

**Enhanced**  
**Affirmative Action Training**  
**for Academic Hiring Committees**

**YORK UNIVERSITY**

**Version: October 30 2017**

**Enhanced Affirmative Action  
For Academic Hiring Committees- Best Practices Cheat Sheet**

<p><b>Prior to Screening CVs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look to the hiring criteria.</li> <li>• Identify the interpersonal skills needed to be successful in the role. Specify how these skills will be identified.</li> <li>• Specify how you will weight the factors of Service, Teaching and Researching.</li> <li>• Is your search committee diverse enough?</li> </ul> <p><b>Prior to reading letters of recommendation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters of recommendation are often written differently for men and women.</li> <li>• How important are reference letters to your decision-making?</li> <li>• Agree as a group, what should your committee be looking for in letters?</li> <li>• Should you consider phone interviews with referees to get more data on candidates?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Considerations When Screening CVs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you evaluating each CV against the established criteria?</li> <li>• How are you considering candidates who have qualifications or experience acquired in non-traditional ways or who have taken a non-traditional career path?</li> <li>• How have you considered career interruptions? Make it EXPLICIT how you will factor in career interruptions?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not penalize candidates for the reason for the interruption. Do not assume a person with a health or medical issue or young children may not have the capacity to meet the requirements of the job.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>What makes a good "fit" at Site visits?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly define the purpose of the lunch or dinner in the hiring process.</li> <li>• Consider in advance how your assessment of "fit" might exclude people who are different than yourself, e.g., racialize or Indigenous candidates, women, etc.</li> </ul> <p>Ensure all candidates are informed of the purpose of dinner or lunch.</p>	<p><b>Considerations when Interviewing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be sensitive to different communications styles (e.g., direct versus indirect), non-verbal behaviours (e.g., eye contact, smiling, handshakes), and other differences such as accents as well as how the candidate dresses, which may impact your assessment of them.</li> <li>• Use a structured format that allows you to collect the same type of info from all candidates.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations when Hiring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go back to the rankings/ratings of applicants before you met them. Remind yourself of the objective data i.e. the demonstrated qualifications that led to your shortlisting and the needs of your hiring unit (teaching, service, research).</li> <li>• In advance of discussion, remind the group about what is the relative importance of interpersonal skills or 'good fit' versus qualifications. Explicitly discuss how being a member of a FDG or a traditionally marginalized group (e.g TGLBT2Q) could have unfairly disadvantaged a candidate during their visit.</li> <li>• After reviewing candidate qualifications and site visit performance (and the relative weighting of qualifications versus 'fit' type factors), with potential unconscious bias in mind, conduct candidate ranking.</li> </ul>	

## **Acknowledgement:**

This document uses and builds on the information contained in:

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: Best Practices for Recruitment, Hiring and Retention  
Canada Research Chairs, Government of Canada

[http://www.chairs-chaire.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best\\_practices-pratiques\\_examplaires-eng.aspx#b](http://www.chairs-chaire.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best_practices-pratiques_examplaires-eng.aspx#b)

These enhanced AA materials and slides were an Initiative led by Rebecca Pillai Riddell (Health), Claudia McPherson (Faculty Relations), Carl James (Education), Annette Boodram (Human Resources) and Tana Turner (Principal Consultant, Turner Consulting). They worked with the following working group members Kate McPherson (LAPS Faculty), John Amanatides (Lassonde Faculty), Chris Robinson (LAPS Faculty), Andrée-Ann Cyrandre (Glendon Faculty), Lykke De La Coeur (LAPS Faculty), Leah Vosko (LAPS Faculty), Marisa Sterling (Lassonde Faculty), Chun Peng (Science Faculty), James Smith (Lassonde Faculty), Andrée-Ann Cyrandre (Glendon Faculty), Barb Edwards (VPRI Staff), Josephine Tchong (REI Staff), and Michael Charles (REI Staff).

## 1. Employment Equity: A Definition<sup>1</sup>

Employment equity involves a systematic effort to achieve fairness in employment. At York, we refer to this as our Affirmative Action Program for academic hires, the terms of which are contained in our collective agreement.

First, it is necessary to eliminate systemic, structural and, so far as is possible — through education, attitudinal discrimination.

Second, no one should be denied access to employment opportunities for reasons unrelated to ability, and all should have access to the fullest opportunities to develop individual potential.

Third, in order to fulfill the second objective above, differences between people must be respected and accommodated in accordance with human rights legislation.

Finally, it is necessary to promote a climate favourable to the successful integration of members of groups designated for employment equity measures within the University.

## 2. The Principles of Equitable Hiring

### Principle 1: Hiring is based on merit

Bias-free hiring helps to ensure that all candidates are provided an opportunity to demonstrate and be judged on their job-related skills and qualifications.

As the *Guidelines for ensuring a fair and transparent recruitment and nomination process* for the Canada Research Chair notes:

The goals of excellence and equity are both compatible and mutually supporting. Sound equity practices ensure that the largest pool of qualified candidates is accessed, without affecting the integrity of the program's selection process.<sup>2</sup>

### Principle 2: Hiring is objective and job related

A bias-free hiring process helps to ensure that candidates are objectively assessed on job-related criteria.

### Principle 3: Hiring is structured

A bias-free hiring process is structured and ensures that all candidates are assessed in the same manner and against the same criteria. This structure provides candidates with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills, knowledge, and qualifications for the job.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/employment-equity/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.chairs-chaire.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/recruitment-recrutement-eng.aspx>

**Principle 4: Hiring is inclusive**

A bias-free process is inclusive and free from barriers that adversely affect qualified candidates from diverse communities, backgrounds, and identities.

In addition, this process includes people on the interview panel who are knowledgeable about equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Interview panels will ideally include people from diverse communities, backgrounds, and identities. This intentional diversity not only demonstrates inclusion, but also reduces bias in the hiring process.

## Best Practices for Academic Hiring

### 1. Reflect on your own biases

The first step to minimizing the impact of your biases in hiring is to reflect on and become aware of your own biases.

While some of our biases may be conscious, such as preferences for candidates who attended the same universities we did, there are other unconscious biases that may impact how we assess candidates. These biases may be based on various characteristics such as race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

When interviewing candidates, be sensitive to different communications styles (e.g., direct versus indirect), non-verbal behaviours (e.g., eye contact, smiling, handshakes), and other differences such as accents as well as how the candidate dresses, which may impact your assessment of them.

Because they are unconscious, these biases are likely hidden to us. Harvard's Implicit Association Test is an online tool that can help you unearth these biases.

You can access the Implicit Association Test at the following link:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

#### Resources

State of the Science: Implicit Bias Reviews, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016

Kirwan Institute, Ohio State University

<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/researchandstrategicinitiatives/implicit-bias-review/>

#### **POINT TO REMEMBER**

We tend to gravitate, hire and, promote people who are similar to us.

Our assessment of a job candidate's skills, abilities, and potential can be impacted by our conscious and unconscious beliefs about a person's race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Our biases often lead us to hire people who are similar to us, and thus we miss out on the creativity and innovation that diversity brings to the department, the field, and the university community as a whole.

## **2. Add structure and transparency to remove bias**

Adding structure and transparency to the hiring process helps remove the likelihood that your hiring decision will be affected by individual bias, personal preferences, etc. Vague, general, or undefined criteria can create opportunities for assessment of candidates to be made based on individual biases.

Ways to add structure and transparency include:

- Clearly identifying the hiring criteria such as educational attainment (e.g., Is a Ph.D. required or can you hire someone who has not yet completed their Ph.D.?), level of experience, area of specialty, etc.
- Clearly specifying the interpersonal skills needed to be successful in the role such as those needed to supervise students (e.g., empathy, listening skills, ability to give effective feedback, ability to engage with students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse learning styles, etc.);
- Weighing the factors of Service, Teaching, and Research to determine the level of importance of each area and how they will be assessed; and
- Reviewing all application packages against predetermined selection criteria.
- Clearly articulate the purpose of the social aspects of hiring, such as the lunch or dinner. Decide what role it will play in the decision-making process. Communicate the structure and purpose to all candidates in advance. Decide who will attend the dinner.

## **3. Redefine your idea of “fit”**

While you may be considering “fit” when evaluating candidates, search committees should clearly define what they mean by “fit”. Some individuals may be looking for a colleague with the same perspective and research interests with whom they can collaborate. Still others may be looking for someone with whom they will get along and can socialize. In these cases, “fit” may be used to exclude candidates from the Federal Designated Groups.

Instead, you may wish to consider “fit” in terms of:

- In what ways does this candidate’s research, teaching and service record fill gaps within the department?
- How might this candidate help the department better reflect the research interests of students from diverse communities, backgrounds, and identities?

The first step in hiring for fit is to articulate the values, norms, and practices that you are looking for. This helps members of the selection committee to avoid confusing personal similarities with fit. When fit is used to hire a homogenous workforce, the resulting lack of diversity will often stifle creativity and innovation. In addition, it further disconnects the

faculty from the increasingly diverse student population and research interests of graduate students.

#### **4. Describe duties clearly and use inclusive language in job postings**

Even if your job posting has already gone out, this is important information to pass onto the next hiring committee.

The job posting should clearly describe the position and the application process. Generally, a good job ad will:

- Use inclusive and unbiased language;
- Provide a clear description of responsibilities and expectations;
- State all the essential qualifications sought plus other key evaluation criteria;
- Provide information on university or community assets that would attract candidates from the Federal Designated Groups; and
- Contain instructions for applicants on how to apply and what information to include, such as noting career interruptions.

The posting must also contain the University's Affirmative Action (for faculty) and Employment Equity statements (non-academic).

When deciding where to post the job ad, you should identify where you are most likely to capture the attention of potential candidates from a broad background, such as discipline-specific journals and list-servs, *University Affairs*, personal networks, university websites, and the *CAUT Bulletin*. Efforts should also be made to advertise with associations or contact groups that directly serve members of the Federal Designated Groups.

In addition, the Government of Canada recommends the following best practices:<sup>3</sup>

- Ensure an equity and diversity expert reviews and approves the job posting before it is posted.
- Post all job postings publicly for a minimum of 30 days.
- Use encompassing, clear, flexible criteria for assessing excellence that fully document, recognize and reward the scholarship of teaching, professional service, outreach, mentoring and research training, and account for nontraditional areas of research and/or research outputs.
- Post only the qualifications and skills necessary for the job.
- Use inclusive, unbiased, ungendered language. Be inclusive of all genders: e.g., use the phrase “all genders” rather than stipulate “women and men,” and use the pronoun

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.chairs-chaire.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best\\_practices-pratiques\\_exemplaires-eng.aspx?pedisable=true](http://www.chairs-chaire.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best_practices-pratiques_exemplaires-eng.aspx?pedisable=true)



“them” instead of “him” and/or “her.” Avoid stereotyping, and avoid prioritizing those traits and descriptions traditionally viewed as masculine.

- Require, as part of the job criteria, a track record related to diversity. Encourage applicants to identify their strengths and experiences in increasing diversity in their previous institutional environment, and in curriculum.
- Use commitment-to-equity statements effectively:
  - Develop an equity statement that is meaningful and applies a wide lens in defining diversity. Avoid using very general statements that the institution or program supports equity or supports applications from Federal Designated Group members.
  - Limit using the adjective “qualified” in the equity statement, as all candidates must be qualified.
  - Provide information about the institution, community assets and resources, equity and diversity policies and action plan, accommodation policies, and family resources that would serve a diverse group and attract them to the institution.
- Avoid creating unnecessary barriers. For example, posting internally or having limited external distribution of the job posting inherently values seniority and those who are “in the know.” Work-related assessment criteria should also apply to comparable experience in non-academic fields (e.g., government or community-based research). Do not focus solely on a strong publication record, as many academics have strong research output in oral or community-based forums (this is especially true of some Indigenous / Aboriginal scholars who come from cultures that value oral traditions).
- Consider an invitation to candidates to offer a brief explanation of career interruptions with their package to help hiring committees better understand the reason for interruption (250 words?).

**TEST HOW EFFECTIVE YOUR JOB AD WILL BE**

The wording of the job ad — that is, the more male-coded language or female-coded language, passive language, length of sentences, etc. — influences which who it will be more appealing to.

Consider assessing your job ad at [www.textio.com](http://www.textio.com)

## **5. Include a statement that speaks to what diversity adds to the department**

Consider using part of the job ad to speak to the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion to the department. Why does your unit believe in diversity of its professoriate? This would be in addition to the blanket statement at the end about York University's commitment to diversity.

These statements could include wording such as the following:

- We are a creative and forward-thinking school that values diversity as a key driver of creativity and innovation. We are seeking new faculty interested in working in a diverse, dynamic, team-oriented, and progressive environment.
- We are committed to increasing the diversity of our staff to broaden the knowledge base and competencies across the department, driving creativity and innovation, and meeting the academic and research interests of our diverse undergraduate and graduate student population.
- With a diverse student body of 600 undergraduate students and 100 graduate students, as well as 40 faculty members from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, ours is an intellectually rich and supportive community, guided by the highest standards of scholarship with a commitment to equity and social justice. The successful candidate will be deeply committed to equity, which is reflected in their research, teaching, and interactions with colleagues and students.
- The department is an international leader in research and education. Successful candidates are expected to pursue independent, innovative research at the highest international level; to establish a strong externally funded independent research program; to have a strong commitment to teaching undergraduate and graduate students from diverse communities, backgrounds, and identities; and to contribute to the equity and inclusion goals of the department.

## **6. Self-Identification**

When asking candidates to self-identify to belonging to one of the Federal Designated Groups, keep in mind the following:

- Explain the purpose of the Self-Identification Questionnaire, how the data will be used in the selection process, privacy considerations, and the importance of self-identification for the university to have an accurate understanding of equity representation
- Be respectful of the reasons why someone may choose not to self-identify. The completion of the questionnaire is completely voluntary.
- Do not guess the gender, race, or other characteristics of a nominee. This is a violation of the individual's right to privacy and is open to error/misrepresentation

- Communicate the importance of self-identification in helping the institution meet the equity targets, and in accurately assessing the university's equity profile.

## **7. Ensure unbiased screening of application packages**

Screening application packages and identifying which candidates to invite to an interview is often where significant barriers arise. Unfortunately, at this stage, there is a tendency to:

- Judge people based on our own experience and knowledge;
- Look for like-minded candidates or those who look like us;
- Think too narrowly, which interferes with seeing how someone may be just as good but in a different way;
- Make assumptions about possible behaviour or characteristics without evidence.

When screening applications to determine which applicants to invite for an interview or job talk, you should:

- Review and evaluate each application against the previously established criteria — which should be relevant, objective, and measurable — to generate your interview shortlist.
- Ensure that you do not exclude applicants who have qualifications or experience acquired in non-traditional ways or who have taken a non-traditional career path. Diversity in background, experience, and research interests adds to the strengths of the department and the university.
- Ensure that you do not undervalue scholarship or research that is non-traditional or unconventional, outside the mainstream of the discipline, or focused on issues of gender, race, or minority status.
- Ensure that part-time and sessional faculty are not unreasonably excluded from the search process.
- If members of the Federal Designated Groups do not make it to the short-list, review the applications again to ensure that all application packages have been fairly assessed. For example, stereotypical assumptions about the importance of an uninterrupted work record may disadvantage women, persons with disabilities, or recent immigrants.
- When considering career interruptions, be sure that you do not penalize candidates for the reason for the interruption. Some employers may assume that someone who has taken time off because of a health or medical issue may not have the capacity to meet the requirements of the job. Others may feel that a woman with small children doesn't have the professional commitment, competence, or ambition to be successful, or a man who takes paternity leave is not committed to his career.

## **8. Ensure diversity on the Search Committee**

Ensuring that a Search Committee is used and is involved in all aspects of the hiring process, including reviewing CVs, interviews / job talks, etc., helps to provide different perspectives and can help to reduce the impact of individual biases on the process and the hiring decision.

Ensuring that members of the Federal Designated Groups are included on the Search Committee will also bring various perspectives to the hiring process. If your department does not have someone from a Federal Designated Group available, consider inviting someone from a related department to assist in the selection process.

## **9. Prepare the Search Committee**

All members of the Search Committee should have the same understanding of the selection criteria and their roles during the selection process. Further, they should understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality and should declare any conflicts of interest, such as personal relationships.

At this point, it is important to ensure that all panel members are available to interview all candidates. This ensures that the same group of people is able to discuss and assess all candidates.

Training or other awareness-raising activities should be conducted to sensitize Search Committee members to issues of equity and unconscious bias. The Search Committee should also be aware of any representation gaps at the university and within the department.

## **10. Assess letters of recommendation carefully**

Letters of recommendation play an important role when hiring university faculty. However, a content analysis of letters of recommendation show gender biases. This research<sup>4</sup> has shown assessors are more likely to use “grindstone” adjectives (e.g., “hardworking,” “diligent,” “conscientious”) to describe women, while they are more likely to use “stand-out” adjectives (e.g., “outstanding,” “superb,” “excellent”) to describe men. Further, these references more often comment on the personal lives of female candidates, but focus more on the CV, publications, or patents of male candidates.

While you may have worked to limit the impact of bias in the hiring process, letters of recommendation may insert bias into the process. You may want to review the CV first and rate the candidate prior to reviewing the letters of recommendation. Where the letters of recommendation changes your rating of the candidate, consider phoning the referee to further explore their recommendation. In this way, you will be able to get more detailed information about the female candidates.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://diversity.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/exploring-the-color-of-glass.pdf>  
October 30, 2017

## **11. Structure interview questions**

The purpose of the interview or job talk is to assess the extent to which candidates meet the criteria established for the position. A structured format allows you to collect the same type of information from all candidates.

## **12. Ensure compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)**

The AODA requires organizations to:

- Notify candidates about the availability of accommodation during the selection process. This can be done in the job ad and when scheduling interviews.
- Provide written materials used during the selection process in an accessible format, upon request.

Further, the selection committee should understand that they are not to consider the candidate's disability or need for accommodation when making the hiring decision.

## **13. View lunches and dinners as a mutual interview process**

While you may be using the lunches and dinners to more thoroughly assess the candidates, remember that candidates are also making decisions about your department as well as York University. During the lunch or dinner, you should allow them time to ask questions about the university and the department to ensure that this position is a good fit for them.

**POINT TO PONDER...**In non-academic circles, informal pieces (like dinners) are frowned upon and avoided. Academics face a far-different hiring task, in that they are hiring people that are expected to stay for decades, so 'getting along' or 'fit' has traditionally been involved in academic decision-making. Recognizing this contextual difference, are there ways to more formally assess a candidate's "fit" rather than through informal practices such as a lunch or dinner?

## **14. Consider career interruptions**

Because you will consider career interruptions when assessing the candidates' productivity, the job ad should ask job candidates to identify these interruptions. However, be sure that when you are making your hiring decision you do not consider the reason for the career interruption, e.g., maternity leave, paternity leave, disability, etc.

## 15. Consider all criteria when making the hiring decision

When making the hiring decision, the federal government recommends the following best practices:<sup>5</sup>

- Be mindful that the best-qualified candidates may not have the most years of experience, greatest number of publications, or largest number of academic accomplishments. For example, an applicant who took time away from work or studies for family-related matters may not have as many publications, but the substance and quality of that applicant's work may render them best qualified.
- Avoid using a candidate's "fit" as a means to discriminate or indulge personal biases. Employment and Social Development Canada allows employers to consider "fit" when evaluating candidates, but this should be used sparingly, and only as a justification for not hiring someone when the grounds are objective and reasonable (e.g., the fact that a candidate is introverted or extroverted should not be considered when assessing their suitability for the position).
- Avoid undervaluing scholarship or research that is non-traditional or unconventional; outside the mainstream of the discipline; or focused on issues of gender, race, or minority status. Search committees can acquire the help of experts to assess fields with which they are unfamiliar.
- Explicitly remind committees that the need for accommodation cannot be used as a negative in the assessment.
- Avoid averaging productive periods across non-productive periods, such as those required for parental, family, or medical leave. For example, some immigrants may have taken longer to attain senior degrees due to the difficulties of relocating and adapting to a new country and language. This should not be viewed detrimentally.
- Be aware of the limitations that a given field of study may have on publishing in top-tier, mainstream platforms and attracting research funding. If the market for the research conducted is smaller, the candidate's "numbers" may not be comparable to those for more traditional areas of research.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.chairs-chaire.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best\\_practices-pratiques\\_examplaires-eng.aspx?pedisable=true](http://www.chairs-chaire.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best_practices-pratiques_examplaires-eng.aspx?pedisable=true)