Strategies for Recruiting an Excellent & Diverse Faculty Complement:

A guide for enhancing the diversity of applicant pools and minimizing the impact of unconscious bias in assessing candidates.

This document offers concrete approaches for broadening candidate pools and supporting diversity at each stage of the recruitment and search process for academic positions. It draws on material from a range of sources, including practice and scholarship in this area from colleagues across the University. It draws, in addition, on a workshop led on our campus in 2016 by the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a special 2016 report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on "Creating a Diverse Faculty," materials from the Center for WorkLife Law on workplace Bias Interrupters, and a 2008 publication from the Education Advisory Board on "Breakthrough Advances in Faculty Diversity: Lessons and Innovative Practices from the Frontier."

Each section of this document speaks to a different stage in the search process. This document structure reflects the principle that a focus on diversity should inform all committee processes and discussions, from the initial development of the position through making an offer to a candidate.

In this document we use the definitions of diversity and underrepresentation provided by WISELI: "Diversity of experience, age, class, physical ability, religion, race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation are just some of the qualities that contribute to the richness of the environment for teaching and research. … The term 'underrepresented,' in this context, means that a particular group's proportionate representation in the academy, or in a field of study, is smaller than its representation in the population at large." (WISELI, 2016, p. 2)

1. Planning the Search

➤ **Approach your search with a focus on diversity and excellence**

> *Our teaching, scholarship and other activities take place in the context of a highly diverse society. Reflecting this diversity in our own community is uniquely valuable to the University as it contributes to the diversification of ideas and perspectives and thereby enriches our scholarship, teaching and other activities. We will proactively seek to increase diversity among our community members, and it is our aim to have a student body and teaching and administrative staff that mirror the diversity of the pool of potential qualified applicants for those positions…. We believe that excellence flourishes in an environment that embraces the broadest range of people.*
>
> *- U of T Statement on Equity, Diversity and Excellence (2006)*

Diversity is a central component of excellence. By generating larger and more diverse pools of applicants for every position, and guarding against unconscious bias in assessing those applicants, we increase the chances of recruiting the best candidate possible. The *Policy and Procedures on*

Academic Appointments (PPAA) observes that efforts to build a large and diverse candidate pool "ensure that the position is drawn to the attention of as many potential candidates as possible in order to increase the chances that the names of the best possible candidates will appear on the list of those to be considered." (PPAA, 2015, Section 1.5.i)

A large and growing body of research illustrates that diversity enriches the education, mentoring, and support students receive; expands and strengthens the curriculum; and enhances research programs.

➢ **1–2 months before posting your advertisement, examine what perspectives and foci might be missing from your unit's research profile and curriculum**

Engage in a unit-level discussion of potential gaps in your unit's research and curriculum. Ask what new perspectives are emerging in the field that could add to the diversity of perspectives within the unit. Consider how viewpoints from candidates from underrepresented groups might contribute to the achievement of these goals.

➢ **Consider diversity in the search committee**

Because of affinity bias, search committees tend to hire people who resemble themselves. Diversity among committee members can encourage the committee to consider a wider range of applicants. In asking underrepresented faculty members to serve on search committees, keep in mind that these faculty members often receive a disproportionate number of service requests.

➢ **Discuss diversity and excellence as a committee**

One of the first steps towards developing a commitment to build a diverse applicant pool is to hold an open discussion about diversity at the beginning of the search. Know that it is permissible under human rights law, and encouraged by the University, to:

- Formulate or discuss, as a committee, specific diversity goals, including the ways in which the realization of goals would enhance excellence in your unit.
- Discuss or implement strategies to increase the representation of individuals from diverse backgrounds in your unit.

As you post your ad and begin to receive applications, you may look at the composition of your pool by requesting aggregate data from the UTORecruit candidate survey. Information about the protected status of individual candidates is not available through UTORecruit.

Contact your Dean's Office (multi-department Faculties) or the Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life (single-department Faculties) to identify colleagues who may be able to attend the first meeting of the search committee to facilitate a research-informed conversation about diversity and excellence.

2. Developing Your Job Ad

➢ **Create a job posting that encourages applications from a broad range of excellent candidates**

In many fields, diverse candidates are better represented in non-traditional, interdisciplinary, and emerging research areas. In writing your job posting, consider broadening the scope of the desired

area of scholarship, experience, disciplinary background, and expertise. Include language that indicates your unit's interest in emerging or interdisciplinary areas, or in particular subfields where underrepresented faculty may be better represented. In addition, consistent with the University's commitment to foster a diverse and inclusive intellectual environment, consider including amongst your preferred criteria factors such as:

- Experience working with, teaching, or mentoring diverse groups or diverse students.
- Ability to contribute to fostering diversity on campus, and within the curriculum or discipline.

Throughout the job ad, be very clear about what is actually "required" and what is "preferred." If appropriate, use "preferred" instead of "required," and "should" instead of "must" when describing qualifications and developing criteria.

Please note that these approaches must be balanced with considerations of immigration requirements. Your Dean's Office and the Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life will work with you to help craft the best possible job posting.

The Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life is working with other offices across the University to develop targeted ad language focused specifically on attracting underrepresented candidates. Please contact academic.jobs@utoronto.ca for more information.

3. Getting the Word Out: Reaching Candidates

➢ **Immediately following the approval of the posting: Expand your pool of applicants through *active* recruitment and outreach**

Your job posting will not automatically reach all qualified candidates. Recruiting a diverse pool of excellent candidates requires active outreach on the part of all members of the committee, reaching out to individuals, organizations, and institutions you may not have contacted in previous searches. Approach this task as broadly and inclusively as possible and save the ranking of applicants for later in the process.

Actively involve all search committee members in specific tasks to identify potential candidates. This might include:

- **Using your networks:** Contact colleagues and members of relevant professional societies or associations and ask them to recommend potential applicants. Ask specifically for recommendations of diverse applicants.
- **Asking colleagues to draw on their networks:** Make an effort to identify contacts who have diverse backgrounds or experiences, as these colleagues may themselves belong to networks with access to highly qualified candidates from less-represented groups.
- **Advertising to diverse audiences:** Advertise in publications that reflect the full scope of the position you have defined and that have a good chance of reaching the broadest possible range of potential candidates.
- **Connecting with fellowship programs:** Identify fellowship programs in your field, especially those that aim to expand the participation of underrepresented groups in the professoriate. Contact the administrators of these programs for recommended potential applicants.

4. Before Opening any Application Files

➢ Assessing your applicant pool

If you find that your applicant pool is smaller or less diverse than you'd hoped:

- If the search has not yet closed, it may be possible, in very limited circumstances, to extend the position closing date so that you can conduct additional outreach. VPFAL (contact academic.jobs@utoronto.ca) can advise you on whether this may be possible in your case, taking the requirements of the immigration process into account.
- You might consider whether you wish to cancel the search and attempt to recruit a broader pool in a subsequent year. To effectively recruit a broader pool, the unit might consider broadening the position description or pursuing additional active recruitment strategies.

➢ Identify any conflicts of interest or known candidates

Known candidates may both benefit from existing positive relationships, or may face challenges because extraneous and personal information is introduced into committee discussions. The committee should identify candidates known to any member of the committee, and discuss how that relationship can best be addressed during committee discussions. Work to prevent any information about a known candidate that isn't available for other candidates from entering committee discussions.

➢ Approach your review of candidates by recognizing the potential impact of unconscious bias in assessing applicants

Even people who are strongly committed to fairness, egalitarian principles and diversity can hold implicit or unconscious assumptions that influence their assessment of candidates. These biases are a byproduct of our environment and culture. Research shows that simply being aware of the unconscious biases we may hold, and the effect they can have on our assessment of candidates, is an important first step in minimizing the influence of these biases. It is more effective to acknowledge and identify biases and then address them than to attempt to ignore these biases.

➢ Discuss diversity and unconscious bias with committee members

Before reviewing applicants, remind committee members of the potential role unconscious bias can play in the evaluation and ranking of candidates. Remind the committee that increasing the diversity of the faculty complement is one of the goals of the recruitment process and that this should be taken into consideration when assessing otherwise comparable applicants.

➢ Create a detailed list of criteria that you will apply in creating your longlist/shortlist

Unconscious bias not only affects our assessment of whether a candidate meets our standards, but indeed can shape how we define those standards. A candidate who provokes an instinctually positive response becomes a mental model of a preferred candidate; we then restructure our understanding of what is needed for the position to fit that candidate's profile.

Consequently, a discussion of criteria, building on the job ad, should precede the discussion of any individual candidate. Before reviewing any applications, a search committee should create a detailed list of criteria describing the qualities and experiences you are seeking in a candidate for the position. Any ambiguity in what the committee is seeking or how those criteria might present themselves in a candidate should be discussed by the committee.

Your discussion of criteria should reflect an openness to a range of ways of demonstrating excellence. In particular, you might want to consider:

- A tendency for committees to prefer candidates who reflect current unit strengths or who can replace a recently retired colleague. Evolving needs or strengths of the unit might point to a different or complementary profile.
- How excellence would be demonstrated by candidates from emerging research areas or who incorporate, for example, community engagement or professional experience in their scholarship.

➤ Prioritize evaluation criteria

After agreeing on the appropriate criteria, discuss how they should be weighed. Prioritizing criteria before reviewing applications can prevent search committee members from unintentionally placing greater value on the qualities a "favoured" applicant possesses and less value on qualities they lack.

5. Creating the Longlist & Shortlist

➤ Review and assess every application

This is a critical moment in the search process. Best practice dictates that every member of the search committee should review every file to determine whether the candidate meets the criteria and, if so, whether they should be placed on the longlist/shortlist. Do not assign the creation of the longlist/shortlist to a small number of members of the committee, or to the chair; every member of the committee should have a say in creating the longlist/shortlist.

Keep sufficiently detailed notes so that the reasons for decisions about each applicant will still be clear later. The notes should reflect an assessment of each candidate against the criteria. Remember that such notes could be subject to review in the event a hiring decision is challenged for human rights or immigration reasons.

➤ Stay consistent in your use of the criteria

If, once committee discussions begin, you find that you are uncomfortable with the criteria you have set or their relative weight, you might pause your assessment of candidates to generate a new consensus on criteria, bearing in mind that the criteria should remain consistent with the job ad. Any candidates reviewed according to the original criteria should be reconsidered in light of the new criteria.

➤ Rely upon inclusion rather than exclusion strategies in making selection decisions

When beginning the process of creating a longlist/shortlist, ask committee members to indicate which candidates they would most like to see included on the list, rather than beginning by

eliminating candidates from consideration. This is a proven approach to expanding the diversity of candidates.

When the committee has agreed on a longlist/shortlist, ask how the list reflects the diversity of the original pool of candidates, and whether the longlist/shortlist contains members of underrepresented groups in the field such as women or racialized faculty. If the longlist/shortlist is not sufficiently diverse, revisit applicant files to determine whether any suitable candidates have been overlooked.

➤ Continue to refer back to the criteria in all discussions of candidates

Individuals or groups of committee members advocating to include or exclude a particular applicant should make their rationale clear to the group by referring to the criteria.

➤ Work to ensure participation from all committee members

Ensure that all committee members have an opportunity to share their opinions and make sure that committee meetings are long enough to give everybody the opportunity to express their views. While everyone holds biases, more voices in a discussion can limit the strength of any particular bias.

Faculty with experience on search committees have suggested several strategies for ensuring all voices on a committee are heard. These include: asking each member for input prior to discussing these perspectives; asking a colleague who has not spoken whether they have anything to add; if a committee member is interrupted, noting that you'd like to hear the rest of what they had to say, and giving them an opportunity to complete their thought; and if a comment from a colleague has been overlooked, reiterating their statement, with attribution, to encourage further discussion.

➤ Evaluate the full application, but only the materials submitted

All members of the committee should work to limit the influence of assessments based on information held only by certain committee members—for example, personal knowledge of an applicant—or that fall outside of the criteria.

One common source of bias is the unconscious attribution of the success of underrepresented candidates to a research director or to collaborators. In reviewing or discussing applicant materials, be attentive to assumptions or inferences about a candidate's individual contributions to a project that go beyond or contradict evidence in publication history or letters of reference.

Each component of an application has the tendency to express or invoke certain types of bias. Do not depend too heavily on any one element, such as letters of recommendation or a candidate's institutional affiliations.

Assumptions about a candidate's *potential* are another key source of bias. Majority male candidates are often seen to have or are discussed (by committee members or reference writers) as having strong potential. Diverse candidates are less likely to be discussed in these terms. Focus on demonstrated activities (including *demonstrated* potential, such as submitted articles) instead of assumptions about what a candidate might achieve in the future. In addition, be cautious about making assumptions about future contributions or career pathways based on personal information about the applicant (e.g., knowledge of family responsibilities).

> **Narrowing the longlist to a shortlist**

Some committees use shorter telephone or video interviews to narrow a longlist to a shortlist. In addition to following the interview strategies outlined below, be sure to consider whether the technology that you are using will work for candidates with accessibility needs or those in areas with slower Internet access. A poor connection or using different technology for different candidates (e.g., phone vs. Skype) can affect the committee's impression of a candidate, and technical problems can reduce the time available for the interview; be attentive to these issues in discussing the outcomes of phone or video interviews.

> **Resist the temptation to rank the finalists on your shortlist**

Of necessity, the review process is based on incomplete information and on judgments about candidates' qualifications and potential that may or may not be accurate. Ranking the final candidates before they visit may inadvertently influence your interactions with them. Instead, remind yourself and your committee that each candidate who has reached this stage of the process is highly qualified for the position, and strive to view the on-campus interviews as a fresh chance to evaluate and re-evaluate the candidates.

6. Interviews & Campus Visits

Your approach to the interview process should draw on the same principles that shape the recommendations for the initial review of candidate files: creating a detailed list of criteria consistent with the job ad, and being aware of and attentive to common sources of bias.

> **In planning the campus visit, offer opportunities for candidates to receive or discuss information relevant to their own needs or interests**

Campus visits can be an opportunity for candidates to meet with faculty who do work that is similar to theirs, and to connect with potential networks. If you are considering arranging a meeting for the candidate with a current faculty member from an underrepresented group, be aware of the often disproportionate number of service requests these faculty members receive.

In addition to your own sense of what meetings might be useful for the candidate, you might also ask candidates whether there is anyone they would like to meet with while on campus, or whether there are any resources or offices they'd like to connect with during their visit. Invite the candidate to share any additional needs or requests (including accessibility needs) that would improve their visit; you might also make some suggestions of possible resources or connections.

> **Discuss goals and criteria specific to the interview and consistent with the job requirements**

As a committee, develop a shared set of expectations and goals for the interview process. Develop or review the interview questions so that they are consistent with the requirements in the job ad and your shared understanding of the characteristics and experiences you are seeking in a candidate. Stay within the scope of the position requirements and you will inherently avoid many areas (e.g., family status) that should not be discussed during the interview process.

➢ **Be aware of and open to bias as you begin the interview process. In particular, be alert to bias that is particularly prevalent in in-person interactions.**

In general, we will have a more favourable impression of candidates who look, act, or sound like our mental image of a successful faculty member in the field. This positive first impression can predispose committee members to additional positive or supportive interpretations of the candidate's answers and expertise during the interview.

One way in which this positive bias manifests is that candidates from dominant groups are ascribed greater potential than underrepresented candidates. This bias can be mitigated through interview questions that focus on the demonstrated expertise of all candidates rather than extrapolated potential. Therefore, instead of questions that focus only on what a candidate *intends* to do, use questions that gather examples of things they *have* done that might illuminate future behaviour.

Be aware also of what the [Center for Worklife Law](#) describes as the "tightrope" of professional behaviour and comportment that underrepresented candidates must walk: "a narrower range of workplace behaviour is often accepted" from these candidates. This includes, for example, expecting women and racialized candidates to be agreeable and deferential, while using these same characteristics to deem them unsuitable for leadership roles.

➢ **Discuss each candidate in turn as interviews take place**

Set aside time after each interview for a discussion of the candidate; bias is more likely to be introduced if significant time elapses between the interview and the discussion. Leave as much time as is possible for this discussion; bias is more likely in rushed discussions.

➢ **When selecting a top candidate, focus your discussion on the criteria for the position**

One form of bias is a tendency to reweight or restructure criteria to match the profile of actual candidates from dominant groups. Once you have completed all interviews and are selecting your top candidate, help maintain a consistent interpretation of the criteria for the position by distributing or displaying the criteria developed by the committee prior to the initial review of candidate files.

In particular, be alert to generalized statements (e.g., "fit" with unit culture) and to discussions that don't relate directly to the criteria you've identified. Committees will naturally discuss elements of a candidate's personality and their potential role in the unit; encourage committee members to ground these discussions in examples from the interview or from the candidate's application materials, and to relate them back to requirements of the position.

7. Making the offer

➢ **Keep the potential for unconscious bias in mind when negotiating**

To mitigate inequities in early-career salaries, the University recommends a starting salary for all positions based on a formula that takes into account current salaries in the unit and several other aspects of a candidate's profile. This approach has led to consistency in early-career salaries within units by minimizing the role of negotiation in determining starting salary.

Negotiation also occurs for non-salary items, such as research support or teaching arrangements. Negotiation for any items by members of underrepresented groups is more likely to be interpreted as aggressive or unreasonable when compared to negotiation by candidates from majority groups. Before beginning negotiations for non-salary items, remind yourself of the full range of what a candidate might reasonably request, or what candidates have requested in the past, and be attentive to the tendency to connect a candidate's request to assumptions about their commitment to the role, their personality, or their collegiality.

➢ **Ensure the candidate has access to the support needed for early career success**

Candidates from dominant groups can have better access to informal information networks and other forms of support. Particularly if you have hired a candidate who is working in interdisciplinary, community-engaged, or emerging research areas and whose work might be more difficult to assess under traditional structures, consider what information or support they will need as they establish their research and teaching and, ultimately, prepare for the assessment of their work (e.g., in PTR or interim reviews). Make this information and support available to them as they prepare to begin the position.

8. Throughout the Process, Keep in Mind…

At each decision-making point, pause to assess whether you are following the recommendations outlined above and whether you have been successful in building and maintaining diverse candidate pools at every stage. In particular, you might be alert to the following red flags:

- You are discussing candidates in very holistic or abstract terms, referring to someone as a "star" or discussing "fit" with unit culture, rather than discussing concrete aspects of the candidate's profile that match unit priorities for the position.
- There is any pattern of inadvertent but systematic exclusion or underestimation of diverse candidates, as demonstrated by the selection of candidates at each stage of the process.
- You are overlooking the contributions and qualifications of applicants from institutions other than the major research universities that train most faculty members.
- You are excluding applicants with non-traditional career paths, such as government or industry, who might offer innovative, diverse, and valuable perspectives on research and teaching.

Contact VPFAL for further support and information

The Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life is available to provide support to units and divisions seeking to review their processes around recruitment planning and academic hiring. Please contact vp.fal@utoronto.ca with any questions.