Recruiting & Diversity
Hiring Search Practices

Amy Olberding, Steve Ellis, Sherri Irvin, Ray Elugardo
University of Oklahoma
Department Of Philosophy

Below are given recommendations for effective use of the Recruiting and Diversity (R & D) committee in our search processes. Also included are recommendations the R & D committee has regarding "best practices" for use by the search committee and wider department during the search process.

Governing Logic of these Recommendations

The goals in view in all of what is offered below are:

1. to set up mechanisms within the search process that will aid us all in minimizing implicit bias;
2. to set up mechanisms through which job candidates will have conditions most conducive to good performance; and
3. to use both of the above to enhance recruiting.

Implicit bias is a psychological phenomenon to which we all are prey. Implicit bias can influence evaluation of job candidates when unconscious assumptions, schemas, or frames regarding social identity (inclusive of race, gender, sexual orientation, sexual expression, age, disability, or religion) intersect negatively with judgments about qualifications for a job. Research on implicit bias shows that everyone has the relevant schemas/frameworks (e.g., implicit bias can manifest in women's evaluations of other women) and that they are exceptionally difficult to eliminate (e.g., even those who score high on egalitarian measures can exhibit implicit bias). Managing implicit bias is, then, a matter of minimizing our exposure to its most common triggers and self-consciously applying appropriate criteria uniformly to all of those being evaluated. Many of the recommendations given here are strategies pitched to minimize the impact of implicit bias.

While implicit bias registers in the evaluation of candidates, the conditions under which a candidate performs can influence the quality of her performance. For example, a candidate in "solo status," one who has a social identity distinct from that of her interlocutors, is more prey to stereotype threat, a heightened awareness of her social identity that can negatively influence her performance. Put informally, candidates who share the social identity of their evaluators will be at greater ease while those who do not may be prey to performance inhibiting psychological responses induced by awareness of their "out group" status. Thus some of the recommendations given here aim at guarding against placing candidates in situations likely to complicate or inhibit their ability to perform well.

In addition to guarding fairness, these processes can also serve to make the department attractive to candidates. Awareness of the profession's lack of diversity has swelled in recent years and these strategies can thus communicate to candidates our department's commitment to providing an inclusive working environment to all of its members.

Role of the R & D Committee in TT Searches
Dossiers may often contain information about candidates that can operate as triggers to implicit bias by activating unconscious schemas regarding the qualities or features of those who belong to recognized social groups. Even where we do not consciously register that a candidate belongs (or appears to belong) to a social group, we may unconsciously register it, and associations we implicitly make between the schemas for the group and qualifications for the job can influence evaluation, both positively and negatively. Self-consciously attending to potential bias triggers within the dossiers can be a strategy for minimizing the influence of negative implicit bias. However, we cannot reasonably expect search committee members, who necessarily have to manage a full range of complex criteria, to additionally screen for such triggers, a process that often requires close attention to features that the dossiers themselves can make difficult to spot. Consequently, the R & D committee will take responsibility for this work, scrutinizing the dossiers with identifying potential bias triggers as a narrow criterion to structure their reading of the dossier material. The R & D committee will then produce a list of dossiers flagged as containing potential bias triggers.

The list of dossiers containing potential bias triggers (the PBT list) will be given to the search committee and made available to all faculty, with the understanding that the search committee will follow up on the PBT list, using it to ensure that those whose dossiers contain potential bias triggers are duly considered. The purpose of listing these dossiers is effectively to alert all readers of the dossiers to the hazard of bias and thereby elevate attention to the careful and uniform application of criteria to them. E.g., search committee members should take special care to read such dossiers slowly, strive to be especially mindful of the formal criteria for the job, and/or may elect to read such dossiers twice.

A representative of the R & D committee will additionally be available to the search committee throughout the search process to assist or advise as the search committee may desire and at the search committee’s invitation. One general aim is simply to make sure that the search committee is assisted with recruiting dimensions of the search, particularly in cases where the composition of the search committee is itself not demographically diverse. In addition to recruiting, a representative of the R & D committee will be available for ex officio participation in the search committee’s deliberations in cases where the search committee judges such participation desirable. The hope is that if a search committee would, at any stage, profit from advice or research the R & D committee could bring to bear to facilitate their work, it would be available.

**R & D Recommendation of “Best Practices” for Searches**

The R & D committee additionally recommends adopting the following list of “best practices” for searches. They are broken down here to track to usual stages of any hiring process.

**I. Initial Vetting of Candidates**

**A. Reviewing Dossiers**

Implicit bias has been shown to register in how candidates’ dossiers may appear to review committees. Awareness of this is consequently important when reviewing dossiers. For any reader, no matter how fair-minded, haste can increase the operation of implicit bias so
taking ample time in reviewing dossiers is important. Because of this, the R & D committee recommends:

1. The department should set a sufficiently early deadline for receipt of application materials that the search committee can adequately pace its work throughout the latter part of the semester.
2. The department should adopt an informal policy of “protection” from other service for search committee members wherever such is possible in order to maximize the time they have available for careful review of application documents.

In addition to giving careful time to each dossier, having a set of clearly established evaluative criteria can be an effective strategy for minimizing implicit bias, for explicit criteria more effectively prevent irregularity in how candidates’ qualifications are evaluated and weighted. Uniform consideration of each candidate’s application with reference to such criteria will be enhanced by employing a pre-fixed list of relevant criteria to which the reader can refer throughout his or her interactions with the dossiers. We thus recommend that search committee members create such a list for use in reviewing dossiers. This may take the form of a list all members of the search committee employ in common or individual committee members may wish to devise their own. Other faculty reviewing the dossiers are likewise encouraged to adopt such a strategy, particularly in advance of the full department’s convening to reduce the initial roster of candidates to a short list for campus visits.

Apart from recognizing our own capacity for implicit bias and guarding against it, it is also important to recognize that implicit bias may influence the contents of the dossiers themselves. Empirical studies have shown that letters of recommendation can exhibit significant differences that break down along gender lines, with letters for women applicants tending to be weaker. Where letters for men tend to emphasize more directly job related skills and intellectual acumen, letters for women tend to emphasize more nebulous social and personal characteristics and speak less often or less emphatically to job related skills. Consequently, review of letters of recommendation should proceed sensitive to this difference.

A second consideration regarding contents of dossiers may be the operation of what is called the “Matthew Effect.” In brief, the Matthew Effect – coined from Matthew 13:12, “For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” – describes the way in which inequities can accumulate over time as differential expectations inform evaluation and outcomes. Our field tends to favor “hotshots” and prestige departments but research on the Matthew Effect suggests that differential expectations play a role in different outcomes, in high prestige “hotshots” being more easily able to maintain that status and in others finding cracking into “hotshot” status more difficult. All this may also be informed of course by implicit biases tracking gender, race, and the whole range of biases rooted in identity contingencies.

The relevance of the Matthew Effect for job searches is in the need to maintain awareness that candidates’ past success may have Matthew Effect elements, with early privilege and high expectations setting the stage for continued privilege and elevated evaluative perceptions. Concomitantly, early disprivilege can set the stage for continued disprivilege. But where the candidate pool is comprised largely of early career philosophers (as most of
our searches are), future success of candidates may often ride on the work environments in which they begin their careers, i.e., in what expectations are applied going forward. Assigning untoward predictive value to past success can fail to acknowledge this. Searches are seeking to identify the rather nebulous quality of “promise,” but care should be taken not to bluntly equate “promise” with halo effects of privilege and prestige or with accumulations of assets that may track with privilege and prestige.

B. Review of Candidates’ Written Work
Reviewing anonymized work is a well-established practice in the profession and can minimize implicit biases on multiple levels. Anonymizing dossiers is unworkable, but some effort in this direction is recommended. Once the search committee arrives at its initial (longer) short list and we must cull this list for campus visits, the R & D committee recommends creating anonymized versions of the initial short list candidates’ writing samples. These samples will be made available to the full faculty for review. Faculty are encouraged to read the anonymized samples rather than reading the non-anonymized versions contained in the dossiers themselves.

C. Ranking the Campus Visit List
The R & D committee maintains that the candidates’ dossiers should be treated as the principal body of data from which hiring decisions are made, but recognizes that campus visits also represent a valuable tool in vetting candidates. However, because campus visits afford opportunities to interact with candidates in ways that necessarily blend the social and the professional, implicit biases and preferences may naturally come into play as the data available about the candidates radically expands and includes much more than what strictly bears on their capacities for the job. Because quite nebulous social factors can at this stage quite easily exert an undue influence on evaluation, the search committee should, where possible and given committee agreement, create a ranked list of campus visit candidates prior to their arrival on campus. The purpose of this is simply so that we, as a department, will be aware if the campus visits effect a change in our ranking of the candidates. There may of course be good reasons for re-ordering the candidates’ rankings after the visits, but the initial ranking, based solely on the dossiers, will provide an important stimulus for the department to query just what in the visits has prompted any revised evaluation of the candidates and better guard against inadvertently giving way to any biasing elements produced by the visits. If the search committee members either do not agree on any ranked order for candidates prior to the visits or considers the candidates invited for visits to be of roughly equal appeal prior to the visit, they may elect simply to present an unranked list.

II. Vetting and Recruiting
A. Inviting On Campus Visits
Candidates invited for on campus visits should be asked whether they have any special needs that the department can accommodate. Candidates should likewise be presented with a proposed plan for the visit before such a plan is completely fixed and invited to notify the department if any aspects of the plan provoke concern. (E.g., a candidate with mobility issues may wish an alternative to a walking tour of campus, a nursing mother or pregnant candidate may need additional and more frequent breaks.) The invitation to communicate these needs should be sent by a representative of the R & D committee (not on the search committee) who identifies him- or herself as such in making this contact with the candidate.
The hope is that candidates wary of how announcing their needs may impact evaluation will feel more at ease if first given the signal that the department is committed to diversity and are then able to communicate with someone less directly involved in the vetting process. A sample of what such a message should contain is in Appendix B.

B. On Campus Interviews

The R & D committee recommends continuing the practice of including an interview, hosted by the search committee, during the on campus visit. With respect to this interview, there are additional recommended practices:

1. The interview itself should employ a predetermined and fixed roster of questions that will be identical for every candidate within the search. This too is a mechanism for bringing uniform criteria to bear on each candidate. Given inevitable differences in candidates’ research foci and answers to individual queries, some questions in the interview will naturally supplement the pre-scripted list.

2. Interview sessions with candidates should represent the diversity of the department to the extent this is feasible and not unduly burdensome. E.g., under current department demographics, our goal is to have two women faculty present at each interview session where this does not impose an undue burden on women faculty. If the search committee has no women members, the search committee should invite a woman faculty member ask some of the interview questions. In short, we should make every effort possible to avoid putting candidates in solo status during the interview. Likewise, it is valuable to communicate the diversity of the department to all candidates.

3. Included among the questions in the interview, there should be at least one that will solicit information regarding the candidate’s approach to diverse classroom populations, recruiting and retaining diverse students, etc.

4. Because quick facility in answering questions can be unreliable as a criterion in evaluating candidates and, at any rate, the campus visit provides no shortage of opportunities for the candidate to demonstrate “thinking on one’s feet,” the interview should not operate on this model. Instead, all candidates should be provided with the list of the questions in advance of their visit. The list of interview questions should be developed far enough in advance that the candidates are not receiving these on the eve of arrival. So too, each candidate should be given the same amount of lead time with the questions.

5. The search committee will establish a protocol to ensure uniformity across the interview sessions and a member of the search committee will chair the session.

C. Committee A Interview with On Campus Candidates

During the Committee A session with candidates, departmental and university policies regarding family leave should be communicated to all candidates. Candidates should be told both what arrangements are in place for family leave and what tenure clock modifications the university allows for pre-tenure faculty who use family leave during the pre-tenure period. Effort should be made to make clear that the presentation of these policies is routinely given to all candidates – i.e., effort should be made to avoid any...
appearance that a woman job candidate is being *specially* told about family leave arrangements.

D. Job Talk
Because the job talk is the most high stakes element of the campus visit, it should most generally be managed more closely than, say, a colloquium might be. To that end, one faculty member should serve as moderator for the talk.

1. The moderator will manage the Q and A. He or she should ensure that the discussion keeps moving and the tone stays constructive, and can help to ensure that questions are asked by a diverse array of people (women as well as men; graduate students as well as faculty).

2. The moderator should undertake responsibility to “protect” the candidate during the break, ensuring that he or she *does get* a real break by gently discouraging faculty or students who may want to ask questions of the candidate during the break.

E. Meals
Because meals with the candidates inevitably mix professional and social aspects, care should be exercised in how they are arranged.

1. A limit of no more than 6 people, including the candidate, should be set for all meals hosting candidates. Reasons for this are multiple. E.g., given present department demographics, larger parties will almost inevitably overwhelmingly tilt towards a heavily male population. So too, the potential to overwhelm a tired candidate is great and where the numbers are large the candidate will have difficulty even in remembering the names and status of all present. Likewise, because implicit bias can be cued by elements as subtle as voice timbre, large dinner parties, where a more commanding voice may be necessary to be heard and a softer voice will operate as a deficit, may be best avoided.

2. Attendance at meals should be restricted to faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates – i.e., those formally affiliated with the department – and the search committee’s outside member. This will avoid generating confusion in candidates about just who is evaluating them and guard against verboten subjects (e.g., marital status, age, whether the candidate has or desires to have children, etc.) being raised in conversation.

3. Because some of those within the department, particularly students, may simply not be familiar with professional norms regarding what subjects or questions should be avoided in interacting with job candidates, e-mails requesting volunteers to assist with hosting candidates should contain a brief notice that simply communicates these norms.

III. Final Vetting
A. Evaluating the Candidates Post Visit
One element regularly cited in recruiting literature as an obstacle to diversity is the way in which more impressionistic social elements of interacting with candidates can function as
biasing noise in hiring deliberations. The candidate who seems to “fit in” best may do so simply because he or she fits the dominant demographic profile of the existing faculty. There are a few steps basic strategies that can help reduce the influence of such elements in deliberations.

1. Most basically, the campus visit in general should be treated as data in supplement to the more fundamental presentation of the candidate in his or her dossier. Consequently, prior to any deliberations subsequent to campus visits, search committee members and all faculty should revisit and review again the candidates’ dossiers.

2. The more social and informal aspects of the campus visit should in most cases not exercise any substantial influence over deliberations. So many variables are in play in these parts of the visit that care should be taken to avoid comparatively evaluating candidates based on them. E.g., who attends a meal with a candidate can greatly influence whether the dinner conversation is philosophically lively or not, so allowing such elements to weigh in evaluations should be avoided.

3. Deliberations about the candidates should in general proceed in line with the above. So discussion of the candidates, whether in the search committee or in meetings of the full faculty, should generally aim to hew closely to the candidates’ work, as represented in the dossier, and performance in the formal elements of the visit. I.e., discussion of the less formal elements of the visit, particularly of more socially toned interactions, should generally be minimized. Reasonable exceptions to this may of course occur in cases where social interaction with a candidate yields information that may relevantly bear on his or her ability to contribute to the maintenance of a collegial and inclusive environment.

B. Graduate Student Feedback
Feedback from graduate students following a campus visit can aid in diversity efforts and should be actively sought with the understanding that their interactions with a candidate can sometimes have a very different flavor than the candidates’ interactions with faculty. Any apparent red flags signaled in graduate student feedback should be closely considered, though here too effort must be made to separate the social from the more substantive. While it is difficult to outline in abstraction what might constitute a red flag, in general, indications that the candidate will not be effective in department efforts to recruit and retain a diverse graduate student population are particularly salient. Here are some examples of the sort of thing that ought weigh more heavily in considering graduate student feedback:

- a candidate who seems inattentive to or impatient with graduate student questions or interaction;
- a candidate who speaks dismissively of whole subfields of philosophy;
- a candidate who demonstrates no interest in graduate student work and/or dominates conversations with them;
- a candidate who exhibits poor judgment in inquiring into the personal lives of graduate students or in treating the graduate students as subservient.

In considering graduate student feedback, there may also be elements best ignored or minimized. Graduate students are not, e.g., well positioned to evaluate candidates’ research.
They will be operating from what they see in the job talk and informal conversation rather than from the more reliable and extensive data in the dossier. This should be kept in mind. So too, judgments about “fit” of a particular candidate that are not tied to more specific considerations (such as those referenced above) may track with elements irrelevant to the search, such as social comfort or personal affinity.
Appendix A

Sample of criteria that might be included in an evaluation template:

PhD school

Evidence that PhD is completed or near completion

Evidence of teaching experience and competence (letters, teaching evals)

Satisfies the AOS

Has a relevant AOC

Evidence of research strength: letters, awards, publications, presentations

Quality of writing sample

Evidence of collegiality (e.g., participation in or organization of reading groups, special events, etc.)

Evidence of departmental service / leadership

Diversity interest candidate?

Other notes
Appendix B

Sample e-mail for contacting campus visit candidates regarding special needs or circumstances:

I am a member of the Recruiting and Diversity Committee in the OU Philosophy Department and am eager to assist in facilitating your upcoming visit to campus. The department aspires to make the on campus visit as comfortable for you as possible and recognizes that some candidates will have particular needs that bear on their comfort during this process. Please do let me know if you have any needs we can accommodate. So too, when we send the provisional schedule for the visit, please do not hesitate to let me know if any elements on it will be problematic or cause you concern. I can be reached by e-mail or by phone (405) xxx-xxxx.