CONDUCTING TELEPHONE, REFERENCE CHECK AND CAMPUS INTERVIEWS

In preparation for the telephone and campus interviews, committee members should review the position description and the vacancy notice for specific knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the position. Review the applicant's resume, cover letter, and any other pertinent material. Note areas that may need clarification or further inquiry.

Follow a structured plan. This will help achieve fairness, equity, and consistency in interviewing. Discriminatory behavior is improper even if it occurs inadvertently. Appearance is as important as reality to the applicant, especially women and persons of color.

Formal Interview Format

1. The chair (or committee member if this is a telephone interview) begins by introducing her/himself to the applicant. Other committee members present should also be introduced.

2. Explain to the applicant the purpose, format, and agenda of the interview. Give the applicant a moment to become comfortable and have an idea of what will be happening. Note-taking by committee members is encouraged as an aid to recall and to ensure accuracy. However it should be explained ahead of time to the applicant that notes will be taken and why.

3. Be professional and consistent addressing men, women, and persons of color. If first names are used, do so for all candidates. If not, then use the appropriate professional title.

4. Briefly review the position and, in general, what will be expected of the successful applicant. Only job related information and questions are proper.

5. As the committee proceeds with the interview, listen carefully and allow the applicant sufficient time to respond to inquiries. If the applicant tends to answer excessively, the chair should interrupt and move on to the next area of inquiry. The key is to combine good listening with good use of questions. These guide the interview and make it possible for the committee to better evaluate the applicant responses.

6. If inappropriate or impermissible inquiries are made of the applicant the chair must interrupt and re-direct the focus of the interview to the appropriate subject areas.

7. Conclude the interview. Thank the applicant for taking the time to meet with the committee and tell her/him what will happen next.

Pluses and pitfalls in Conducting the Interview

1. As a general rule, if the committee members talk as much as 50% of the time, they are monopolizing the interview. Ideally, 75% of the comments should come from the applicant. The committee's job in the formal interview is to listen and evaluate.

2. To avoid the appearance of an interrogation, do not focus exclusively on the prepared questions. It is appropriate to make comments interspersed between questions in order to establish the pace of the interview and to encourage a dialog or discussion between the applicant and the committee. For example, the chair may make a statement about student advising and ask the applicant to give the committee her/his thoughts on the subject.

3. Avoid asking questions that require only "yes" or "no" answers. Ask questions that encourage the applicant to share ideas and information.
4. Use words or phrases like "why", "how", "what", and "describe" or "tell us about" are more likely to yield useful information. For example, "Why did you choose to do research in the field of __________?" will be more useful than "Do you like __________?"

5. Avoid leading questions that have an implied answer. For example, "What aspect of teaching (research) do you most enjoy?" would be more productive than "Do you like to teach/do research?"

6. Carefully constructed hypothetical situations posing problems to be solved may be particularly useful in assessing the applicant's knowledge, ability to respond, and ability to foresee consequences and outcomes.

7. Interviews are two-way processes. Not only is the applicant being evaluated, but also the applicant is evaluating the university. At the end of the interview always allow time for the applicant to ask questions and give further information. Answer questions and allow the applicant to give further information.

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

These are examples of areas and approaches to questions. They are general, not exhaustive and are drawn from numerous sources. The committee may wish to construct a few of its own questions dealing with issues unique to the position. Your proposed questions are to be forwarded to the Office of Equity and Compliance with Form B-1.

1. What interests you about this position?

2. Describe your views on the role of student advising by faculty?

3. What do you consider the most rewarding/challenging aspects of your last/present position?

4. What in your experience has prepared you for this position?

5. How do you see yourself contributing to the enhancement of student awareness of and appreciation for diverse cultures?

6. What has been the biggest professional challenge you have been confronted with and how did you handle it?

7. What do you think should be the balance between teaching and research?

8. What is you theoretical orientation or philosophy relative to your discipline?

9. Describe your teaching experience?

10. Tell us about your dissertation topic and why you selected it. What did you learn from it?

10. What are your areas of interest in terms of research?

11. Describe the teacher you believe to have been the best you had as an undergraduate. On what basis did you make your selection?

12. Tell us what your views are on community service and the role, if any, it plays in higher education.
13. Describe your ideal student-teacher relationship. In what ways is this ideal?

14. Describe your current understanding of the retention and tenure process.

15. What do you think would be adequate preparation for an undergraduate student in your discipline? Why?

16. What areas of your professional development do you think most need improvement?

17. Based on what you know about the profession of college teaching, what do you find most and least attractive about the field?

18. What steps would you take to handle those parts of the job that are less interesting?

19. What trends have you discerned in your discipline?

20. Where do you think your discipline will be in 5, 10 years? What role do you see yourself playing in those changes?
GENERAL PROCESS FOR TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECKS

Name of Applicant: ________________________________________

Person contacted: ____________________ Title: ___________________

University/Company/Other: __________________ Telephone no.: __________

Committee members present: 1) ___________________ 2) ________________

Date of contact: __________

1. Introduce yourself and identify yourself as a member of the Recruitment Committee for the position of _____ at the University of Wisconsin - River Falls.

2. Ask the reference if this is a good time to talk with her/him and indicate about how long it will take. If the reference is not available at this time, make a specific appointment to call back at a later time. A telephone reference call should take no more than about 20-30 minutes in most cases.

3. Begin the interview by briefly describing the position for which the applicant is applying. Include the duties, responsibilities and qualifications as described in the position description. Mention any special knowledge, skills, and abilities that are being sought in applicants. Also describe the university (the vacancy notice has information you may want to include) and any particular information important to the position.

4. Tell the reference you are now going to ask her/him a series of questions related to the position and would appreciate any responses she/he may wish to offer. Indicate that their comments will be kept confidential to the extent the law allows.

5. Tell the reference that you are interested in responses based on personal experience/interaction with the applicant and behaviors that she/he has personally witnessed. Avoid secondhand information, especially if it cannot be verified by the original source.

5. Begin the questions. (See some examples below.) Allow the reference ample time to fully respond to your inquiries.

6. After you have made your inquiries, ask if she/he has any questions of the committee members and thank the reference for taking the time with you.

The questions that follow are examples only. There are many that may be used, depending upon the position being filled.
SAMPLE QUESTIONS
TELEPHONE REFERENCES

1. How long have you known the applicant?

2. In what capacity?

3. How would describe ____________’s ability in the area of ________________?

4. Can you give us a specific example?

5. How would you describe ____________’s communication skills (both oral and written)? Example?

6. UW - River Falls is an institution that places a high value on the ability of the professor to effectively interact with students. How would you evaluate __________’s ability in this area? Give us an example.

7. How familiar are you with ____________’s research interests and activities? (Assuming the reference is somewhat familiar) As you may know ____________’s area is ______________. Describe your observations of ____________’s work in his field.

8. In the general category of “work habits” describe ____________’s ability to initiate, implement, and follow through on projects. Can you cite an example?

9. What, if any, experience or preparation has ____________ had that would prepare her/him to make a contribution to the enhancement of student awareness of and appreciation for diverse cultures?

10. What else would you like to add that might assist the committee in evaluating ____________’s qualifications for this position?

11. What further questions do you have?

12. Thank you for your time.