

Thrivecast Episode 54: Best Practices for Faculty Recruitment

Trish Kritek: [00:00:00] Welcome to another episode of the University of Washington's Thrivecast, the podcast designed to help school of medicine faculty thrive. I'm Trish Kritek, and today we're joined by Dr. Sahar Rooholamini. Dr. Rooholamini is an associate professor in the Department of Pediatrics and the Assistant Dean for Faculty Recruitment and Retention, and it's really that second part that is the reason I invited Sahar to join us today.

So Sahar, first of all, thank you so much for joining us.

Sahar Rooholamini: It's so great to be here. Thanks, Trish.

Trish Kritek: It's really my pleasure and our pleasure to talk with you. This idea of having an assistant dean whose responsibility is recruitment and retention of our faculty is one that I'm super excited about. But maybe before I jump into asking you a bunch of questions, you can explain what that means.

What is your role as the assistant dean for recruitment and retention?

Sahar Rooholamini: Yeah I will say it's really exciting to be the first person in a new position because you get to really define what the role means. [00:01:00] My focus in the past six months since I started in this role has really been information gathering.

So speaking with the 31 excellent department chairs in our School of Medicine, leaders across the school, vice chairs, folks who have really been deeply engaged in the work of advancing a diverse and inclusive faculty and understanding where we succeed and where we have challenges. One of my goals is to understand best practices in recruitment and retention not just developed and practiced here at the University of Washington, but nationally, and figure out what we can do to better implement and adhere to those best practices and what kind of tools we need to be able to do that.

Trish Kritek: I really appreciate that. And I do think there's some best practices. And I think that many of the spaces in our community, we're using those, and yet we're not consistently doing it across the school.

And for those reasons, I think it's great to have you in this role. [00:02:00] I know that I know because you work with me that your title says both recruitment and retention. I'm going to focus on the recruitment part and we'll save another podcast for retention. But I think let's think about recruitment and let's talk about what are some of the best practices.

And when I think about recruitment, I think the place where we usually start is how do we have a pool that is more diverse. More representative. How do we start with that cohort that we start a search from? So are there best practices in terms of a more inclusive process for getting your pool of applicants?

Sahar Rooholamini: Absolutely. So search is a verb and a very active word. And so when I think of faculty search, it really means intentional planning about things like how the job ad is written. Who is going to do outreach and really every member of the search committee as well as the hiring unit, the department, division, research group, et cetera, activating their professional networks.

We have an [00:03:00] obligation under UW state and federal policy to do really robust outreach to generate the largest pool of qualified applicants. And so I always say, how can we get the largest number of eyes on this job ad? So within professional societies, are there support or affinity groups for those who may be underrepresented?

How can we reach them? Do we have members of our own faculty? In our community who are part of networks who can spread the message. One thing that I've learned from Professor Chad Allen, our associate vice provost for faculty advancement is flattery can go a long way. So if someone suggests someone, another institution, reaching out to them personally and saying you have been nominated as someone who would be great for this position, it's not.

Inauthentic, but it's a way to [00:04:00] really help them engage and hopefully want to find out more and apply. So I think outreaches are a huge part and we cannot be passive about it.

Trish Kritek: Yeah, I really like the part where you said search is a verb. What I heard were, potentially working through professional societies and affinity groups within those.

Connections that any of your faculty members might have and I think I heard implicit in that. It's not just the search committee. It's all the faculty who are part of helping with the outreach. And then when you have some names. Reaching out and saying, Hey, your name was not, you were nominated because of your outstanding work or something like that.

That kind of is a little bit of a catch or Hey, we're excited about you from the start. Are there any other strategies that you would espouse that are important in terms of that first phase? And I'm going to ask you about the job ad in a second. Cause I heard you mention that, but before we get to the ad, are there any other ways that we can strategize and give people yeah behaviors that they can engage in that would help broaden that pool.

Sahar Rooholamini: [00:05:00] Yes. I would add 2 things actually, Trish. The 1st is that the faculty who will be working with this new faculty member should definitely activate their networks. The search committee chair should be really clear about the way that potential applicants should be contacted. I think it can get chaotic and people may hear different information.

If multiple people are reaching out. And so 1 best practice here would be to identify a point person, for example, the search committee chair to do that outreach and then be able to give people The best, most accurate, and consistent information about how the search

process is going to go. The second thing I'm asking about other behaviors is, I know we tend to see recruitment and retention as maybe discrete events.

We have a job open. We're looking for, three faculty members, for example, or we are trying to retain this excellent faculty member. But really [00:06:00] these are ongoing activities, and they are underpinned by our everyday work interactions and climate. And so whether I know it or not, or I'm thinking about it or not, what I do every single day in my interactions and my work feeds into recruitment and retention.

And similarly, when I either virtually or actually physically step outside of the University of Washington to give a talk, to meet with people at meetings, to mentor I Work on Q. I. Projects, for example, and visit hospitals around the country. I am a representative of the University of Washington, and one thing I would recommend is when any of our faculty members at any stage of their career are giving a talk at a conference or invited speakers to.

Take time to meet with trainees, early career faculty, anyone who might be interested in just learning more about them, and to say why they're here. What keeps them at the University of Washington? [00:07:00] What do they like about being here? What are the challenges they faced, and what are the ways that they see overcoming those challenges?

It can be A 20-minute tea and coffee. It can be very informal, but really give some dimension to who you are and why you're here. And that kind of activity, though it may seem small, can lay the groundwork, maybe even years down the road for effective recruitment.

Trish Kritek: I find that super empowering because it says we're all part of the recruitment process, and we're all part of creating the climate and the culture that we want to be in and hopefully are bringing other folks into.

So I really like how you're empowering all faculty to be part of that process. I also just want to highlight the part where you said, it's good for people to do outreach, but having a single point person, maybe the. The search committee chair so that we don't give mixed messages to potential applicants seems also really important.

So both of those are great additions. Thank you for both of them. I said I was going to ask you about the job ad. I [00:08:00] feel like a lot of times that's some of the early work that a search committee does and I love to write things and I find that writing a job ad is very challenging. So do you have some advice about the best approach to writing a job ad.

Sahar Rooholamini: Yes. I'm so glad you're asking me about this because I don't think I've ever heard anyone say. With enthusiasm that they are about to undertake the writing of a job ad. But at its best, it's really an opportunity to honestly and openly communicate who we are and our enthusiasm for the person that we want to hire.

There are a few things I'll focus on. Three key qualities of a good job ad. The first that it's well informed. And what I mean by that is even before a single word is drafted for the job

ad, has the search committee talk to the people who are going to be [00:09:00] working with this faculty member? Have they talked to all the collaborators?

both locally and maybe in the larger institution regionally and really found out what the characteristics and experiences and knowledge are for this person to come and be successful. So doing your homework in terms of, what that unit is looking for. The second is that the job ad.

Communicates who we are and our values as a division, a research program, a clinical program, a school, a university, that we clearly state our mission and values, our commitments to excellence, to diversity, equity, inclusion, these are front and center, and that we express these with enthusiasm because we really do put forth resources and support to advance our mission.

These goals of ours the [00:10:00] job ad can highlight the funding opportunities, the interdisciplinary programs, all the great things that we have to attract candidates to apply and to learn more. And the third characteristic is that the job ad reflects expansive thinking and its possibilities. So we don't want to prematurely limit who might consider applying to the job.

So one recommendation is in the section where it says qualifications, to really put the minimum qualifications, whether that's degrees or years of experience. But not be too prescriptive because there may be someone from a discipline that has not been represented yet that may want to apply or with a, with an area of focus that we currently don't have faculty working on in the University of Washington.

Trish Kritek: I want to just dig in a little bit on that last one, because that's been something that I've evolved my practice on. I think I used to have a vision of who's going to be in this [00:11:00] job, and I would put into the minimum qualifications, the various things that either were the person who was in it before or the kind of how I'm already seeing that.

I think I probably learned it from you or from Chad. Less is more in the minimum qualifications. And so I wonder how you think people could go about a self-check on that. Because I think it's really easy to put in there all the things of the person who was already in that role or exactly looks like in quotes, the person who was previously in that role.

So is there a process for that? Do you have someone else read it? Do you walk away and come back to it? What do you do?

Sahar Rooholamini: Yes, that's a great point that if you are under a time crunch to submit this job ad, you're not going to be thinking expansively. You're going to want to get the tasks done.

I think those are great suggestions to. After you've had your town hall listening sessions, surveys, et cetera, to inform the job ad to perhaps have members of the committee review

it or have someone else take a look at it or step away [00:12:00] and come back to it. If there are preferences for the position, those should be under the job description, but not qualifications.

I think you want to keep the qualifications part as minimal as possible. Because those really have to then be followed exactly when going through the hiring process. But the preferences can absolutely be communicated under the position description.

Trish Kritek: I think that distinction is really helpful. And I think I often think about it as we want to be as broad and net and put our arms around as big a pool to start with.

And so if you make it a, You have to have this. You're going to exclude some people that you might not really want to exclude. And then you can later work through the folks who have stepped forward and say, okay maybe they don't have all the things that we, prefer, but sometimes you're surprised by who might walk in the door.

And I always tell this story that when I first went to hire Dr. Anne Browning to be our, at the time, associate, actually, [00:13:00] assistant dean for wellbeing at the time, I wrote the job that the person had to be a physician. I actually wrote the job, the person had to be a faculty member, and it ended up that the person who was perfect for the job was somebody who was neither of those things.

I actually had to do the search all over again, and it was valuable to do that, but it was a limitation that I created by making some minimal. Requirements that I wished I hadn't done so I have lived it. And so I would encourage everybody to I love that word expansive. I also think we often are very comfortable hiring people who fit with who's in our division, our department, our office and.

Trying to be more expansive in that way is also particularly valuable. I chuckle because a lot of the ads I've seen also talk about the beautiful Pacific Northwest and like the mountains and how you can go climbing and you can do all this stuff and I'm always wondering if like we're putting off people who are like, I'm not an outdoors person.

Should I not even look at this job? And I'm. Curious your thoughts [00:14:00] about that, because on the one hand, it's awesome to live in the Pacific Northwest, but on the other hand, not everybody wants to ski and climb and kayak.

Sahar Rooholamini: Yes. Sometimes I say, when I used to work in our wonderful UW Pedes residency program, I would say, we have outdoor enthusiasts, indoor enthusiasts, and everything in between.

And to really showcase the wide range of communities and possibilities in terms of how one builds a life here and sustains their longevity and wellness. And I think, we phrase it in different ways. Certainly, hiring for difference as opposed to sameness, not trying to quote clone ourselves.

One way that I've recently read about this is really, instead of thinking of someone being a fit for our unit, for our culture, for our group is, are they an add? So as opposed to culture fit, culture add. Can they bring experience and wisdom and perspective and [00:15:00] tools in their toolbox that we don't have and thus really help us generate new, innovative, different solutions to the challenges.

Trish Kritek: Thank you for that. I couldn't agree with you more, and I think it's a space that we need to be intentional about, because it's easy to not do that without intentionality. I have two more things I'm going to ask you about before we run out of time. The first is the idea of a rubric. So we talk about rubrics when we get initial packets, we talk about rubrics when we interview people, and I guess we could talk for a whole podcast about rubrics, but my question for you is, when are you Developing those rubrics in this process, because I feel like that might be an important part to talk about with folks.

Such an

Sahar Rooholamini: important question. There is a through line in all of the things that we're discussing Trish. So when. The listening session, town hall, surveys, et cetera, happen with [00:16:00] the faculty who are going to be working with this person, and the preferences are put into the position description, and the qualifications are written, et cetera.

That is the time that the search committee should be forming its rubric. So the mission, vision, values, the goals for this hire all inform the job ad, which then informs the assessment rubric. So there really shouldn't be surprises. If an applicant is looking at the job ad, and then they come for the interview, the questions should reflect those same criteria, and the rubric should be formed pretty early on, really at the same time that the job ad is being written, and certainly before a single interview.

Interview a single application has been received because you don't want to be creating assessment criteria or rubrics once you've actually seen the materials that [00:17:00] applicants have submitted.

Trish Kritek: Super helpful. Like the timing makes all the sense, but I think maybe the more important thing that you said is like all this work you're doing about understanding the position that you're crafting or the Folks that you're seeking for this role and that job description, job ad that you create, they're really the rubric.

It's in there and you have to tease it out and put it into a rubric, but it's not discrete. It's, as you said, a through thread, which I think is really helpful. That means that these things are all connected because they're all saying the same thing in different ways. And I also heard you say your questions that you are going to ask in an interview space are going to also reflect the same kind of values.

Perspectives priorities, et cetera. And I think maybe thinking of that as that continuum that you just described is particularly helpful for folks. Thank you.

Sahar Rooholamini: I hope so, and I hope it makes it feel less like of a laborious step when you have to [00:18:00] design the job at write the job ad and then figure out the rubric and then craft interview questions.

We will soon have a toolkit that will guide people through this and have rubrics that they can adapt across the School of Medicine and tailor to their own searches, but really, if you see it as a through line, then one thing will follow from the last step, as opposed to a de novo intensive process each step of the process.

Trish Kritek: I actually felt that it felt good and I've done this a bunch. So I like that a lot. I hope it has the same impact on people listening. And I heard that teaser about more resources are going to be on our website. So we'll look forward to that. I'm going to squeeze in 1 last question. And that is for lots of positions that we have both for new faculty hires and for leadership positions.

We have internal candidates for that role. And I feel like this is sometimes the place where we get stuck or maybe have bumps in the road, and I [00:19:00] wondered if there were just a few thoughts you could share about how do we do our best to include internal candidates and also treat them equitably with external candidates.

Sahar Rooholamini: This is a really common question and a super important 1 and 1 that. I'm happy to dive deep into with any search committee or anyone who wants to make sure that internal applicants really go through the process fairly. So there are a few best practice principles that I'll try to go through pretty quickly.

The first is confidentiality. So the integrity of any search process really hinges on the confidentiality of search committee deliberations. It's going to be challenging, especially when there are internal applicants who are going to be well known to the committee. So at the outset of any search, the search committee chair absolutely needs to set a clear expectation for the strict confidentiality of all candidate information.[00:20:00]

And everyone on the search committee should know exactly what can and can't be shared outside of the committee, and who will share that. Will updates on the search process be given by the search committee chair to candidates and faculty in the department, for example? Will there be an administrative partner who is the first point of contact?

And then during the search, if questions come up, someone asked you in the hallway, Hey, what's, when's the next step going to be? When do I find out? They need to refer all questions back to the search committee chair that exactly so that people are not receiving differential information.

Trish Kritek: Okay, so confidentiality and established patterns of communication.

Sahar Rooholamini: The second best practice principle is really fair and unbiased assessment. So we know from the research and from personal experience that internal candidates are vulnerable to the known quantity [00:21:00] bias, and they can be both advantaged and disadvantaged during that process.

And so some best practices here are some of the things we've already talked about. At the outset of the search, determine the assessment rubric before any application has been reviewed. There needs to be a discussion as a search committee about the challenge of maintaining fairness and collegiality and a discussion around what constitutes a conflict of interest is not something that I certainly discussed at length in any of the search committees that I served on years ago, but I think we need to think through at what point is a Professional or personal relationship meritorious of recusing oneself and what kind of disclosure needs to happen before we speak as search committee members on how qualified we think applicants are during the search.

1 thing that I've seen done. Is that the search committee [00:22:00] chair has a really important responsibility to make sure that folks are really focused on the criteria that were developed before any applications rolled in and not let additional criteria get added on as people deliberate and really keeping the search committee focused on those.

And if there are members of the search committee who know certain applicants better than others. To ask them to speak later or last so that those who are not as familiar with the applicants can provide their unbiased assessments. 1st,

Trish Kritek: I think a lot there, which is really great. So 1 thing that I heard is as a search committee, have a frank and open conversation about conflicts of interest and maybe how you're going to navigate that with internal candidates.

So I think having explicit conversation was 1 thing that I heard you. You say, and then acknowledging those conflicts of interest and potentially recusing yourself if there is that closeness. And I think we think of obvious things like my partner in [00:23:00] life is one of the people. I'm going to recuse myself, but there's other degrees of relationship where someone might recuse themselves from the deliberation.

And the last one I think is super practical. Have the people who know the person the best talk last. I think that's a great one that I think everybody could put into action relatively quickly. So those are really great. I feel as if you might have one last best practice on internal candidates. Did you have another one you wanted to share?

Sahar Rooholamini: This one's pretty straightforward, but if the process is, which now is often the case post COVID 19 to have a first round Zoom, then every single person who makes it to that first stage interview needs to be interviewed on Zoom, even if they are in Seattle, Washington, even if they are on campus.

So really making sure that the assessment activities are identical for all applicants at all stages.

Trish Kritek: I think that's a really good one. I have personally interviewed for a job in my office at the University of Washington in a nice [00:24:00] outfit on zoom and it was the same as somebody who was interviewing from across the country.

So I think that's a practice that we can all embrace. Sahar, you have given so much thoughtful guidance and so much wisdom to people who are listening, I know that people have learned a lot, and I feel like this is a great thing to listen right before you, if you're asked to be on a search committee, you should listen to this right before you engage in being a part of that search committee, I ask everyone at the end of our conversations if they have one last pearl that they want to share with folks, so do you have one last pearl you want to share?

Sahar Rooholamini: So I would just say, not so much a pearl, but please stay tuned. We have exciting programming in terms of education, workshops, a toolkit coming, and this is really a collaborative process, right? There are best practices out there, but just like anything else, they need to be adapted for a particular Departments, divisions, et cetera.

So please email me, reach out to me. I would love to chat. I would love to understand [00:25:00] what is top of mind for faculty and leaders at all stages of their careers on all tracks in the School of Medicine. So would love to chat with you. Please be in touch.

Trish Kritek: I think you actually shared many pearls throughout the conversation, and then you ended with opening the door for all of our faculty.

So I'm deeply appreciative of you sharing so much wisdom, like I said already, and for your willingness to collaborate with folks. And continue to iterate on these best practices as we learn and grow. So thank you so much for joining us today.

Sahar Rooholamini: You're welcome. Thank you so much.

Trish Kritek: It's been my pleasure, and I suspect it was everyone's pleasure who was listening.

I'll add, as I always do, that if you want to listen to more episodes of Thrivecast, you can find them at Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you find your podcasts. You could also find them at the UW School of Medicine faculty website at <https://faculty.uwmedicine.org>. Thanks for listening and have a great day.