

Best Practices for Faculty Search Committees: Internal Applicants

Taken directly and adapted from the [University of Washington's Handbook of Best Practices for Faculty Searches](#) (2024).

Best Practice Principle	Description	Best Practice Strategies/Actions
Confidentiality	Maintaining the confidentiality of search committee deliberations and decisions is key to upholding the integrity of the search process. This may be challenging particularly when there are internal candidates who are well-known to the committee.	<p>At the outset of the search:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search committee chair sets a clear expectation for strict confidentiality of all candidate information and committee deliberations. • Committee members should have a clear understanding of what can and cannot be shared outside of the committee, and by whom (e.g., updates on the process will be given by committee chair to candidates and faculty in the department). <p>During the search:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search committee members should refer back to the designated point person (often the committee chair) with questions from applicants regarding the search process and timeline.
Fair and unbiased assessment of candidates	Research confirms that bias can enter the assessment process at multiple points and in multiple forms. Particularly relevant to internal candidates is the “Known Quantity” Bias. Internal applicants can be both disadvantaged and advantaged during the hiring process.	<p>At the outset of the search:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine assessment criteria before any application reviews or interviews have occurred. • Openly discuss as a committee the challenge of maintaining fairness, collegiality, and confidentiality when internal applicants or other well-known applicants are part of the pool. • Discuss how committee members will define and then handle potential conflicts of interest, potential bias or perception of bias, such as a prior relationship with an applicant or with an applicant’s advisor/mentor. Discuss under what conditions members should recuse themselves from making evaluations. <p>During the search:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess all applicants based only on the criteria developed at the outset of the search (see above). • Search committee members should be accountable during discussions for staying focused on outlined assessment criteria.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One strategy during committee meetings is to allow those who do not know the applicant personally or professionally to speak first, and those who are more familiar with the applicant speak at the end, once others have had the chance to provide their input.
Timely communication	To the extent possible, internal applicants should not have an “inside advantage” during the search process in which they receive information preferentially or differently from external applicants.	<p>At the outset of the search:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign a point person—perhaps someone with authority who is not on the hiring committee (e.g., assigned administrative partner)—as a communication contact for internal applicants. <p>During the search:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If internal applicants proceed to the in-person interview stage, schedule them early in the process to avoid the appearance that they have an inside advantage by seeing external applicants’ interview days.
Efficient, effective and fair interviews	Both preliminary and subsequent/final interviews should be consistent, fair and effective in providing the search committee and applicants with the information they need to make decisions about next steps.	<p>At the outset of the search:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review search timeline and ensure that the process is clear and allows adequate time for all applicants to be scheduled for interviews. <p>During the search:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid offering “courtesy” interviews to applicants who do not meet stated criteria, including internal applicants. • Conduct all interviews in the same format and under similar conditions—whether in person, over the phone, or on Zoom—including interviews with internal candidates. • Ensure that the itineraries for internal candidates’ assessment activities—whether on campus or virtual—are identical to those of external candidates. • Inform internal candidates about all aspects of the final interview process, and be intentional about maintaining fairness, collegiality, and confidentiality.