**Be Aware of Bias**

Become educated about unconscious bias. Be aware of personal biases that may affect the way you evaluate applications.

**Ask yourself these questions**

- Are women and minority candidates subject to different expectations?
- Are negative assumptions about whether women or minority candidates are “a good fit” influencing the evaluation?
- Have the accomplishments, ideas, and findings of women and minority candidates been unfairly attributed or undervalued despite contrary evidence in publications or letters of reference?
- Is the ability of women or minorities to run a group, solicit grant funds, and supervise students and staff, regardless of their gender or ethnicity, being underestimated?
- Are assumptions about possible family responsibilities negatively influencing a candidate's merit, despite evidence of productivity?
- Are candidates from other institutions (historically black universities, four-year colleges, government) being undervalued?

**References**

Cognitive Shortcuts and Unconscious Bias

The two tabletops to the right do not look identical, but they are—use a ruler to check! Because the tables are oriented differently relative to our line of sight our brains take a cognitive shortcut and “trick” us into assuming that the tabletops are different sizes. This optical illusion shows that we can make wrong assumptions and not realize it.

Similarly, research shows that we all make unconscious assumptions about people based upon our previous experience. These assumptions may be about a candidate’s physical or social characteristics relative to the particular job. This form of bias is not intentional, but affects how we judge people, and can deny a hiring institution of excellent resources. For example, search committees will more often choose to hire “Brian” over “Karen” or “Jamal”, even when their application packages are identical. It is therefore important to take care when evaluating job applications to minimize the impact of unconscious bias on candidate selection.

Evaluation

- Obtain information on bias in hiring (for example, see www.engr.washington.edu/lead/biasfilm).
- Educate the search committee about unconscious bias, as well as best practices in the search process.
- Have an agenda for the search process, as well as for each search committee meeting.
- Use a written rubric to standardize evaluation criteria and ensure that they are upheld.
- Take adequate time to review each application; minimize distractions.
- Take notes during all stages of evaluation and be prepared to justify decisions.
- Don’t depend too heavily on only one element, such as letters of recommendation or prestige of an institution.
- Recognize that letters of recommendation can show bias against women and underrepresented minorities.
- Make an inclusive “long short list” before settling on a short list of interviewees.

Interviews

- Interview more than one woman or person of color to help ensure that they are evaluated fairly.
- Structure all candidate contacts consistently. Tell candidates in advance exactly what will be required during the visit, including details of expected audience and time allotted for each activity.
- Use a core set of interview questions for all candidates.
- Give each candidate sufficient time with key decision makers and use “social time” with members of the department in the same way for each candidate.
- Avoid one-on-one interviews—it is better to have at least two interviewers meet with a candidate together.
- Collect information from various constituents in a systematic manner during and after each interview. Such note taking increases accuracy and helps to reduce bias.
- Telephone or video interviews can be conducted as a first step, particularly when there is a long list of potential candidates. Follow the rules of uniformity when conducting phone or video interviews: use the same questions for all candidates, explain the process to the candidates ahead of time, and have the same members of the search committee participate in all phone or video interviews.

BEST PRACTICES

Recruitment

- Strive to increase the representation of women and minorities in your applicant pool. Research shows that gender/ethnic assumptions are less likely to influence evaluation when women and minorities represent a larger proportion of the pool of candidates.
- Recruit to ensure that underrepresented groups comprise at least 30% of the applicant pool.
- Use language in the job announcement that encourages a diversity of applicants.