Diversity in the Recruitment Process

Research on Bias and Assumptions
We all like to think that we are objective scholars who judge people based entirely on their work experience and achievements, but copious research shows that every one of us brings a lifetime of personal experience and cultural history that shapes the review process.

The results from controlled studies in which people were asked to make judgments about subjects demonstrate the potentially prejudicial nature of the many implicit or unconscious assumptions we can make. Examples range from physical and social expectations or assumptions to those that have a clear connection to hiring, even for faculty positions.

It is important to note that in most of these studies, the gender of the evaluator was not significant, indicating that both men and women share and apply the same assumptions about gender.

Examples of assumptions that can influence the evaluation of applications:

- When asked to rate the quality of verbal skills indicated by vocabulary definitions, evaluators rated the skills lower if they were told an African American provided the definitions than if they were told that a white person provided them (Biernat et al).

- When asked to assess the contribution of skill and luck to successful performance of a task, evaluators more frequently attributed success to skill for males and to luck for females, even though males and females succeeded equally (Deaux and Emswiller).

- Evaluators, who were busy, distracted by other tasks, and under time pressure gave women lower ratings than men for the same written evaluation of job performance. Sex bias decreased when they were able to give all their time and attention to their judgments, which rarely occurs in actual work settings. This study indicates that evaluators are more likely to rely upon underlying assumptions and biases when they cannot/do not give sufficient time and attention to their evaluations (Martell).

- Evidence shows that perceived incongruities between the female gender role and leadership roles cause two types of disadvantage for women: 1) ideas about the female gender role cause women to be perceived as having less leadership ability than men and consequently diminish women’s rise to leadership positions, and 2) women in leadership positions receive less favorable evaluations because they are perceived to be violating gender norms. These perceived incongruities lead to attitudes that are less positive toward female than male leaders (Eagly and Karau; Ridgeway).
Overcoming the influence of unconscious biases and assumptions:

- Learn about research on biases and assumptions.
- Discuss research on biases and assumptions and consciously strive to minimize their influence on your evaluation of candidates.
- Develop criteria for evaluating candidates and apply them consistently to all applicants.
- Spend sufficient time evaluating each applicant.
- Evaluate each candidate’s entire applications; don’t depend too heavily on only one element such as letters of recommendation, or the prestige of the degree-granting institution.
- Be able to defend every decision for rejecting or retaining a candidate.
- Periodically evaluate your decisions and consider whether qualified women and underrepresented minorities are included. If not, consider whether evaluation biases and assumptions are influencing your decisions.

Guidelines for Interviewing

- Follow the plan established before the interview process and allow enough time for the interviews.
- Avoid asking questions about: Race, Ethnicity, Religion, Age, Gender, National Origin, Sexual Orientation, Disability Status, Ancestry, Belief System, or Marital Status and Children.
- Make candidates feel welcome and comfortable.
- Treat each candidate as a potential colleague.
- Allow sufficient time for follow-up questions, candidate questions, and breaks.
- Ask the same questions of each applicant applying for the job.
- Complete evaluations.
- Follow the agreed-upon process for making hiring decisions – evaluate candidates for their strengths and weaknesses on specific attributes.
- Consider whether any assumptions are influencing evaluation of final candidates.
- Check references following an agreed upon format.
- Communicate with candidates in a timely manner.
- Plan for how you will proceed if your top candidate turns you down.