender, "The Effects of the Type and Amount of Information in Sex Discrimination Research: A Meta-Analysis," *Academy of Management Journal* 28;3 (1985): 712-723.

and evaluated his application as equivalent to that of the less qualified average applicants with French names.[18]

9. Rely upon inclusion rather than exclusion strategies in making selection decisions

When faced with the task of selecting applicants for further consideration in the hiring process, search committees have essentially two strategies for proceeding. They can exclude from further consideration those applicants they evaluate as unqualified, or they can include the applicants they deem qualified. Theoretically, if search committees fairly and equitably evaluate applicants on the basis of their qualifications, both strategies should yield the same set of applicants. Yet, substantial research on decision-making strategies indicates that they do not. Making decisions using exclusion rather than inclusion strategies results in a larger pool of applicants remaining. This occurs because evaluators make more careful and deliberate choices when deciding whom to include.[19]

One research study investigated how biases and assumptions interact with these decision-making strategies. This study examined (1) how assumptions about gender roles and leadership influenced evaluators' decisions about identifying male and female politicians and judges and (2) how assumptions about African Americans and athleticism influenced evaluators' ability to identify black and white basketball players. Participants in the gender study received instructions to select from a list that included equal numbers of male and female names those individuals who were well-known politicians or judges. For each gender, half of the names were those of well-known politicians or judges and half were random names. Researchers instructed half of the participants to "**circle** the names of those who ARE politicians or judges" (inclusion) and half of the participants to "**cross off** the names of those who ARE NOT politicians or judges" (exclusion). Instructions were similar for participants in the race study but the list included the names of an equal number of well-known black and white basketball players.

In both cases, the research demonstrated the expected effect—evaluators using a strategy of exclusion generated substantially larger lists than did evaluators using an inclusion strategy. Using signal detection theory to analyze "hit rates" (correct identifications) and "false alarms" (misidentifications), the authors demonstrated that evaluators who made decisions by exclusion were more subject to the influence of assumptions associating men as leaders and African Americans as basketball players (more misidentifications). This analysis also showed that relying on an exclusion decision-making strategy led evaluators to set a higher standard (fewer correct identifications) for selecting members of stereotyped groups into counter-stereotyped categories (e.g., women as leaders, or white men as basketball players).

Relying on inclusion decision-making strategies, the authors conclude, can help reduce the influence of bias and assumptions not only by reducing our tendency to rely on differential

---

18. Markus Brauer and Abdelatif Er-rafiy, "Increasing Perceived Variability Reduces Prejudice and Discrimination," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 47;5 (2011): 871-881.

19. Kurt Hugenberg, Galen V. Bodenhausen, and Melissa McLain, "Framing Discrimination: Effects of Inclusion Versus Exclusion Mind-Sets on Stereotypic Judgments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91;6 (2006): 1020-1031; Ilan Yaniv and Yaacov Schul, "Acceptance and Elimination Procedures in Choice: Noncomplementarity and the Role of Implied Status Quo," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 82;2 (2000): 293-313; Irwin P. Levin, Mary E. Huneke, and J.D. Jasper, "Information Processing at Successive Stages of Decision Making: Need for Cognition and Inclusion-Exclusion Effects," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 82;2 (2000): 171-193.

criteria for underrepresented groups, but also by focusing our attention on individuals' qualifications rather than on our assumptions about characteristics of the group/s to which they belong.[20]

10. Stop periodically to evaluate your criteria and their application

Designate specific times during the evaluation process when the committee will pause to assess the effectiveness and implementation of their evaluation criteria. These times might include before finalizing the "long shortlist," before developing the "shortlist," and before selecting final candidates. At these times, the committee and each individual member can consider the following questions:

- Are you consistently relying on the criteria developed for the position?
- Are your criteria appropriate for the position?
- Are you inadvertently relying on unwritten or unrecognized criteria?
- Are you inadvertently, but systematically, screening out women or underrepresented minority applicants?
- Are women and minority applicants subject to different expectations in areas such as numbers of publications, name recognition, or personal acquaintance with a member of the committee or department? *(An effective way to test for this is to perform a thought experiment—to mentally switch the gender or race of the applicant and consider whether expectations and/or judgments remain unchanged.)*
- Are you underestimating the value and qualifications of applicants from institutions other than the major research universities that train most faculty members? *(It is useful to recognize that many highly successful faculty members have followed nontraditional career paths and that qualified applicants from institutions such as historically black universities, four-year colleges, government, or industry might offer innovative, diverse, and valuable perspectives on research and teaching.)*
- Have the accomplishments, ideas, and findings of women or minority applicants been undervalued or unfairly attributed to a research director or collaborators despite contrary evidence in publications or letters of reference?
- Are you underestimating the ability of women or minority scholars to run a research group, raise funds, and supervise students and staff of differing gender, race, or ethnicity?
- Are assumptions about possible family responsibilities and their effect on an applicant's career path negatively influencing evaluation of an applicant's merit, despite evidence of productivity?
- Are negative assumptions about whether women or minority applicants will "fit in" to the existing environment influencing evaluation?
- Are you evaluating applicants on the basis of promise or potential rather than on evidence of accomplishments and productivity? *(The research discussed above strongly suggests that judgments about promise or potential are particularly susceptible to the influence of bias and assumptions.)*

20. Hugenberg, Bodenhausen, and McLain, 2006.

11. Be able to defend every decision

Each member of the search committee should be able to defend cogently every decision to accept or reject an applicant at each stage of the search process. The reasons they provide should be based on evidence in the applicant's record and performance and on the criteria established for the position. It is particularly important to hold reviewers accountable not only for the competence of the applicants they recommend for hire, but also for the fairness and equity of their review.

Research shows that holding evaluators accountable only for the competence of the applicants they select may lead them to assume that applicants who resemble those who have previously succeeded in the position are the most competent or the best choice. Under such conditions, evaluators may assume that applicants who differ from the majority previously in the position, whether on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, training, or any other dimension, are more "risky" and that a greater burden of proof is necessary to demonstrate their competence or fit for the position.[21] Holding evaluators to high standards of accountability for the fairness of their evaluation, however, reduces the influence of bias and assumptions.[22]

---

21. Monica Biernat and Kathleen Fuegen, "Shifting Standards and the Evaluation of Competence: Complexity in Gender-Based Judgment and Decision Making," *Journal of Social Issues* 57;4 (2001): 707-724.

22. Michael Dobbs and William D. Crano, "Outgroup Accountability in the Minimal Group Paradigm: Implications for Aversive Discrimination and Social Identity Theory." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 27;3 (2001): 355-364; Martha Foschi, "Double Standards in the Evaluation of Men and Women," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 59;3 (1996): 237-254.