



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI®

***Faculty Recruitment
Hiring Guidelines and Procedures***

Revised 8/1/19

Office of the Provost

FACULTY RECRUITMENT AND HIRING TOOLKIT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document was developed to clearly articulate faculty hiring goals for search committees and to streamline and formalize our faculty recruitment and hiring process. Information sources include The University of Southern Mississippi Faculty Handbook, existing Human Resources policies and documents, and the current Faculty Hiring Guide.

This Faculty Recruitment and Hiring Toolkit includes the following items:

1. State the importance of using best practices in a timely manner to recruit and select outstanding faculty
2. Request and Approval Process to fill faculty positions
3. Guidelines and expectations for search committees
4. Procedures for screening applicants and verifying credentials
5. Interview process guidelines for telephone and on-campus interviews
6. A step by step faculty recruitment and hiring process guide covering necessary forms, required information for letters of offer and acceptance and hiring package contents

Sample Resources

1. Letters and emails
2. Interview guidelines, suggested questions, telephone interview scripts
3. Applicant resume review document
4. Interview evaluation documents

Suggestions for improving our faculty hiring processes should be sent to the Office of the Provost via allison.gillespie@usm.edu.

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Philosophy

Recruiting faculty is one of the most critical activities performed at a university. By recruiting outstanding and diverse new faculty, we will become a better university to serve our students, create and disseminate knowledge, contribute to the culture of the State of Mississippi and provide valuable service to the citizens of Mississippi, the United States and the international community

Our recruiting efforts must go beyond the job postings and hiring and be a continuous process of building relationships and networks with our colleagues and other institutions. Our recruitment process should reflect our values and mission to cultivate intellectual development and creativity through the generation, dissemination, application and preservation of knowledge. This can only be done through a faculty that is engaged in cutting edge research, committed to excellence in teaching and value service to the university community.

The University of Southern Mississippi is committed to building a more diverse faculty through intentional efforts to recruit outstanding qualified applicants that are international or from typically underrepresented groups. Our Nondiscrimination Policy and other information can be found on the [AA/EEO website](#).

The USM faculty recruitment process should be guided by the following:

- The search process will start as early as possible to ensure a better and more diverse pool of applicants
- Open positions will be advertised widely
- Communication will be timely and personal with all applicants throughout the entire process
- Application review, evaluation and interview processes will be highly structured to ensure a consistent message and level of professionalism and integrity
- Candidates who are invited to campus will have a well-planned itinerary and will be treated as our guests

Objective

The objective of this guide is to provide a thorough explanation of our faculty recruitment and hiring process. While every effort has been made to be as detailed as possible, the USM Faculty Handbook, college, and school documents are the ultimate guiding documents.

The recruitment of new faculty is a complex process with multiple objectives. The faculty hired through this process should be:

The best qualified faculty for the position defined and advertised;
Instructors who will excel in the classroom and will achieve success with USM students;
Scholars who are committed to a life-long program of discovery and sharing of knowledge;
Committed to the full range of faculty responsibilities including research and service.

Adherence to hiring procedures is vital to ensure equitable treatment of applicants and the hiring of the best qualified candidate. The primary purpose of this toolkit is to provide step-by-step procedures that will assist in conducting effective and timely searches, ensuring equitable treatment, and promoting employee

diversity. Questions should be directed to the Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs. **When in doubt, please ask.**

Note: This toolkit is based on the University of Hawai'i Hilo model and contains material and forms drawn from that resource.

Introduction

Please refer to the following information when processing paperwork regarding advertising, interviewing, and hiring tenure track faculty, instructors, visiting faculty, and all non-tenure track research, clinical, artist-in-residence, professor of practice, and adjunct faculty. These hiring processes can be located at on the Office of the Provost Website [click here](#).

The "Permission to Hire Faculty" forms (full-time) and are available on the Office of the Provost web site as PDF files – [click here](#). Personnel Data Sheet forms (PDS – for adjuncts and/or part-time faculty) Personnel Action Forms (PAF) are available from the Human Resources Department.

The designated administrative specialist for each dean will be the contact person between the dean's office and the Budget Director in the Office of the Provost. Unless otherwise specified, "dean" refers to the college academic dean. Questions about this process from the respective schools should be addressed to the dean's administrative specialist.

Personnel paperwork from all campuses and locations follow these same procedures.

All paperwork regarding faculty must be submitted to the Office of the Provost.

PROVOST APPROVAL OF FACULTY POSITIONS

Approval to Conduct the Search and Initiation of the Search

Deans will submit hiring requests via the process established by the Office of the Provost. All searches must be discussed with, and approved by, the Provost.

Special Hiring Situations and Resignations

Resignations:

When a faculty member resigns, the resignation MUST be in writing and in addition to submitting the paperwork to HR, a copy must also be sent to the Office of the Provost.

Failed Searches

If a search is approved to be declared failed or closed by the Provost, and the position will be filled by a “visiting” faculty member, revise and resubmit the hiring package indicating the change and providing a clear explanation of the change.

Midyear Vacancies

In the event of a mid-year vacancy that must be filled immediately, the dean should meet with the Provost as soon as possible

If it becomes necessary to fill a position mid-year, the dean should discuss with the provost for approval.

Nepotism

In all faculty hires, visiting and regular, please pay particular attention to *Employee Handbook Chapter 3 – Employment Policies: Nepotism*.

Employment of Persons with University Terminal Degrees

As a comprehensive university with extensive national and international ties, the University seeks to broaden the intellectual perspective of its students and to promote the public interest by employing and retaining a cosmopolitan, culturally diverse faculty. In this endeavor, the University follows a general rule of not employing persons who have earned their terminal degrees from the University in the full-time instructional ranks of Professor, Associate Professor, and Assistant Professor.¹ Exceptions to this policy require the approval of the President.

¹ Office of the Provost. "Terminal degree" is defined as the last, final, or supreme academic degree conferred within an academic discipline as established by the Board of Trustees upon the recommendation of the University President in consultation with pertinent academic units.

SECTION 1. FACULTY RECRUITMENT PROCESS:

Once a position has been discussed with and approved by the Provost, a job posting is done in Cornerstone - Applicant Tracking System (ATS).

The school director or designee is responsible for writing and posting faculty positions in the ATS. Generally, positions may only be posted with one rank – e.g. assistant professor, associate professor, professor – exceptions require dean approval and the funding must be identified prior to posting. The director will consult with the dean and others as necessary to determine the Minimum Qualifications (MQs) and Desirable Qualifications (DQs) for the position. Accurately determining Minimum Qualifications and Desirable Qualifications is critical because once the job ad is posted, these qualifications cannot be altered and all Search Committee decisions must be based on them.

USM policy states that all full-time and part-time faculty and staff positions are required to be posted through the applicant tracking system except for Visiting positions (with approval of Provost/Dean to not post).

PROCESS

- Position request from dean approved by Provost
 - Position description developed and approved by dean and school director
 - Hiring Manager/School Director submits requisition through ATS
 - ATS approvals obtained (HR/School/Dean/Provost/Budget)
 - Position Posted
-
- Note that different VP units may have different processes in addition to those outlined in this toolkit, such as a process to approve positions prior to submitting in the ATS. All positions will be posted by Human Resources (HR) through our Applicant Tracking System (ATS).
 - Discuss with your HR Partner posting and sourcing strategies for position.
 - The Hiring Manager (HM) is responsible for developing and maintaining an accurate description of the essential responsibilities of the job, which is to be maintained in the college dean's office.
 - HR will review job descriptions for consistency across the University and recommend edits as necessary.
 - HR will create any templates for positions not yet in the ATS.
 - The School will be responsible for editing specific details needed within the posting.
 - The last step in the ATS routing will be with HR and the position will be posted after this stage.

_____ Create Job Posting in ATS. (done by School)

The Job Posting is done by the School Director or dean's office. Once the Job Posting is submitted by the School, the following process occurs automatically:

Job posting created in ATS: Note that this language will also be used to create the Job Advertisement for "higherjobs.com" so it should contain all information that should be in the online publication advertisements.

Human Resources is automatically notified to review the job posting to check for consistency and compliance with regulations.

If the school wishes to advertise the position in additional publications or listservs, they must use the language in the approved posting. Using a shortened version of the approved job advertisement is acceptable. Work with your HR partner if necessary.

Usually, unless hiring requirements change for a particular academic year, all USM faculty jobs are automatically advertised, at no cost to the hiring unit, on HigherEdJobs.com for at least 2 months. This process happens automatically with the Department of Human Resources once the job advertisement is approved. Note that jobs are posted on HigherEdJobs.com until they are closed/removed from the USM HR website.

The job advertisement used in posting ads to online publications contains the same information from the approved posting.

Additional Job Advertisement (done by School)

The dean should also consult with the search committee chair, Search Committee members, and other appropriate faculty to identify additional professional publications and websites where the ad should be placed.

Should a school determine a position should also be advertised with other vendors, the school should work with purchasing to create a separate purchase order for each vendor (when necessary) where an advertisement will be placed. (Purchase requisitions are not necessary when there is no cost required to publish an advertisement; however, the ad/language must be from the approved Job Advertisement). When necessary, a shorter version of the approved job posting may be used.

1.1 AFFIRMATIVE ACTION CONSIDERATIONS

Committee members are responsible for ensuring that all applicants are treated fairly and equitably in accordance with equal opportunity/affirmative action requirements.

Enhancing and Broadening the Applicant Pool

Personal networking is especially important for recruiting women and minority candidates. Search Committee members are strongly encouraged to contact people they know, such as directors of graduate programs and heads of associations of minority scholars within the discipline and inform them about the search.

The Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity may decide to place ads in publications which target minority candidates such as the *Minority and Women Doctoral Directory*, *Center for Institutional Cooperation* and *National Minority Faculty Identification*. There are other resources available on the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity website – <http://www.usm.edu/aa-eeo>

The University of Southern Mississippi offers to all persons equal access to employment opportunities without regard to age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy, gender identity, genetic information, religion, race, color, national origin, and/or veteran status pursuant to applicable state and federal law. It is the responsibility of all persons making employment decisions to support this policy and ensure the work environment is free from discrimination as established in the University's Affirmative Action Plan.

So what is Affirmative Action?

- An Affirmative Action Plan (AAP) is a requirement of Executive Order 11246 which mandates government contractors take affirmative actions to ensure equal opportunities exist in every aspect of the employment process.
- An AAP is a management tool designed to ensure equal employment opportunity for minorities, women, veterans and persons with disabilities.
- Affirmative Action is based on the premise that over time, and absent discrimination, the University's workforce will reflect the ethnic, racial and gender make-up of the labor markets used to recruit applicants.
- As part of the AAP, we are required to conduct an assessment annually of our labor markets and identify gaps where minorities, women, veterans and persons with disabilities are underrepresented (i.e. a greater representation in the workforce than at USM). Those gaps are then translated into goals.
- Goals are created for all EEO job groups for each campus location as well as USM as a whole
- Goals are not quotas.
- Our obligation under the AAP is to make "good faith efforts" to achieve our goals by increasing the pool of qualified minority, female, veteran and disabled candidates when recruiting for open positions.
- We identify our good faith efforts as part of our AAP each year.
- All leaders will receive training on the affirmative action plan, identified goal areas, and good faith efforts action plan on an annual basis (note, this is not part of faculty search and hiring process).

- Examples of USM’s good faith efforts include:
 - Analyze all job descriptions to ensure descriptions accurately reflect position functions
 - Review minimum qualifications of like-positions to ensure consistency across units
 - Utilize the Mississippi Department of Employment Services, job fairs and recruiting programs sponsored by local community colleges and other community organizations. Identify and utilize targeted recruitment sites for qualified minority and female applicants.

As a Hiring Manager, how can you support our affirmative action efforts?

- Partner with University HR to ensure your job descriptions and postings are consistent with like jobs across the University and accurately reflect appropriate minimum qualifications. Adhere to University hiring policies.
- Utilize [Diversity Recruitment Resources](#) to source applicants.
- Ensure all participants in the hiring process review the Implicit Bias Resource (included in the **Section 3** of the toolkit).
- Consider diversity when selecting committee members.
- Do not make any employment decisions based on a protected class.

SECTION 2. SEARCH COMMITTEES

2.1 Appointment and Duties of the Search Committee Chair and Search Committee Members

A search committee ensures applicants selected for interview and final consideration are evaluated by more than one individual and minimizes the potential for personal bias. The committee membership should be such as to avoid a “group think” or possible collective bias.

Search committee chairs and committee members are appointed by the school director (or dean), with the approval of the dean. A sample appointment letter is on the Provost’s [website](#). Ordinarily, the search committee chair is a senior member of the hiring unit who is experienced in conducting searches. The chair should be appointed before the job ad is posted so that the chair can be designated as the contact person for applicant inquiries. The chair alone should serve as the contact point for a search. Note that unless otherwise specified, “chair” refers to the chair of the search committee.

The committee chair is responsible for scheduling committee meetings, communicating with candidates, scheduling interviews, and coordinating the activities of the committee. The search committee coordinates the review process of applications, the interviewing of candidates, and the recommendation of candidates to the school.

Each committee member is expected to fully participate in the process including assisting search committee chair, developing screening criteria, interview questions, attend all committee meetings, carefully review all applications, assist with credential and reference checks, participate in the interview process and adhere to the confidentiality agreement.

Search committee proceedings are strictly confidential. The discussions, ratings, and even the names and institutional affiliations of applicants and references are confidential, unless specified below. All members of the search committee must sign a confidentiality agreement which will be retained by the search committee chair in the search file. Once a candidate agrees to a campus interview, it is understood that their candidacy and official application materials may be shared (cover letter and CV).

Committee members must ensure no conflict of interest in relation to the applicants under consideration and must never be an applicant him/herself.

Concerns and questions regarding this process should be directed to the Office of the Provost or the AA/EEO officer.

2.2 Duties for Search Committee Chairs:

Maintain contact with the administrative specialist for the dean. As applications are received, check for completeness and send an acknowledgment letter under your name. Note any required items which are missing.

Understand your charge and what the decision maker wants from the committee, e.g. a list of the top three candidates in rank order or alphabetical order; list of top 3 candidates including strengths and weaknesses, etc.

Also at your **first committee meeting**, have all committee members sign the confidentiality agreement and keep it in your search file.

Regardless of the number of applicants, be sure all committee members independently assess the Minimum and Desirable qualifications of all the applicants in order to determine who makes the first cut.

Send a thank you letter to applicants who do not make the first cut.

Develop questions to ask references. Sample questions may be found on the Office of the Provost website.

SECTION 3. CONDUCTING THE SEARCH

3.1 Getting Started: Expectations of the Search Committee

Once the job is posted, the search committee chair calls the **first meeting**, at which the committee members and chair will:

- Sign the confidentiality agreement (signed copies will be kept as part of the hiring package)
- Review the Implicit Bias
- Set a specific timeline including all meetings, telephone and campus interview dates, final committee deliberation, faculty meeting for presentation of candidate (where applicable), offer of position and required date of acceptance
- Discuss application review process and resources, and process for determining candidates for telephone interviews
- Determine the following terms
 - Standards for inclusion and exclusion of applicants based on the completeness of their files
 - Interpretations for minimum and desirable qualifications
 - Forms to be used by the committee members in making evaluations. Sample forms are available from the Office of the Provost
 - A plan for screening and then evaluating applicants
 - An evaluation system that will result in clear statements of the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates

Review the [Questions to Avoid](#) resource on the Provost's website.

3.2 IMPLICIT BIAS

Key points to remember:

Also known as implicit social cognition, implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control.

Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness.

The implicit associations we harbor in our subconscious cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance.

These associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages. In addition to early life experiences, the media and news programming are often-cited origins of implicit associations.

Key Characteristics of Implicit Biases:

Implicit and explicit biases are **related but distinct mental constructs**. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce each other.

The implicit associations we hold **do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs** or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.

We generally tend to hold implicit biases that **favor our own ingroup**, though research has shown that we can still hold implicit biases against our ingroup.

Implicit biases are **malleable**. Our brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned through a variety of debiasing techniques.

*Taken from the [Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity](#), Ohio State University

Next Steps...

Continue the conversation with friends, family, colleagues

Learn more about implicit bias and how it impacts your life

Take the ["Project Implicit" assessment](#)

3.3 ESTABLISHING CRITERIA

Criteria are the competencies and qualifications you will establish to screen applicants, determine questions, and make decisions. **Criteria** is based off of the minimum and preferred qualification as taken from the posted job description, including the required skills, knowledge and abilities (SKAs). *SKAs represent competencies needed in the job, such as experience with certain courses, minimum number years teaching, etc.*

Established criteria must be consistent with the minimum qualifications of the job per the job description. In other words if the job description states that a minimum of 5 years of experience is required, the established criteria must be no less than 5 years of experience. If an established criteria is “strong communication skills” and the person submits a resume with typos and inconsistencies, you may consider that information when assessing the candidate’s qualifications. The minimum qualifications serve as the base-line for establishing the applicant pool. **If minimum qualifications are not met, the applicant’s status should be changed to “not hired” and s/he should be eliminated from consideration.**

All applicants who meet the minimum qualifications compose your applicant pool. Once your applicant pool is established, you then need a way to begin evaluating applicants and determining “best qualified” for interviews. Note you are under no obligation to interview every candidate who meets the minimum qualifications of the job. In this stage you may elevate your requirements to begin differentiating candidates. For instance, though only a 3 years teaching experience may be required, you may score applicants higher for having additional years of experience.

Establishing criteria will also be the basis of the questions to ask in both the phone screen and interview stages. For instance, if advising students is a requirement of the appointment, you may want to assess their ability to mentor students. Refer to [Sample Competencies with Example Questions](#) for more examples.

When establishing criteria, consideration may be given to the current needs and composition of the academic unit. While minimum qualifications should never deviate from what is listed on the job description, preferred qualifications can change depending on the current needs of the academic unit.

3.3.1 The stages of criteria include:

- Using the qualifications on the posted job description, criteria is established. Examples of established criteria include 5 years of related experience, a terminal degree, licensure requirements, or strong communication skills.
- Established criteria will be used for the initial screening of applications to determine your applicant pool (meets minimum qualifications) and then to begin evaluating “best qualified” for further consideration.
- Established criteria will be used to formulate questions for the phone screen and/or on-site interview.
- Established criteria will be used to evaluate candidates and determine your hiring decision.

These stages are explored further in the next sections of the hiring toolkit.

3.4 PLAN FOR INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES

The committee should also develop a plan for interviewing candidates. This plan should include dates for various stages of the interviewing process (resume review, phone interview and campus interview), reference checks, logistical roles of committee members (help with transportation, hosting meals, etc.), and other aspects of executing a successful faculty search.

1. Dates for phone interviews
2. Questions to ask references and a schedule for checking references
3. Dates for an on-campus interview schedule for the top 3 or 4 candidates including local and on-campus candidates

The search committee will meet soon after (the day after is recommended, and this will have already been determined on the agreed upon timeline) the search closes to discuss candidates and determine the shortlist for telephone interviews

A consistent set of **telephone interview questions** to be applied to candidates who make it through the second screening (see below). Samples of interview questions and other hiring resources are available from the Office of the Provost.

3.4.1 Responding to Applications

Applicants will be directed to submit electronic application materials via the USM employment website.

A personalized letter or e-mail to each applicant should *also* be prepared and sent by the search committee chair confirming receipt of the application and stating that applicants may be requested to provide official transcripts later in the process (unless official transcripts were initially requested).

SECTION 4. NARROWING THE POOL - REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS – SCREENING APPLICANTS

4.1 Individual Committee Member Review of Applications

Before any candidate with a terminal degree from USM can be considered in any part of the search process, including campus interviews, the dean should send to the Provost a written explanation describing in detail why an exception to this policy is to be requested. The explanation should include a list of all candidates under consideration with a synopsis of their ability to meet the expectations of the faculty position in addition to the steps taken to assure a broad pool of candidates for selection.

Prior to reviewing applications and making screening decisions, the search committee must understand what the minimum qualifications and established criteria are for the position. Qualifications will be based on the posted job description.

The initial screening of the applicant pool is designed to eliminate applicants who do not meet the minimum qualifications and, in the event of a very large candidate pool, reduce to a workable size the number of applicants who will be given serious consideration. The committee members' first screening of the applications should be completed prior to the search committee meeting to be held as soon as possible after the closing. Each committee member is expected to carefully review **all** applications to determine if the candidates meet the minimum requirements.

All applicants who meet the minimum qualifications must receive consideration. Consideration does not mean that they must be interviewed; however, they must stay in "in review" status until the screening process is complete. Any applicant who does not meet minimum qualifications can be immediately moved to "not hired" and should not receive consideration.

The applicants who meet minimum qualifications and are "in review" status compose your applicant pool. The search committee is under no obligation to interview every one of these candidates and can now employ a screening process to select the "best qualified" candidates for consideration. Please note that "best qualified" is not the same as "most qualified." The search committee is under no obligation to select the applicant with the most education and experience as qualifications are broader than just those two essentials (i.e. competencies).

For example, applicants with extensive teaching experience may be eliminated due to an unprofessional resume with typos and grammatical errors. Or a candidate with only 5 years of specific experience in the job duties may be considered a better candidate than one with 10 years of related but not specifically the same experience.

In order to make these decisions, it is recommended that you utilize a **screening matrix**. The matrix allows you to identify your criteria and rate applicants accordingly. You then select the top candidates (how many is up to you) to move on in the process. If those candidates are not successful, you can then move on to the next highest rated candidates, etc. The screening matrix enables a bias-free evaluation of the candidates as well as documentation for why decisions were made.

A letter will be sent by the search committee chair to applicants who did not meet the Minimum Qualifications. The chair will prepare and send the letters. A sample letter is on the [Office of the Provost website](#).

4.2 Full Committee Application Screening

Applicants meeting the minimum qualifications must be evaluated further. Prior to this meeting, each member of the search committee should have completed the screening matrix (developed based on the criteria). The Committee then uses these rating forms as the basis for their deliberations to identify the top applicants.

4.3 A Note on Motivational Fit

Motivational fit is defined as the extent to which an applicant's expectations of what s/he will get out of a job match up with what the job provides. Why is s/he interested in this job? Will the job meet those needs? Will the job be satisfying and engaging? Motivational fit is considered one of the strongest indicators for predicting success in both job performance and longevity. Consider making motivational fit an established criteria for every position. Refer to the **Sample Competencies with Example Questions** for more information.

4.4 Application Red Flags

When reviewing applications/resumes, be on the lookout for red flags. Although red flags themselves are not necessarily reasons for eliminating an applicant from consideration, they may be useful in developing your line of questioning.

Some examples of red flags include:

1. Gaps between employment
 - a. Did the person find him/herself unintentionally without a job (i.e., fired), which is why there wasn't straight employment?
2. Does this person resign positions without having a new one lined up indicating s/he impulsively quits?
3. Did the person take another job that didn't work out and didn't put that on his/her application?

Short stints at jobs

1. Is this person a job hopper?

Drastic changes in types of jobs

1. Does this person really want to do something else and is just settling?
2. Has this person been unable to find work in his/her field?
3. Does this person have a career path or just jobs?

Career ladder discrepancies

1. Why did s/he change jobs for a lower level position or pay cut?
2. Is this a step down for him/her? Why is s/he interested?

Reasons for leaving

1. Are these reasons going to affect his/her satisfaction in our job as well?
2. Have those reasons been rectified?
3. Do the reasons given match with job changes and dates of changes?
4. Do the reasons show good judgment?

Indicated preferences (pay, teaching load, location, etc.)

1. Was s/he able to articulate why s/he is interested in something that may seem undesirable?
2. Is s/he going to take something just for “a” job but keep looking?
3. Is s/he just trying to get a foot in the door and then hope that you will offer the preference desired? Is that going to happen?

Red flags are not disqualifiers, they are subjects to pursue in your questioning and evaluation

4.5 REFERENCE CHECKS AND VERIFICATION OF ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

When possible, reference checks are conducted by members of the search committee after the pool has been narrowed to those who are to be interviewed by telephone. In some cases, this is neither preferable nor possible to do so. However, reference checks **MUST** be conducted **BEFORE** a candidate may be invited for a campus interview.

4.5.1 Reference Checks

Ideally, the committee should agree on no more than five to seven questions to ask each reference with the last one being open-ended. Some committees may choose that reference checks be conducted prior to the telephone interview, unless the applicant specifically requests that their references not be contacted. Each committee member should provide a summary of their reference checks to the committee.

Requests for information from **external sources** may be more robust and detailed asking about knowledge, skills and abilities. The information requested should mirror the criteria being evaluated. The information gathered should be job-related and should not be in conflict with the [Questions and Topics to Avoid](#).

Social Media Searches

Some search committees like to review a candidate's social media to assess professionalism. However, this practice presents challenges because it also exposes information about the candidate that could be considered protected, such as age, national origin, religion, pregnancy, number of children, marital status, disability, etc. Once the search committee (or others involved in the process) have looked at the information, it is hard to prove it wasn't part of the consideration if ever challenged. Therefore, it is recommended that the search committee chair enlists a third-party unaffiliated with the hiring process to conduct the search and report back on only relevant job related factors. Relevant information might include vulgar posts or images, discriminatory language, or the use of social media to harass. Please consult with Human Resources if you have questions.

4.5.2 Academic Qualifications

Refer to the [USM Faculty Credentials and Qualifications Policy Manual](#) on the Office of the Provost website. Colleges submitting hiring paperwork **without the appropriate documents** for Academic Qualifications may be delayed or returned to the college before it will be reviewed.

4.6 TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS/SKYPE INTERVIEWS

Phone screens (or use of Skype or similar) are conducted to further drill down on candidate qualifications and are a practical way to narrow the pool prior to in-person interviews. Although a candidate may look well qualified on paper, s/he may be lacking the competencies required for the job that are difficult to evaluate from an application/resume alone. Therefore, a phone screen allows a mini-interview to assess skills, knowledge and abilities without requiring the extensive time commitment that a full interview entails.

4.6.1 Questions

The questions to ask in a phone screen are to be established in advance, based on the criteria established, and should be asked to each candidate being interviewed for consistent evaluation. A phone screen should be treated like any interview and a Phone Screen Evaluation should be completed afterwards. You should then narrow down your candidates for on-site interviews based on the evaluations from the phone screens.

Ordinarily, there should be enough of the best qualified candidates interviewed by phone to result in a pool of 3 or 4 finalists. If there are fewer than three qualified candidates, after consultation with their dean, the committee should telephone/Skype interview only those who are qualified.

If you are dissatisfied with your candidates after the phone screen, go back to your screening matrix and identify the next group of applicants for consideration. If none of the applicants meet minimum qualifications or pass the phone screen step, you should discuss this with the school director/dean. While you can reevaluate your preferred qualifications with this applicant pool, you cannot decrease minimum qualifications without reposting the job (and having a new job description reviewed and approved by HR).

Note that the candidate with the most experience and education is not always the “best” candidate for the job. You are under no obligation to hire the person with the “most” qualifications. The “best” candidate may be determined by skills, knowledge, abilities, salary expectations, interest in the position and other competencies. Oftentimes the “most” qualified person is “over” qualified for the position. Being overqualified in and of itself should not disqualify a person but may be a negative if it skews their salary expectations or would inhibit their interest in the job duties to be performed, for instance.

4.6.2 Rating System/Matrix

Prior to the phone interviews, the committee must decide on the rating system it will use and develop a set of interview questions. The same set of questions must be asked of all candidates. Each committee member should be given a rating form for evaluating the candidates' responses. Care should be taken in crafting the questions to:

1. cover all essential areas
2. ask questions which result in meaningful and useful evaluation of a candidate's qualifications
3. avoid redundancy
4. avoid questions which are not job related

Prior to a telephone interview, the committee chair should send the applicant information about the membership of the search committee, the approximate time allotted for the interview, and the approximate number, though not the nature, of questions that will be asked.

During the course of the telephone interview, particularly if the final question allows the candidate to ask for information, questions of a personal nature may arise. A candidate, for example, may have a spouse or domestic partner who would need to find employment in order for the candidate to accept the position.

The search committee cannot ask about marital status or partners and must not engage such discussions even if they have been initiated by the candidate. The committee can suggest to the candidate that it would be appropriate to discuss these issues with the dean and/or Department of Human Resources.

If official transcripts were not requested as part of the application process, or an official transcript was not submitted, the following statement should be included in the phone-interview invitation e-mail or telephone invitation: “Official academic transcripts will be requested of candidates invited to campus for an interview.” For information related to transcripts and credentials, refer to the [USM Faculty Credentials and Qualifications Policy Manual](#).

SECTION 5. CAMPUS INTERVIEWS AND EVALUATION

5.1 Finalist review and approval

When the telephone interviews are complete, the committee will meet to evaluate the candidates. The search committee chair will discuss the committee's findings with the dean and/or school director and develop a plan for on-campus interviews.

Prior to inviting potential finalists or alternates for the campus interview, the chair must have the USM faculty qualification review underway with the college credentialing officer. No candidate should be invited for a campus interview if they have not been reviewed and approved by the College Credentialing Officer.

5.2 International Hires

If a candidate will need visa services to work in the United States, the search committee chair should consult with the Administrator of the Office of International Student and Scholars Services to determine a candidate's ability to work in the United States or can be provided the appropriate visa to work at USM. When possible, this should be done PRIOR to inviting the candidate to campus as a finalist. Finalists must either meet in person with the Office of International Student and Scholar services to review their immigration status and potential additional information needed.

A school is not obligated to sponsor applicants for work visas and may reject applicants with such a need. While national origin is a protected class, you are not making a decision to not hire because of where the person is from, but because you do not wish to sponsor the applicant. That is allowable under law. In fact, our application asks questions about visa status and sponsorship so that information is available to you as part of your screening process. If the school does not have a budget and the applicant answers yes to requiring visa sponsorship that can in and of itself be a screening criteria (i.e. anyone who needs sponsorship is automatically eliminated).

Prior to inviting a finalist to campus, the school must indicate finalists, alternates, and those not selected for interviews in the ATS. The school must also select the reason(s) for non-selection.

Note: While the applicant tracking system, will automatically send notifications to the candidates who were not selected once their status is changed to "Not Hired" at any point in the process, consider reaching out directly to those you interviewed. For all applicants, chairs should send a personalized email or letter to those applicants the committee wishes to release from the pool to notify them they were not selected for a campus interview. Doing so is not only respectful but also maintains the relationship in the event of future opportunities.

5.3 FACULTY SEARCH GUIDELINES FOR CAMPUS INTERVIEWS

All Hiring Managers, search committee members and others involved in the interview and selection of candidates must attend the first committee meeting and review the hiring process and become familiar with basic interview guidelines. Hiring Managers or committees can use the [Sample Competencies with Example Questions](#) to craft an interview script for both phone and in-person interviews. The interview questions are to be established in advance, based on the criteria established, and should be asked to each candidate being interviewed for consistent evaluation. This criteria should be added to the [Interview Evaluation](#) form and should be tailored to the specific position based on the qualifications and SKAs of the posted job description.

The goal of the on-campus interview is to not only show the candidates that we are interested in them but to recruit them to our campus. While a candidate may not be selected, they should leave campus feeling that USM is an outstanding university and a great place to work. It is also to assess the candidates' teaching and research skills and publication record, their community service and collegiality, and the likelihood that they will be successful at USM.

In the campus interview, we want to make the best impression possible as we are recruiting as well as selecting a candidate.

The campus interview schedule should include time with the search committee; meetings with students, faculty and University personnel; a seminar presentation; and hosted lunch and/or dinner. The dean should meet with the candidate even if it means the candidate or the dean flying to a secondary location.

The candidate should be provided a schedule before arrival. The schedule should have the date, time, location, and names of all involved in each meeting.

Best practices indicate that the candidate should be met at the airport by the search committee chair or a faculty member, unless other arrangements are agreed to ahead of time.

Meals with the candidate are part of the interview process. As such, a member of the search committee, and others as desired, should have breakfast, lunch, and dinner with the candidate.

The cost for all meal participants should be paid for by a host committee member. Alcoholic beverages should be charged separately. Meal and beverage receipts should be provided to the appropriate administrative specialist for reimbursement.

Someone should be designated to escort the candidate from one meeting to another.

Only if requested by the candidate, and if the schedule will allow, time should be scheduled with a local realtor to show typical housing to the candidate.

Allow the candidate 30 minutes or so preparation time before the presentation.

Remember this is our chance to show the candidate that we are interested in him/her.

5.3.1 Invitation for On-Campus Interviews

Invitations from the chair of the search committee to interview on campus should be followed up with an e-mail or letter as well as a package of information about the college and school, USM, Hattiesburg, Long Beach, etc., and other helpful information. A copy of the interview schedule, including names of those participating in the interviews, should be sent to the candidate prior to their arrival on campus.

Candidates for Gulf Park faculty positions should both tour the campus and meet with others, as is appropriate. In addition, when possible, teaching demonstrations or research presentations for these positions should be presented on the Gulf Park campus.

The following is a list of activities that are normally engaged in during an on-campus interview. Those activities marked with an asterisk (*) should be part of every on-campus interview.

- Pickup from hotel (if not local candidate)*
- Greet candidate and escort him/her to the first meeting*
- Meals (see Faculty Search Guidelines for Campus Interviews above)*
- Give a research and/or teaching presentation – try to schedule earlier in the day (students may be invited)*
- Interviews with:
 - Dean*
 - Search committee*
 - General/Departmental faculty/students/community members* (ordinarily a coffee/tea hour)
 - Division Chair, if not a member of the search committee*
 - ISSS Administrator (if a foreign national)*
 - Vice President for Research (only if research start-up funds are requested by the candidate)
 - Provost (only for director positions and faculty who will be hired at the rank of Professor)
 - Campus tour*
 - Tour of local area

Candidates may wish to visit schools, meet with a realtor, or otherwise engage in other specific activities during their visit. Please keep this in mind when creating the interview schedule.

A campus itinerary will be created for each candidate and distributed together with a copy of the candidate's CV to all faculty of the hiring unit at least two days prior to the visit.

5.3.2 Additional Reference Checks after the Interview

Committees may wish to conduct off-list reference checks (additional references not listed on the application) at this point. Even though the university reserves the right to communicate with any person who may have information, when necessary, the committee chair should consult with the school director, and then obtain general permission from the candidate (you do not have to specify who will be contacted). It is further recommended that two committee members be present when off-list references are contacted.

5.3.3 Evaluation and Selection of the Candidate

The chair of the search committee is responsible for distributing an on-campus interview evaluation form to all staff and faculty involved in the on campus interview of the candidate. These evaluation forms provide another method for evaluating the candidate before the search committee makes a recommendation to be presented to the school faculty.

The search committee should prepare a list of candidates in the format requested and stated in the charge to the committee. *For example*, a list of the top three candidates in rank order list to include the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. This list is presented to the School Director who will then presents the hiring recommendation from the committee to the college dean. The recommendation is forwarded to the Provost by the dean's office using the faculty "Permission to Hire" form.

SECTION 6. HIRING FACULTY PROCESS

The Permission to Hire Process varies slightly for each of the categories of: Tenure Track Faculty and non-tenure track teaching faculty (Instructor, lecturer, senior lecturer, and teaching professor positions) and other non-tenure track positions. This includes Post-Doctoral Positions on E and G funds only. Note: there are additional requirements for international faculty to complete once they have been offered the position. Contact International Services for more information.

NOTE: The **Faculty Offer** letters will not be sent via the Applicant Tracking System. You may prepare the letter in the ATS, but faculty will still receive the written offer letter, signed by the dean, and mailed to them, to be signed and returned.

6.2 Tenure-Track and Teaching Faculty

If an applicant is selected and an offer is to be made, the school director, with the assistance of the dean's administrative assistant, will assemble a packet of material (Hire Package) containing the following items.

6.2.1 Hiring Package Checklist

Use this checklist to ensure that the Hiring Package is complete to prevent any delays in review and approval:

- Permission to Hire Form
- Immigration Status Memo
- DRAFT Copy of Offer Letter
- Academic Credentials/Transcript

Permission to Hire Form (please make sure to use the most updated version, located on Office of Provost [website](#)).

Place the **HR Requisition number** (e.g. req55 from the ATS) in the space provided.

If **research start-up funds** are requested, consult with the dean to obtain agreement on the amount and time period of the funds. The VPR should approve the research start-up funds by signature on the Permission to Hire form.

If **approved salary** is more than budgeted salary, describe source of additional funds under the Special Conditions/Justification section, and if approval has been given for the higher amount.

Immigration Status Memo

If applicable, attach the ISM memo completed by the Administrator of International Student and Scholar Services for the selected candidate.

DRAFT Copy of the Offer Letter

This letter must be clearly stamped “**DRAFT**” and cannot be mailed to or shown to the candidate until the Provost and Budget Officer give final approval for hiring the candidate. **The offer letter must be signed by the dean.** The offer letter will need to include the following:

- Rank/Title
- Assignment city location
- Salary (to include reference to any pending salary adjustments relative to ABD status or Ph.D. completion)
- Start Date
- 9 month or 12 month appointment
- Expectations of position including teaching load, research, and service
- If applicable, specific date of pre-tenure review (i.e., “Your pre-tenure review will occur during the 20xx-20xx academic year, and tenure review will occur during the 20xx-20xx academic year”). Please see the faculty handbook for specific information concerning these reviews.
- If applicable: Credit towards tenure. Any credit towards tenure must be approved by Provost and President.
- If applicable: Amount of research start-up funds and moving expenses as well as any other miscellaneous special circumstances that are listed on the “Permission to Hire” form.
- Deadline date for acceptance of the terms
- Teaching assignment or course reassignment (12 hours per semester)
- Acceptance signature/date block on the bottom of the letter for the candidate to sign and return, including space for email address.
- Information regarding completion of HR forms (Background Check, Employee Data Form, Authorization to Release Information Form, Vehicle Use Agreement Form and I-9 notification)

Academic Credentials Documents *(provided by the school and reviewed by the college credentialing officer)*

- Copy of the candidate’s curriculum vita
- Copy of the candidate’s official transcripts
- Faculty Qualification form signed by College Credentialing Officer

If there has been a change in the funding source for this position, it must be noted on the PTH and the dean should also submit an updated spreadsheet to the Provost for review prior to approval.

Completed Hire Package

Send completed package to Dean’s office for review and approval. The dean will send the completed “Hire Package” to the Office of the Provost, for review. If approved, a copy of the “**Permission to Hire**” form and the approved draft offer letter will be sent to the respective dean’s office to prepare the offer. **The final written offer to the candidate may only be from the dean.**

If not approved, the package will be returned to the dean for revision and resubmission.

*****If the candidate declines or the offer is withdrawn, send an e-mail notice to Budget Director in the Office of the Provost.***

See the Office of the Provost Website for most up to date offer letter template or utilize the approved template in the ATS.

Incomplete or incorrect hiring documents will be returned to the dean's office for correction. AGAIN, in order to prevent any delays in review and approval of Hiring Package, follow the check-list and make sure ALL of the relevant information is included on the Permission to Hire form.

- Permission to Hire Form
 - Salary Information
 - Position Title
 - Search Number
 - Credential information
 - Start-up funds or special instructions and documentation from the VPR
 - Attached documentation of any special circumstances or requests. In the instance of approval was required from the provost, that documentation needs to be included as well

- Immigration Status Memo
 - If applicable

- DRAFT Copy of Offer Letter
 - Double check dates, salary, position, title, pre-tenure/tenure review dates, and teaching load

- Academic Credentials/Transcript
 - Copy of the candidate's curriculum vita
 - Copy of the candidate's official transcripts
 - Faculty Qualification form signed by College Credentialing Officer

6.3 Hiring Adjunct Faculty/Part Time Faculty

The Personnel Data Sheet (PDS) is available on the Human Resources website must be used to hire adjunct faculty. The required attachments are the curriculum vitae, official transcripts, and the Qualifications of Full-Time and Part-Time Instructors of Record form. Once the completed PDS package has been approved by the school director and respective dean, the dean's office is to forward the completed package to the Budget Office.

6.4 Faculty to Teach for Study Abroad Programs

Below are the procedures to hire a faculty member to teach in one of the credit abroad programs at Southern Miss.

Current USM Faculty (forms located on Office of Provost [website](#)).

Submit a **Personnel Action Form (PAF)** when hiring a current Southern Miss faculty member to teach in a study abroad program. The hiring school and all Southern Miss faculty hired to teach on study abroad programs will need to ensure that the following documents are on file with Human Resources.

- Official Transcripts
- Curriculum Vita
- Verification/evaluation of foreign credentials and copy of Faculty Qualification from signed by College Credentialing Officer

Adjunct Faculty (non-Southern Miss faculty)

Submit a Personnel Data Sheet (PDS) when hiring an adjunct faculty member to teach in a study abroad program. Adjunct faculty who are hired to teach in study abroad programs will need to submit the following documents.

- Personnel Data Sheet (PDS)
- Official Transcripts– there must be official transcripts for all graduate degrees
- Curriculum vita
- Copy of Faculty Qualification form signed by College Credentialing Officer
- Verification/evaluation of foreign credentials, if required
- Immigration Documents, if required
- Sealed envelope from new hire containing the HR forms - Background Check, Employee Data Form, Authorization to Release Information Form

Once the completed PAF or PDS package has been approved by the school director and/or respective dean, the dean's office is to forward the completed package to Human Resources.

6.5 VERIFICATION OF FOREIGN TRANSCRIPTS

All graduate transcripts of any faculty member who has a degree(s) from a foreign university **must** have the foreign transcript(s) evaluated by an independent third party. There are several companies who provide this service for a fee. The evaluation of the foreign transcript(s) must accompany the rest of the hiring documentation. Allow for at least four (4) weeks for the foreign transcript(s) to be evaluated and returned to the faculty member and/or university. It is up to the individual faculty member to bear the cost of obtaining the evaluation. A complete listing of companies who provide this service may be obtained from the Director of Human Resources.

SECTION 7. PERSONNEL PROCESSING

Close the Search:

Once a candidate has accepted the offer, their status should be changed to **Hired**, and the status of all other applicants to **Not Hired**.

A final **Personnel Action Package** will need to be assembled. Included documents are:

- Personnel Action Form (PAF)
- Copy of "Permission to Hire" form
- Original offer letter with acceptance signature of the candidate and the date signed (where approved, updated each year for one year/visiting appointments)
- Any letters of recommendation
- Official Transcripts– there must be official transcripts for all graduate degrees
- Curriculum vita
- Faculty Qualification form signed by College Credentialing Officer
- Immigration Status Memo (where applicable)
- Sealed envelope from new hire containing the HR forms - Background Check, Employee Data Form, Authorization to Release Information Form, Vehicle Use Agreement Form, when applicable.

Once the completed PAF and package is received by the Office of the Provost, the Provost will review and approve. Once approved, the budget coordinator will forward the package of material to the Department of Human Resources.

All foreign nationals are subject to approval by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. Additionally, all employees at the university must possess a United States social security number. Note that employees may not start to work without the background check.

For your reference, new employees will also need to complete, the I-9 form. Please instruct them to view the form on the HR web site prior to their arrival to campus as it contains information about required forms of identification.

SECTION 8. CLOSING THE SEARCH

Once a search has been completed successfully or cancelled due to lack of success, the search must be closed. The school director or search committee chair should change the status of all applicants in the ATS as noted in Section 6. The search committee chair must write or e-mail all candidates who have applied that the search has been concluded. If the search was terminated without a hire (because the pool of minimally qualified candidates has been exhausted), the letter may indicate that the search was cancelled.

It is important that the search documentation can be located in the event that a complaint is filed by an applicant. All official documentation (matrix, evaluation forms) for each candidate should be retained for a minimum of 3 years. Electronic files of application materials are maintained in the ATS. All other documentation should be kept by the hiring school. Electronic records/copies of search documents are acceptable.

Frequently Asked Questions

How should candidate inquiries about their status be handled?

Prior to the selection of candidates(s) to interview, those meeting the minimum qualifications should be told that their applications are still under consideration. When the selection of candidates to be interviewed has been made, other candidates may be told that they were not included in the first group of candidates to be interviewed.

What do we do if a candidate is qualified for a higher rank than advertised?

The candidate should be considered only for the rank(s) in the position.

What happens to incomplete applications?

Applications are not available for review until all required documents have been submitted electronically. Application materials are not returned to candidates.

How do we treat internal candidates?

Internal candidates cannot be involved in the search process and must be treated in the same manner as external candidates. Confidentiality in all matters must, *absolutely*, be maintained.

Late applications

Late applications may not be considered if received after a firm deadline. The applicant should be notified of this. (If a search committee, in consultation with the school director and/or dean, decides to make an exception for an applicant, then all late applications must be considered.) Once the application deadline has passed, the online posting will be closed.

What if there are no acceptable candidates?

The search can be suspended or cancelled at the instruction of the dean; candidates will be informed by letter that the search has been cancelled. Alternatively, the search can be extended and the position re-advertised.

What if a person sends his/her vita to the dean or the Director asking if they think the person meets the Minimum Qualifications and should apply?

Refer that person to the job ad website or attach the ad in an e-mail. Explain that all applicants must be assessed on the criteria stated in the ad, that you believe he/she is in the best position to determine if he/she meets the qualifications or not, and, he/she is certainly welcome and encouraged to apply after making that determination.

APPENDIX AND SAMPLES

See the [Office of the Provost](#) website for SAMPLE documents and [Questions to Avoid](#)