GUIDELINES FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF ACADEMIC FACULTY or UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS

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Executive Summary

Recruitment of university administrators and academic faculty is a critical and challenging task that is traditionally a joint effort between a hiring department and a search committee. For the purposes of this document both populations will be represented under the title “academic administrator”. This will be defined as either a staff or faculty member who holds a position within our university setting. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for members of search committees both faculty and non-faculty hires. The various categories below will enable each search committee member the opportunity to gain a better understanding of their roles as search committee members and to effectively critique the applicants in order to make the best educated choice for a final candidate. Five phases of the recruitment process are summarized here, they include: analyzing the position; establishing search committees; and identifying, evaluating, and recruiting candidates.

Analyzing the Position – A vacant position provides hiring departments an opportunity to assess their departments success and challenges and to critically think about the contribution of each position in their department. Therefore, the first steps in the recruitment process should be analyzing the position and institutional needs and defining role essential/desirable skills of a potential candidate. This analysis should provide a framework of questions to assist the recruiting administrators in this analysis.

Convening Search Committees – Effective search committees enhance the search process by their individual member’s respective experiences and knowledge. This is dependent however on having an appropriate number/mix of members who are familiar with the department and the positions functions. Group dynamics suggest there should be at least five but not more than nine members, and composition including a diverse representation of key stakeholders, personal qualities, and interests.
Identifying Candidates – The guidelines note that identifying appropriate candidates requires proficiency with the preferred vs. required qualifications, knowledge of the long-term plan for the department and how the position supports that vision. This will also create a framework of questions to assist search committees in developing a summary of preferred qualifications. The committee should take the time to locate and develop a plan of contact in order to develop a diverse pool, not just send a letter to an address.

Evaluating Candidates – The committee must be congruent in terms to the criteria used to evaluate candidates, and have similar weights for each area of evaluation. The committee should discuss possible alternatives methods to obtaining the recommended qualifications, and determine if the experiences requested adversely impact any group or gender. Include strategies for identifying ranking the requisite number of candidates with requisite skills in your recruitment area, developing an education/experience criteria ranking, streamlining the interview process, and checking references.

Recruiting Candidates – Determine the competitiveness of your search; see what regional organizations are seeking similar job titles. Accentuate the positive of QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE, review ads of other institutions, and determine what separates QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE and document them in advertisements or communicate them on the phone. Prepare yourself with possible questions and develop timely responses to these Issues, for example salary, benefits, length of appointment, reporting/supervisory responsibilities, social/other expectations, and criteria for performance evaluation are always good candidate questions. Search Committee Chairs should familiarize themselves with topics such as: housing, child-care, school needs, elder care, spousal employment issues, and relocation expenses. Policies/resources related to each of these issues can be briefly discussed.

The American Association for Higher Education’s (AAHE) Search Committee Handbook: a Guide to Recruiting Administrators identifies four questions that may help in the assessment.

What would happen if this job were not filled or performed?

What larger developments in society, higher education, or within the position’s special area prompt different ways of thinking about the role of the position in the school and/or institution?

Given the institution’s strategic directions, what background and abilities might the department/school need in this position to meet its own agendas?

What can we learn from our past five years’ experience with this position?

The hiring department has primary responsibility for analyzing and defining the position, but he/she may gain valuable insights by seeking input from a variety of sources. The level/extent of input is dictated by the position, but useful resources may include:
other senior administrators that the position reports to;

representative faculty, staff, and students that interact with or receive services from the position;

relevant medial reports or newspaper articles.

Previous search committees may assist in reviewing notes form a previous hire, and assess the success or failure of the previous candidate. A search Committee chair may research the resource used to fill the position and/or contact area colleges or universities about recruitment efforts for similar positions in other academic institutions. The results of the position analysis are critical and should be well articulated because they will guide subsequent phases of identifying, evaluating, and recruiting candidates.

Convening Search Committees

Search committees typically play a pivotal role in the recruitment of academic administrators, particularly key academic administrators such as presidents, deans, and department chairs. The university strongly encourages recruiting administrators to use search committees as a tool to recruit candidates but this is not always feasible. In those cases, the hiring representative must be able to defend any decision to appoint an academic administrator without a search process/committee.

Effective committees can enhance the search process by broadening participation, but the timeliness of the search must also be taken into consider. Representation of key stakeholders - Key constituencies impacted by the position should be represented on the committee. Faculty members are typically the primary stakeholders for academic positions, but there should also be appropriate representation of administrative and staff perspectives, if the position has administrative responsibilities.

Personal qualities – The AAHE Guidelines recommend identifying committee members who have personal qualities that will enable them to work effectively within a committee structure to accomplish the search. Desirable qualities identified include:

Interests – Based on the position and institutional priorities/needs, there are typically other interests that should be considered in establishing search committees. Factors in this category include:

A blend of teaching, research, service & administrative expertise that is appropriate for the search;

gender and ethnic diversity;

familiarity with the position and department, and

factors related to the search process such as experience with searches, access to networks for identifying candidates, and interviewing skills.
Search committee members may be drawn from a variety of QCC departments but, as a group, the status should be commensurate with the position being filled. The search committee appoints the chair of the committee, and he/she should also ensure he or she contact the Affirmative Action Office early with any questions or concerns he or she may have about the search. This is particularly critical in terms of maintaining the recruitment process and participating in a confidential, and professional search. The chair of the committee convenes the committee to meet with the AA Officer. The topics covered during this meeting include:

- the roles/responsibilities of the vacant position;
- the role of the committee;
- the desired scope of the search (e.g. statewide, national);
- preferred time-line;
- essential and desirable characteristics of candidates;
- instructions for transmittal of recommendations regarding candidates;
- if/how the hiring department will participate in the search process;
- resources available to support the search process;
- relevant policies/regulations/laws; and
- to review the expectations of the Search and Hire Form.

The primary responsibilities of identifying and evaluating candidates are discussed in more detail below.

Identifying Candidates

Identifying qualified candidates requires a clear vision of what the committee is seeking, and this should be based on the charge of the search committee chair, development of a comprehensive position description, and wisdom of the committee about the hiring department. The AAHE Guidelines recommend developing a written summary of preferred qualifications and suggest the following three questions as a framework for developing them. [1]

What is the job? – While the charge and job description are starting points for developing a clear understanding of the job, the committee will want an in-depth understanding of the job that may require additional sources of input.

The committee should consider the department’s priorities/challenges and previous year’s goals as well as daily/routine tasks required in the position. Potential resources include faculty, staff, students, peers, and the previous incumbent when available or appropriate. Seeking broad input about the position is useful because it not only
informs the committee about the position, but it can also enhance the committee’s credibility.

Who could succeed in the job? – Given the job at hand, the committee should also consider the knowledge, experience, abilities, and traits required to succeed in the position. The abilities should be evident from the task analysis & current environment, and should include administrative/leadership skills and style. Essential requirements for the position (e.g. faculty experience, publications in refereed journals) should also be identified.

The AAHE Guidelines recommend focusing on candidates’ evidence of desirable skills/qualities and caution against being overly prescriptive about the type of experience required (e.g. years, where it occurred) early in the search process since this may unnecessarily eliminate good candidates. [1]

Who would be interested in the job? – This question focuses the committee on what the position offers (e.g. salary, benefits, working environment and/or prestige) and where it is likely to find appropriate and interested candidates.

At this point in the search process, the chair may want to review the preferred qualifications and progress to date with the recruiting administrator to ensure the committee is on the right track.

The committee is now ready to identify interested and qualified candidates. The AAHE Guidelines emphasize the importance of actively identifying/pursuing qualified candidates and note “the ultimate appointment can’t be any better than what you attract to the pool.”[1] It is not sufficient to rely solely on responses to advertisements or traditional networks because these strategies may fail to attract top candidates who are not actively seeking new positions and who are not part of traditional networks. Therefore, to be effective, committees should be proactive and employ multiple strategies to identify applicants. Several strategies are summarized below and include recommendations from the AAHE Guidelines and the American Association of University Professors’ 1995 edition of Policy Documents and Reports. The principles of recruitment should be substituted for those positions seeking non-faculty candidates.

Identify qualified internal candidates – Recruiting administrators may choose to limit searches to internal candidates, but, even with national searches, internal candidates should not be overlooked. The institution has a strong and competent faculty, and internal candidates should be encouraged to apply and given due consideration in the evaluation process. Factors to consider when determining the scope of the search include: availability of interested and qualified internal candidates; urgency of appointment since external searches are typically more lengthy; the seniority of the position since national searches are typically expected in senior positions; and affirmative action considerations where there may not be sufficient pools of internal minority or female candidates. Internal candidates may offer several advantages such as their familiarity with and to the institution and lower recruitment costs.
Place advertisements in appropriate publications – Advertisements provide a mechanism to reach a large audience and may be placed in leading journals in relevant fields, publications of professional societies, and publications of minority and women’s groups. Advertisements must indicate that “The Queensborough Community College is an Equal Opportunity Employer” and that “Women and minorities are encouraged to apply” (If the school’s/department’s workforce is predominantly female, the statement would refer to men instead of women.)

Contact professional organizations for nominations – Professional organizations have good networks and may be contacted for information about individuals who meet the requirements for the position.

Ask select deans, chairs, and colleagues at Queensborough Community College and other local institutions for nominations, particularly institutions with similar composition, who may be solicited through letters and personal calls. Personal calls have the advantage of allowing committee members to discuss in more detail institutional needs and priorities and may be more effective for identifying strong candidates. Keep in mind that sole word of mouth recruitment can be perceived as discriminatory.

Ask the leadership of Queensborough Community College groups and other external multicultural community based organizations for nominations – These groups have strong networks among respectively women and minority faculty in a variety of fields/disciplines which they can utilize to help identify a short list of qualified candidates who are interested in being considered for vacant faculty and academic administrative positions.

Send job announcements to minority institutions – Minority institutions may be a good venue for identifying minority candidates, and many of them are included in the database maintained through minority on-line information services. Committees should consider sending job announcements to these institutions, and may want to contact appropriate Deans, Vice Presidents and/or Presidents directly to solicit nominations.

Develop a list of strong male and female candidates that committee members personally contact to discuss the position and generate interest – This strategy may be particularly effective for developing a pool of strong candidates that includes qualified male, female, and minority candidates. Some of these individuals may not be actively seeking a new position but might be persuaded to be a candidate given the right opportunities and challenges.

Send job announcements to schools where enrollment is predominantly one gender - Depending on the nature of the position advertised, it might be useful to send job announcements to schools where the enrollment is predominantly one gender.

In seeking qualified candidates, the committee’s actions should reflect Queensborough Community College’s commitment to recruiting and hiring females and minorities in job categories in which their participation is underutilized and to being an Equal Opportunity Employer.
Information packets can provide potential candidates with additional information about the institution. Providing substantive information may help candidates know what to highlight about their professional experience in information submitted to committees, and it may also help limit the pool to appropriately qualified candidates. Suggested information to consider sharing with candidates includes:

- job description;
- summary of task analysis and preferred qualifications;
- salary range and benefits;
- information about the office, school and institution;
- information about the city/larger academic community as it relates to the position;
- information about Queensborough Community College’s work/life initiatives;
- information about discipline specific minority & female faculty associations;
- information about the composition of the search committee; and
- time-table for the search.

The Guidelines suggest not requesting references at this point in the search process, and instead recommend committees request resumes that include detailed information about relevant qualifications and experience. A cover letter that might address strengths or specific interests related to the position. For some positions, it might be appropriate to request work samples, or the committee can develop a situational question to administer during the interview.

Committees also have administrative responsibilities during this phase of the search, but they may be delegated to a staff person from the search committee. Affirmative action guidelines require that committees send voluntary self-identification documents to each applicant so that candidate Logs coded by race and sex, if known, can be maintained. Letters of acknowledgement should also be sent promptly to all applicants upon receipt of their application packet.

Evaluating Candidates

Assuming the committee has a good pool of candidates, the evaluation phase begins with an initial screening of applicants based upon the agreed upon criteria. The committee’s first step is to eliminate candidates who are clearly not qualified then remaining candidates can be screened and ranked by the entire committee. The committees should be open enough to talent hunt where members focus on identifying interesting people who would bring something special to the position. They also suggest that each member have the opportunity to designate two candidates that will be placed in the pool for full committee review without challenge.
Further reducing the applicant pool by focusing on critical areas and facilitating the evaluation process. Experts also recommend the following steps to improve the evaluation process:

- complete as much of the reviewing as possible at one time to promote consistency;
- seek advice from psychologists, human resources professionals, or other appropriate personnel about refining and effectively utilizing the rating scale; and,
- keep records with notes regarding questions about candidates and additional information needed.

Committee members should acknowledge any personal relationships with candidates that might unduly impact their objectivity and consider excusing themselves when appropriate. Midway through this phase and after completion of the rankings, members may want to bring forward one candidate unchallenged for the next narrowing of the candidate pool. These candidates may then be contacted by phone to verify continued interest, collect additional information. When the committee has a short list of about eight, the recruiting department should be given a progress report. Candidates not on the short list should then be informed by letter, when it is clear they are no longer being considered.

With a short list of around eight candidates, the committee must learn as much as it can about candidates’ qualifications by gathering feedback telephone interviews, focusing on the knowledge/skills essential for the job, patterns of strengths/weaknesses, and evidence of fit with the institution. The campus interview involves reciprocal learning and courting. The institution must determine which candidates “fit” best and court them, and candidates must determine if positions are right for them. Determining the short list for campus interviews may be accomplished by a variety of methods.

Providing candidates comprehensive information about the position and institution to both inform them and generate interest – Many of the candidates’ questions can be answered prior to the visit, but it may also be useful to dedicate much of their initial meeting with the committee to answering additional questions they have. This can be useful because it: ensures candidates have the information needed to evaluate positions; conveys the institution’s interest; provides the committee information about candidates’ priorities and awareness of issues; and allows committee members time during the remainder of the visit to seek answers to questions they could not answer. Candidates should also have adequate time to meet with the recruiting administrator and opportunities to learn about the locale, office and institution.

Developing an understanding of candidates’ motivations, work-style, and maturity – These critical, yet difficult to evaluate, parameters are typically determined in in-depth, extended and focused interviews that may last several hours. The interviews focus on details about job-relevant experiences, degree completion, and other appropriate topics.
Ascertaining candidates’ views about substantive academic issues – These topics may be communicated by members of the community at large. The committee chair may find it useful to meet with these groups ahead of time to discuss key questions/topics.

Assessing “fit” with key constituencies – The extent to which a candidate’s managerial style “fits” with the institution’s culture and philosophy will have a significant impact on his/her ranking in the selection process and ultimate success as an administrator. They caution however that “fit” is sometimes equated with how much a candidate is liked and with who is most like “us,” and therefore emphasize that fit alone is not sufficient for being an successful hire.

Determining how candidates might approach/perform relevant tasks – To supplement information already obtained about past performance of relevant tasks, committees can try to develop situational questions surrounding relevant job-related tasks. Candidates will have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills/knowledge.

Committees should arrange to promptly submit feedback, or provide a comment sheet ahead of time and/or immediately after the candidates’ interviews.

Even though interviews are an essential and important part of the evaluation phase, the AAHE Guidelines acknowledge the challenges and limitations of the interview process and recommend not over-emphasizing them. [1] They note there may be little correlation between candidates’ performance in interviews and in jobs and cite one expert’s advice to “not rely on interviews, even your own.” Common pitfalls to avoid include:

- making up your mind in the first few minutes and spending the rest of the interview confirming it;
- overrating a negative reaction (a common tendency is to find reasons to reject not select);
- generalizing/making global judgments based on a small piece of information; and
- falling in love with the first candidate.

The Guidelines also suggest that a few of the committee members review some of the available literature on interviewing and that a human resources professional brief the committee on interviewing techniques. Two useful resources are The Evaluation Interview by Richard Fear and Seeing and Evaluating People by Geis, Carter, and Butler.[3],[4]

At the conclusion of each candidate’s visit, it may be useful for him/her to meet with the chair of the search committee.

This provides the chair an opportunity to:

- answer candidates’ remaining questions;
ascertain candidates’ level of interest;

discuss issues that might impact a candidate’s decision to take the position;

seek permission to contact remaining references; and

request any additional information the committee feels might be useful.

Promptly after the final candidate’s visit, the committee should have an in-depth meeting to formulate the recommendations. Resumes, notes and feedback for each candidate should be reviewed and thoroughly discussed, and a summary discussing each candidate’s strengths, limitations, preparation based on preferred qualifications, and the overall judgment of the committee should be prepared. The committee should avoid rank ordering candidates since this can:

Focus committees’ discussions on rankings instead of qualifications; constrain committee members; and cause committees to lose focus of the fact that, since all finalists should be qualified, the distinguishing factors should be the unique skills/expertise they would bring to the position and the direction they would take the unit.

The recommended candidates will then be forwarded to the next level of interviewer(s), and the appropriate steps stated above should be followed. Finally, An affirmative action hiring and search form will also need to be completed to document the top three candidates with the candidate log and, if applicable, a written justification for hiring without a search committee, to the Affirmative Action Representative.

Recruiting Candidates

Assuming the slate of candidates is acceptable to the search committee and no further background checks are necessary, he/she should proceed as quickly as possible with initiating negotiations to recruit one of the candidates. This may include visiting the candidate at his/her campus or inviting him/her to visit Queensborough Community College again with family. Issues identified by the AAHE Guidelines that should be negotiated or communicated include: [1]

- salary and benefits;
- start of appointment;
- reporting and supervisory responsibilities;
- academic, social and other expectations; and
- criteria for performance evaluation.

In addition to specific job related issues, there are a variety of other factors that may impact an individual’s willingness to seriously consider relocating and/or ease/impede the relocation process. These issues may surface only through considerable discussions
with candidates and may be raised with either search committee members or hiring departments. Therefore, both groups should be aware of relocation related issues, policies and/or resources. Some of these are briefly discussed below. There are also websites with information about Queensborough Community College and the city of Jersey City and surrounding Hudson/Essex county communities that candidates might find helpful.

Housing – A variety of housing information or realtor information is available on various websites. This information can be included with the QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE information, and arrangements can also be made for candidates and/or their spouses to spend time with realtors during their visits. This can be extremely helpful in orienting candidates to Jersey City and helping them efficiently begin to address their housing needs.

Child Care – Candidates or their spouses may use Queensborough Community College resource and other referrals to get information about child-care.

Employment Searches of Spouses – Employment needs of spouses can be a significant factor in relocation decisions, and, for some candidates, the availability of assistance for spouses seeking employment may help persuade them to accept a job offer and ease the relocation process. Assistance in this arena is available through the Dean or Vice President of that particular school or administrative unit.

When negotiations are finalized, the hiring department should develop a public relations strategy to inform appropriate constituencies of the new appointment and the opportunities it brings to the institution. Prior to the public announcement, the new appointee needs time however to inform his/her supervisor about his resignation, and the search committee should inform remaining candidates, and any staff or administrators who need to be informed prior to the announcement. Therefore hiring departments should ensure new administrators receive appropriate orientations when they arrive, and, prior to their arrival, hiring departments should: include them in relevant communications; arrange a contact person that will provide assistance in the transition period; and deal, if appropriate, with existing “messes” in new appointees’ areas of responsibility. Finally, search committee chairs may want to informally offer to be a resource to ease the new administrators’ transition.

References for Search and Recruitment of University Employees.


