**Faculty Development & Diversity Specialist. Joann.moody@earthlink.net**
**www.diversityoncampus.com**
********************************************************

# Ground Rules governing the search committee's work

***Note to Reader: The sample Ground Rules below are meant to spur thought and discussion by members of search and other evaluation committees and their chairs. After discussing and amending, adding, subtracting, and refining items below, each committee may wish to officially adopt its own version of Ground Rules, to benefit its committee's deliberations and decision-making.***

**1. We will concentrate on rising above cognitive biases and errors in our discussions.** Each of us, including the Diversity Advocate and the search chair, will stay alert to the errors, biases, and shortcuts we learned about in our two coaching workshops. To help remind and prompt us, we will verbally review all of the cognitive shortcuts and errors from time to time; place abbreviations of them on a banner for taping to the wall of our meeting room(s); and employ other visual aids as reminders, as we go along. Each of us bears responsibility for asking for a "Time Out" if she/he detects a possible error in-the-making. At this point, we will quickly pause to discuss and try to self-correct.

**2. We will adhere to the weighting of each job category, as we agreed when doing our planning with the dean's or provost's office.** There will be no switching or trade-off of points from one category to the other. After deliberating, we will rate all applicants according to the categories and their designated values. A matrix, corresponding to the job categories and their agreed-on value, will be taped to the wall, to assist all of us in staying with the official job criteria and gathering evidence regarding each of those.

**3. Attendance at each search committee meeting will be the norm.** It will undermine the committee's deliberations if one or more members are habitually absent or late. Moreover, no one during a meeting should be multi-tasking (such as texting, phoning, checking email, or whatever) while other colleagues are working and trying to stay on task. Full and courteous concentration is needed. Electronic devices should be put away.

**4. We will present and consider concrete evidence not personal opinion or hearsay about job candidates.**

**5. We will guarantee strict confidentiality regarding job candidates, the committee's procedures, discussions, and deliberations.** First, confidentiality to job applicants is owed, most especially when a candidate does not wish his/her interest in the job opening to be shared with those at his/her current position at their home campus or office. Second, confidentiality is necessary in order to protect the committee proceedings themselves. When members make jokes to non-members about the how the search is progressing, hint at how the applicant pool is measuring up, or confide snippets of the committee's deliberations and internal conflicts, they are in fact compromising the integrity of the process. It is no excuse to explain that the non-member who received the information (or more likely, misinformation) is not a member of the hiring department or resides outside the United States. In order to highlight the importance of confidentiality, some search chairs ask that each committee member plus any secretary or other staff member assisting with the search sign a pledge of confidentiality. Others remind colleagues and staff at the end of each meeting of their confidentiality obligation. All of us together will decide which option we prefer.

**6. We will decide, before the committee commences its work, how we will come to decisions during various stages of our work**. Will we be governed by voting (with a simple majority prevailing), by reaching consensus, or by some other method?

**7. We will undertake outreach to build up the pool of candidates—the searching part of the search process.** Every committee member will undertake pro-active outreach to identify promising job candidates, especially under-represented minorities and under-represented women—by means of making personal phone calls to colleagues far and wide; placing info about the job opening on various listserves; contacting appropriate staff at professional societies; asking for nominations of strong candidates from former students, post-docs, outside speakers (who have been on campus and know the hiring department fairly well), and so on. The point is to widen and deepen the pool of possible candidates. The committee chair should at times invite prospects to send in their applications. All this is legal because the committee is trying to enlarge the pool. No prospect will be hired surreptitiously on the spot. On the contrary, everyone invited to apply will be evaluated the same way as those responding on their own to job ads.

**8. All members will have more or less equal "air time" during committee deliberations.** To facilitate this, we will observe the protocol that no one speaks twice until everyone in the room has spoken once. The chair will make sure that no one becomes a monopolizer and undermines the committee's team work.

**9. All members agree to treat every job applicant with cordial respect.** The committee will share essential planning and logistical information with each applicant being interviewed by phone or in person. Even though it may be a buyer's market and applicants seem plentiful, each committee member will be expected to be on their best behavior in interactions with applicants. As a courtesy to all candidates chosen for phone interviews, we agree to provide beforehand to them three sample questions (the same three for all) with one of the three being "How do you see yourself in our geographical area and at our campus?"

Further, as a courtesy, we will provide to every applicant coming for a campus interview essential information so that there are no surprises. The types of information should include:

- ❖ the job talk expected of each candidate on campus (length of talk; who will be in the audience; audio-visual equipment that can be provided, etc.)
- ❖ interviews of the candidates (length of interview sessions; names and job titles of attendees; format—only questions or also role-playing and simulations; forms used to gather feedback about various interviews, etc.)

- ❖ teaching a class or talking with a group of students (length and structure of the interaction, academic level of the students, and so on).

Further, we will ask each on-campus applicant, before their arrival, if there are other groups or individuals on campus whom they would like to privately meet with. Sometimes applicants will request private conversations with other women or other minority faculty on campus or wish to talk with leaders of specific groups on or off campus.

Finally, we will courteously remember to provide a few breaks during the day so that applicants on our campus can have a few moments of silence and a few sips of coffee or water with no one watching. Besides giving the applicants' brain and psyche a short respite, they may also decide during this quiet time that there is something additional that they should add to one of their responses to a question and so on. Wouldn't it be refreshing for candidates to have the chance to refine an answer and demonstrate mindfulness? This is unlikely to happen if candidates are forced to run a marathon and cover new ground every moment of the day.

**10. We will use several behavior-based questions, standard questions, and perhaps simulations during our phone, video, and face-to-face interviews; the same list of questions and simulations will be posed to every applicant.** Throw-away questions such as "tell us about your research and teaching" should be avoided, if possible. The applicants' materials will have given all of us at least a superficial glimpse of those categories. So let's try to dig deeper and ask questions such as the following.

- ❖ Tell us specifically how and why your teaching approaches have evolved over the past few years.
- ❖ Tell us specifically why you would be an asset for our department.
- ❖ Looking at the courses you've taught, as listed on your C.V., I wonder which two courses were the most problematic for you and how exactly you dealt with the issues in those courses.
- ❖ We are interested in how you have mentored and inspired undergraduates to aspire to graduate studies. This is a requirement we listed in the job

announcement. In particular, how have you mentored and inspired women and non-immigrant minorities (such as African American, Mexican American, and American Indian students)? What worked for you and them and what didn't? Why?

- ❖ If you encountered this classroom problem (describe a specific situation that a new hire might be expected to deal with), how would you handle it?
- ❖ Recall for us a successful collaborative research project that you undertook with others over the past two years. What was your role? What problems came up? How did you resolve them?
- ❖ All of us, from time to time, have to deal with colleagues who severely disagree with us. Recall a time when this happened, and explain in detail how you managed the situation. What did you learn from the experience?
- ❖ Given our geographical location, how do you see yourself thriving here?
- ❖ Given our institutional mission and the needs of our students (or our new cross-disciplinary center or whatever else the committee wishes to focus on), what contributions do you see yourself making?

[Note to reader: more details about behavior-based questions can be found in search guides by Fernandez-Araoz et al, 2009; Vicker and Royer, 2006.]

**11. We will bring up promptly and in a general way that our campus is eager to provide assistance to spouses/significant others in finding jobs in our geographical area.** The sooner we bring up this topic, the better. Many (but of course not all) job candidates will appreciate the surfacing of this concern. We can adapt this legal and deft phrasing from the University of Wisconsin: "*If information about dual-career assistance interests you, it's right there in the packet of materials we have sent [or will send] to you. Please let the contact person in the provost's office (who is named in those materials) know of questions you may have*." Or another example: "*Our campus has just joined the Higher Education Recruitment Consortium for our region. Campuses of all types throughout the region now list their current job openings on the HERC data base, which is regularly updated. This is a valuable way*

> *to give assistance to spouses and significant others with their own job searches. We are informing all our candidates of this service*."

These eleven ground rules for the search process will certainly help keep the committee on track. Before the committee leaps to its tasks, it should spend time discussing, adopting, and reaching consensus on ground rules. These rules are essential preparation. But do the chairs of search committees require any additional coaching and preparation, especially if they have had limited leadership experience ? My answer is yes.

## Extra Coaching for the Search Chair, to Reduce or Prevent Troublesome Dynamics and Shortcuts

The chair deserves and indeed requires special attention, prior to the commencement of the committee's work. The dean's or provost's office (or perhaps a management or communications studies expert on campus) should give the chair real-time practice in dealing with bad behavior and psycho-dramas that can develop (e.g., *Charlie, you and everyone else on this committee needs to know that I will fight to the death for my candidate; the rest of you can go jump*). Practice is also called for so the chair can deal with these familiar situations: one member resorts to bullying or to refusing to yield the floor to others; another seems to withdraw into timidity or indifference; another spends insufficient thought on the homework required for the next committee meeting.

To bolster the chair's preparation, the dean's office could ask senior and retired colleagues who are veteran search chairs to share how they have or would respond to those and other typical problems. The search chair should also be provided by the dean's office with a list of game plans on "dealing with difficult people"; there are several how-to books on this subject. Tips for chairs can also be found in Faculty Recruitment "Toolkits" and guidelines posted at the websites of the Universities of Washington, Wisconsin, Michigan, and others. For instance, the Wisconsin Guidelines for Chairs advises the chair to assign tasks to members at *end* of each meeting and then ask for a report from *each person* at the beginning of the next. The dean's office should compile a list of pointers for the chair from these and other sources.

Search chairs might consider taping the job-criteria *matrix* on the wall of the meeting room together with a bulleted list of *cognitive errors* to avoid. These two visual aids, as I previously mentioned, will help both the chair and the Diversity Advocate/Monitor keep members on course and avert common mistakes.

Above all, the chair and the Diversity Advocate/Good Practices Monitor together should be given practice "drills" so they are ready to disarm typical lines of resistance and confusion regarding faculty diversity efforts. By assuming the part of devil's advocate and hard-nosed obstructionist in these practice sessions, the associate dean (or chief diversity officer, vice provost for faculty affairs, or some other appropriate person) could act out questions, retorts, bullying, passive aggression, and other actions which both the chair and the advocate/monitor, in real time, might confront. The chair and the advocate should "rehearse the new behavior [and interventions] at every opportunity until it becomes automatic (that is, until mastery has occurred at the level of implicit learning)" (Coleman et al, 2004). **END**