Policy and Practices Regarding Faculty References

As with all other search processes, the goal is to have consistent and clear processes that support fair evaluations of candidates from a wide pool of individuals, regardless of their institutional or personal affiliation. Clear and consistent processes decrease the impact of implicit biases and practices that may unintentionally favor or harm candidates on factors unrelated to performance and potential.

1. Candidates at a certain level of evaluation (e.g., short list or campus visit list) should all receive the same level and processes of information seeking.

2. In all cases, the information that is sought from all references needs to match the job description and relate to evaluation of performance and potential for the position.

3. Follow-up reference checks should be done in accordance with the HR and ODI guidelines on appropriate questions to ask during the interview process. These guidelines can be found within the Faculty Hiring Training Modules and Resources in Canvas (found here), and the AHSS Portfolio site includes examples and discussion regarding best practices for inclusive excellence in hiring.

4. Reference checks should be documented as part of the search (either via email responses or notes from a phone call), and will need to be included with the search materials submitted to HR at the end of the search process.

5. There needs to be clear criteria for making calls. Usually, all candidates at a certain level will have references called in the same way with the same general goals. If not all candidates at a particular level will have references called, the reason for this discrepancy should be documented, including the specific goals of the calls and the rationale for selecting the individuals to be called and the candidates for whom there is a call. (Consider your comfort in explaining to a candidate that was not hired, and did not have references called, why you did not seek additional information about them; consider telling a candidate who was not hired why you called only references for him or her and not others.)

6. Candidates should be notified if calls will be made to references they have provided. For example, if the search committee wants to call individuals who have written recommendation letters, the candidate should be notified. Permission is not needed to call these individuals, but providing notice to them is a best practice.

7. If calls are to be made to individuals who are listed as references, but who did not write a letter, the candidate should be notified with sufficient time to let these individuals know the call is coming. Although permission to call these people is not required, best practices are to confirm with the candidate that these references know of the application and stage in the process.

8. Off-list references (individuals who the candidate did not ask to write a letter or did not list as a reference) may be called, but the practice should be carefully limited. Candidate permission to call off-list references is not required, but best practices are to inform them that you are doing so. If this is done with an individual in the campus visit pool, for example, it should generally be done for all members of the campus visit pool. The selection of off-list references needs to be carefully considered. What is the information that is being sought, how it is related to the job description, and why is this off-list reference the best person to provide this information? How can you get the same level of information for other candidates at this level, using similar criteria for reference selection? Some considerations for off-list references include: Do you have a process to get the same type of information for all candidates at the level of consideration? Is the selection of off-list references based on potentially biased criteria (e.g., a member of the search committee knows people who know candidate A, so they are called, but no one knows colleagues of candidate B, so no off-list references are called?).