


## THE SEARCH PROCESS AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

While schools and departments at Columbia have different processes in place for recruitment, all recruiting shares some common features. All academic searches at Columbia University utilize the Recruitment of Academic Personnel System (RAPS), which serves both as an online recruitment tool and as a record of affirmative action.

All searches at Columbia must comply with affirmative action guidelines. The Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA) uses this candidate data to ensure that the University's affirmative action obligations are being met.


The Office of EOAA has developed policies and procedures to ensure that hiring processes at Columbia comply with federal EOAA regulations. Information on these policies will be noted throughout the handbook in two ways:

1. Details about various **guidelines and procedures** will be provided in a box with a special icon, shown below:



**Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action:  
Guidelines and Procedures**

2. A checklist of items relevant to each stage of the search process will be provided in shaded text boxes:



More information is available at the Office of EOAA Faculty Recruitment website: <http://eoaa.columbia.edu/recruitment/faculty>.

## SELECTING SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### Best Practices

- Create a diverse search committee, including, where possible, women, underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities, and members of other underrepresented groups.
- Appoint a search committee member as a diversity advocate to help ensure that the search is consistent with best practices in faculty search and hiring and that it gives consideration to all candidates.

Search committees play a critical role in shaping Columbia's faculty—they are stewards of Columbia's future. The care that they take in selecting faculty ensures that instruction and scholarship are of the highest standards. By recruiting individuals with different perspectives and areas of expertise, search committees help build a rich community whose members continually challenge and learn from each other.

Columbia's continued strength depends upon ensuring that our faculty represents the highest standards of excellence and reflects the diversity of our student body, the city in which we are located, and the world in which we are engaged. To safeguard this excellence, it is the special responsibility of search committees to ascertain that, at all stages of the recruiting process, efforts are made to include women and underrepresented minorities in the applicant pool, and that the evaluation of these candidates is fair.

Those individuals appointed to search committees should have good judgment and a strong commitment to diversity and equity. They should represent different backgrounds, career stages, and areas of expertise, and have a deep understanding of department priorities and Columbia's mission.

Consider the following when composing a committee:

### **Include Women, Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Minorities, and Members of Other Underrepresented Groups**

It is important to include women, underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities, and members of other underrepresented groups on the search committee wherever possible, as a diverse group is more likely to generate a strong applicant pool.

When considering women and underrepresented minority faculty and graduate students to serve on search committees, keep in mind that they may face a greater number of committee appointments than their colleagues. Try to limit this burden by prioritizing the contributions women and underrepresented minorities are asked to make, and provide additional recognition if necessary. If there is a shortage of women and underrepresented minority faculty in a particular department or field, consider inviting women and underrepresented minority faculty from other disciplines and administrative units to serve on the search committee.

### **Ensure Committee Chair Supports Diversity**

The individual who is chosen to be chair should be committed to faculty diversity.

### **Consider Involving Graduate Students**

Determine the desired level of student involvement at the outset of the search process.

### **Be Alert to Conflicts of Interest**

Members of the search committee should have no conflicts of interest. Before the search, have a plan for how to deal with any conflicts of interest that arise during the search process.

### **Be Attentive to Power Dynamic of Committee**

The professional, mentoring, or personal relationships within the search committee will affect the power dynamics of the group. To help ensure that recommendations are a result of fair deliberations, and that all individuals have an

equal opportunity to voice their thoughts, be mindful of how power dynamics may affect the group while assembling the committee. Although not all power dynamics can be avoided, adhering to rules on equal participation and voting in the search committee can help ensure equitable participation in decision making.

### **Identify a Diversity Advocate**

In order to ensure that the search is exhaustive and gives due consideration to all candidates, the search committee may appoint a diversity advocate. Although all members should be trained on issues of diversity and affirmative action and make certain that best practices in fair and open searches are followed, the diversity advocate can help the committee stay focused on these efforts.

A specific action that a person in this role could take would be to review the applicant pool and candidate shortlist to ensure adequate representation of women and underrepresented minorities. Another would be to ensure that each candidate is asked about his or her demonstrated commitment to diversity, and experience working in diverse environments. Consider asking a respected tenured faculty member to serve in this role, who may feel more comfortable with such advocacy than an untenured faculty member. This person should preferably not be the only underrepresented minority or the only woman on the search committee.

For details on the role of the diversity advocate, please refer to Tools for the Diversity Advocate on the Search Committee in the **Appendix**.

## THE SEARCH COMMITTEE'S CHARGE

### Best Practices

- Dean, vice dean, or other leadership responsible for hiring meets with committee at beginning of search process to reinforce importance of diversity and goal of identifying outstanding women, underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities, or members of other underrepresented groups as candidates for the position, and to reiterate selection criteria.
- Dean, vice dean, or other leadership responsible for hiring provides department-specific data from the provost's office on (a) the gender and race of all hires in the past five years, and (b) the percentage of females and of underrepresented minorities among tenured and tenure-track faculty and students.
- Create a search plan, including broad outreach.

The search committee's responsibility is to identify a slate of top candidates for the position in question. In their charge to the committee, the dean, vice dean, or other leadership launching the search should emphasize that this responsibility includes advancing the goal of identifying outstanding candidates who are women, underrepresented minorities, and members of other underrepresented groups, in fields where they are in the minority. The dean, vice dean, or other leadership should present data on hiring history and department makeup by gender and race or ethnicity for the committee's consideration.

In the search committee's initial discussions of its charge, it should consider the data presented by the dean, vice dean, or other leadership on past searches. These discussions should take place as the committee develops its search plan.

### Reviewing Past Searches

The search committee will find it helpful to ask the following questions:

- What proportion of past applicant pools and interviewees were women and underrepresented minorities?
- Have women and underrepresented minorities been offered positions recently?

- How were women and underrepresented minority faculty who were recently hired persuaded to accept their position at Columbia?
- How will this data influence the way that the present search is conducted?

### Interventions to Avoid Common Biases or Errors in Search Process

Numerous studies have demonstrated the role that bias plays in hindering diverse recruitments.<sup>1-6</sup> Acknowledging that we are all subject to bias is a critical step to mitigating its impact.

Consider incorporating the following evidence-based interventions<sup>7</sup> to minimize bias and ensure an equitable search:

1. **Document the entire search process.** Creating a record of search committee discussions, advertisements, nominations, recruiting efforts, interviews with candidates, interviews with references, and rationale for selecting or refusing candidates will allow committee members to review their process for evidence of bias, and correct as needed.
2. **Educate committee members on hiring biases.** Research has shown that when decision-makers learn about hiring biases they are more likely to evaluate candidates fairly.<sup>8-10</sup>
3. **Establish evaluation criteria.** Deciding in advance of reviewing applications which criteria will be used, and how they will be weighted, will help evaluators avoid common cognitive errors<sup>11</sup> such as:
  - **elitism**—assuming that individuals from prestigious institutions are the best candidates without viewing all applications more closely and/or considering the needs of the department;
  - **shifting standards**—holding different candidates to different standards based on stereotypes;
  - **seizing a pretext**—using a minor reason to disqualify a candidate without properly considering all other criteria;

- **ranking prematurely**—designating some candidates as more promising than others without fully considering strengths and weaknesses of all applicants; and

- **rushing to judgment**—having strong group members, particularly those with seniority, reach and express consensus without sufficient discussion, which may make it difficult for others to challenge those conclusions.

4. **Spend sufficient time reviewing applications.** Allow adequate time (15–30 minutes per candidate) for the committee to evaluate applications, to decrease the likelihood of arriving at biased judgments of applicants.<sup>12–14</sup>

5. **Create multiple rankings based on different criteria.** Rather than a single ranking system based on holistic assessments of candidates, a more objective way to build a shortlist is to rank candidates on different criteria and then choose candidates who rank highly on a number of criteria.

6. **Interview more than one woman and/or underrepresented minority candidate.** Women and underrepresented minority candidates are more likely to be evaluated fairly when they are not the only candidate of their gender, race or ethnicity under consideration.<sup>15</sup> This phenomenon may result from the gender and/or race of the applicant becoming less prominent in a more diverse pool of applicants.

## Developing a Search Plan

When developing a search plan, the search committee should consult its department’s Standard Search and Evaluation Procedures (SSEP).

## Special Cases

There are special cases in which a standard open search is not required. Hiring units can apply for waivers in these special situations, which are detailed on the Office of EOAA website and which follow. If you believe one of these cases may apply to your school or department, please contact the Office of EOAA for further information.



## Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action: Standard Search and Evaluation Procedures (SSEP)

The procedures by which officers are appointed and promoted may vary from one school or department to the next, but the principle of accountability requires that those procedures be consistent within a given school or department, or “unit,” and that they be stated with clarity and precision. Each department, school, institute, and center, and the Libraries are required to have an approved SSEP on file in the Office of EOAA.

The SSEP describe how the unit normally chooses selectees for positions. They also provide the basis for creating the templates that the unit uses for online postings in RAPS. The procedures include:

- a detailed description of the process for authorizing searches;
- the process for constituting a search committee;
- the means by which information about an opening is published and disseminated, including the specific professional journals and electronic sources used to advertise and any e-mail distribution lists to which the opening is sent;
- the general information, such as position title, basic or minimum qualifications, position requirements, application instructions, and application deadlines that will be included in advertisements; and
- the process and criteria by which applicants are evaluated, including creating a shortlist, identifying a pool of finalists, and choosing a selectee or selectees.

A separate set of procedures is needed whenever the unit’s SSEP vary by rank, tenure status, types of officers, or similar distinguishing position criteria.



## Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action: Waivers from Standard Procedures

A unit will normally use the procedures described in its SSEP to recruit officers of instruction, research, and the libraries; teachers at The Columbia School for Children; and intercollegiate athletics coaches. In unusual situations, a hiring unit may seek a waiver from the search requirements. The following situations may be appropriate for such a waiver:

- **Outstanding diversity candidate:** A hiring unit may have the opportunity to recruit a highly qualified woman or candidate from an underrepresented minority group for an academic position whose appointment would assist in meeting applicable placement goals.
- **Accompanying spouse or partner:** The recruitment of a faculty member or officer of research may require the appointment of an accompanying spouse or partner.
- **Specialist:** The requirements for certain positions are sufficiently specialized that they can be filled only by a limited number of senior academic officers, all of whom are known to the professional community.
- **Star:** An opportunity arises to recruit a senior academic officer of great eminence who would ordinarily not be

expected to be available, such as a distinguished scholar or nationally renowned artist or professional. This waiver is not appropriate for junior faculty positions or, with rare exceptions, nonfaculty appointments.

- **Distinguished visitor:** A department or school wishes to enrich its curricular offerings by temporarily appointing a distinguished visitor for a semester or year.
- **Research team member:** The recruitment of a faculty member or officer of research may require appointing others because they form an established research team.
- **Grant team member:** The receipt of a grant may be contingent upon assembling an appropriate research team in advance of its award.
- **Candidate for promotion:** The outstanding achievements of a member of the research support staff may merit a promotion to the rank of staff associate. The attainment of a Master of Library Science by a Libraries staff member, and the subsequent reclassification of his or her position to officer level, based on increased level of responsibility, may merit a promotion to librarian.

Waivers and clearances require the approval of the Associate Provost for Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Melissa Rooker, for hiring on the Morningside campus, and Senior Vice President for Faculty Affairs and Career Development Anne Taylor, for hiring on the Columbia University Medical Center campus.”

### A Note on Confidentiality

The search committee should establish clear guidelines at the outset for keeping deliberations, personal or background information on a candidate, or a candidate’s name in the strictest confidence. Committee members should understand that it is inappropriate to engage in any off-the-record reference checks of candidates. Establishing such guidelines is an essential part of any search.

## CRAFTING POSITION DESCRIPTION

### Best Practice

- Add language to job ad signaling a special interest in candidates who contribute to the department’s diversity priorities. For example: “The search committee is especially interested in candidates who, through their research, teaching, and/or service, will contribute to the diversity and excellence of the academic community.”

### Define Position Broadly

In order to attract a wide range of applicants, write the position description as broadly as possible and consider the following questions:

1. Can we expand the position description to attract a wider range of candidates? Can we advertise this position more broadly?

2. What will the rank of this position be? More junior positions will allow access to a greater number of women and underrepresented minority candidates.
3. It may be worth considering the practice of “cluster hiring,” or hiring more than one faculty member within a particular specialty that is underrepresented in a department. This practice may help decrease the sense of isolation newly hired women or underrepresented minority faculty may feel if they are the only scholar in their particular subject area.
4. Does this position description appeal to individuals with experience mentoring and collaborating in a diverse environment?

5. Will the position description draw candidates who are creative, imaginative, and original?
6. Will the position description appeal to individuals who have shown an ability to draw on all strengths of teams that they have led?



- Create posting in RAPS.
- Obtain approval for advertisement and search plan from the appropriate vice president, dean, or director.
- The search officially begins once the vice president, dean, or director posts the search to the public RAPS website.



## Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action: Guidelines on Advertising

At a minimum, a unit must advertise openings in the venue(s) listed in its Standard Search and Evaluation Procedures (SSEP). The venue(s) must include at least one national or international print or electronic source. An advertisement may appear exclusively in an electronic venue only if the accepted professional site for advertising positions in the discipline is an online venue. All publications or online sites that are used for advertising a position should be listed in the Recruitment of Academic Personnel System (RAPS).

If the text of any advertisement differs from the position description as entered into the RAPS posting, the hiring unit also must include the text of the advertisement in the “Advertisement Text” field in RAPS. If a unit does not indicate in RAPS that it will advertise in a venue specified in its SSEP, the vice president, dean, or director will not approve the search. Likewise, the vice president, dean, or director will not approve an appointment if the hiring unit has not advertised in the venue(s) indicated in its SSEP and RAPS posting for the position.

A search must remain open in RAPS no fewer than 30 days after the advertisements for the opening appear in print or are posted externally online. The advertisements that appear in online venues should be set to expire or be removed by the date that the search is closed in RAPS. No advertisement may appear after the search has been

closed in RAPS. If the search is not completed within twelve months of the original advertisement (i.e., if a selectee has not been identified and undergone EOAA clearance), the unit must post a new search in RAPS and re-advertise the opening.

Each advertisement and announcement must include **at a minimum:**

- the specific rank(s);
- the name of the unit(s) in which the officer will serve;
- the deadline for submitting applications or, if the search committee does not impose a deadline, the date the screening of applications will begin;
- the URL for the RAPS posting; and
- the statement, “Columbia University is an Equal Opportunity Employer/Disability/Veteran.”

It is acceptable to use a single advertisement for more than one opening; however, the advertisement must clearly distinguish among the positions if the ranks, responsibilities, or requirements for each are different.

To keep the text succinct, the advertisement may refer applicants to the URL for the RAPS posting(s) for detailed information and requirements for the position(s), rather than including this information in the advertisement.

## Language in Job Advertisements

Be mindful of the language used to describe the responsibilities of the position. By including certain phrases and language, Columbia can signal to candidates that it is a family-friendly institution where diversity is valued. Additionally, when stating experience requirements, list the rank of the position (assistant, associate, or full professor), rather than list experience as years since Ph.D. (or other advanced degree), encouraging individuals with nontraditional career pathways to apply.

Below is a list of phrases (drawn from UC Berkeley guidelines) that can be included in the job description to communicate that Columbia actively seeks to build and support a diverse community of scholars:

## Family-Friendly/Work-Life Balance Language

- “The department welcomes applications from individuals who may have had nontraditional career paths, or who may have taken time off for family reasons (e.g. children, caring for disabled or elderly family), or who have achieved excellence in careers outside of academia (e.g., in professional or industry service).”
- “Columbia is responsive to the needs of dual career couples.”
- “Columbia is committed to supporting the work-life balance of its faculty.”

## Diversity Language

- “The school/department seeks candidates whose research, teaching, or service has prepared them to contribute to our commitment to diversity and inclusion in higher education.”
- “The school/department is interested in candidates who have a record of success advising and mentoring individuals from groups underrepresented in higher education.”
- “The school/department is interested in candidates who will bring to their research the perspective that comes from a nontraditional educational background or understanding of the experiences of those underrepresented in higher education.”
- “The school/department is interested in candidates who have research interests in subjects that will contribute to the understanding of diversity and equal opportunity.”

- “Columbia University is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer. The University is dedicated to the goal of building a culturally diverse and pluralistic faculty and staff committed to teaching and working in a diverse environment, and strongly encourages applications from women, minorities, individuals with disabilities, and veterans.”

## Language Inviting Applicants to Include Diversity Statements

- “Columbia University is an equal opportunity institution. Because the University is committed to building a broadly diverse educational environment, applicants may include in their cover letter information about how they will further this objective.”
- “Candidates are encouraged to describe how diversity issues have been or will be brought into courses.”
- “Candidates are encouraged to describe previous activities mentoring women or members of underrepresented groups.”
- “Applicants are encouraged to describe in their letter of intent how their scholarship contributes to building and supporting diverse communities.”