

Applicant Selection Information

What process works best?

- A process that includes people evaluating applications alone and people discussing their judgments together.
- Most people find it easiest to do a quick screening to eliminate applicants who don't have the absolute necessary qualifications, then take a more careful look through the rest. As extra insurance, you can have someone else look through the "rejects" with the sole goal of identifying people who might have been overlooked because their background isn't typical.
- Do use the criteria as a guide, to make sure you are consistent, evaluating each applicant against the same criteria (some people like to use a rating matrix, to record which applicants have which qualifications; others just take notes).
- If you have a large search committee, you may want to have two people volunteer to do the first screening, and everyone involved in more carefully evaluating the rest. If you have a large pool, it's fine to split up the applications among pairs of people, who take responsibility for presenting them to the rest of the group.

Deciding on a 'short list' (interviewees and alternates)?

- You will make better decisions if you use a search committee to discuss the applicant's qualifications, rather than just averaging numerical ratings. If you cut off debate too quickly, you waste the benefit that different perspectives can bring to the difficult task of evaluating qualifications.

How should the process be documented?

- The chair is responsible for ensuring that the group's judgment is recorded on the screening forms.
- In addition, the search committee chair should record briefly what the process was (who did what when) including decision points (e.g., "we decided to interview only people who had both the computer skills and experience with implementation of a new system".)
- All records of recruitment, including interview notes taken by all search committee members and reference check notes, will be retained for five years by the appropriate department.

How can you tell if people really have the abilities that they claim to have?

- At the application screening stage, you have to take their word for it. You may get a better idea in an interview or a reference check. If a person is hired and is unable to perform their assigned tasks because they lack the necessary qualifications, they can be released during their probationary period or through corrective action.

To what extent can one assess interpersonal skills from a written application?

- At best, you may see that an applicant has done work that probably required those skills. Interpersonal skills are best assessed through interviews and reference checks.

Does the time lapse between hiring and a person's education or job experience matter?

- It may, but only in fields that have changed significantly in recent years, and remember that the applicant may have kept him or herself current in other ways.

When is more experience better?

- It depends, and you can't always tell. More isn't always better -- twenty years of experience may mean a person is extremely knowledgeable and skilled, or it may mean the person got stuck and couldn't move out of that job.

What should be done with an "overqualified" person?

- There are good reasons why a person might choose to take a job with a lower level of responsibility than they've had in the past. If you find yourself making assumptions about the person's motivation, check them out at the interview, or call the person and make sure they understand that the job will not be at a higher level than advertised.
- Don't assume that holding a higher-level job necessarily means that a person can do lower-level tasks. You need to assess each person's qualifications for this position. If the person's application suggests that they can do the job, hire the best-qualified person.

What is "equivalent" to a college degree?

- Evidence of course work or work experience that would give the applicant the knowledge or skills you need. It's the applicant's responsibility to explain or demonstrate that s/he has equivalent knowledge or abilities.

Is it appropriate to make judgments about a person's skills from the way they fill out the application (or other application materials)?

- If the job requires good spelling and grammar and the application is filled with errors, it's appropriate to assume they don't have these skills. But don't screen out applicants for trivial reasons just to reduce the pile -- you may be missing a great employee.

How should patterns in a person's job history be evaluated?

- Be careful not to make unwarranted assumptions. People may have reasons for changing jobs or taking time between jobs that have nothing to do with how good they are as an employee. When checking references, check whether the reason for leaving stated on the application is consistent with that given by the reference.
- Progressively responsible job experience can be a positive indication of the applicant's ability to adapt to new situations and grow within a job.

When is it appropriate to favor an applicant who has done very similar work over one who has done less similar work -- e.g. to favor a person with internal experience over one with similar experience elsewhere?

- When you absolutely can't afford (in time or other resources) to let the person learn on the job, e.g. for a short casual job or one which requires complex knowledge they wouldn't otherwise have. If it's just a matter of learning something about internal procedures or systems, it's probably better to invest in the person who will be able to do the best job in the long run.

How do you evaluate transferable skills versus actual experience?

- Think through whether the experience the person has had required the same sorts of skills that you will require. Look for or try to obtain evidence of the strength of that person's skills to help you assess how successful they might be in applying those skills in your job.

What should you do when you have more information about one applicant than another? -- e.g. if one person submits a lot of extra material with their application?

- Just remember that having more evidence about a person's qualifications doesn't necessarily mean they are better qualified. You can always take steps to get more information on applicants -- e.g. with a phone call or request for more written information -- as long as you don't give anyone an unfair advantage.

How much weight should letters of reference be given?

- Letters of reference should not be taken at face value. Letters of reference, which speak to an individual's specific accomplishments, can generally be given more consideration. Remember that a letter of reference does not replace the need for a reference check, should the candidate be selected.

Do I have to consider out of town applicants?

- The location of a candidate's residence shouldn't be used as a selection criterion. If you are unable to pay travel expenses, consider doing the first interview by telephone or asking the candidate to pay his/her own travel expenses.

What if the applicant is currently making a higher salary than you are able to offer?

- If you are concerned that if selected, the applicant may not accept the position because of salary limitations, you may advise the applicant when they are contacted for an interview that you are concerned about a potential salary issue and then reiterate the salary. This allows the applicant to make the decision as to whether s/he is still interested in the position.

What if the applicant has a disability?

- It is illegal to discount an otherwise qualified individual because s/he has a disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that the University take steps to reasonably accommodate individuals with disabilities so they may perform the essential functions of a position. Keep the focus on whether the individual has the skills to perform the position.

What if a current employee applies for the job and you know more about them (positive or negative)?

- You don't need to try to forget what you know, but only reliable information (not rumors or reputation) about their actual job performance is appropriate to use.
- You should evaluate the information in terms of the qualifications established for the position.
- Keep in mind that you can also call a current or past supervisor for a reference check, just as you would someone who works outside the University. If you have concerns about a candidate who remains among your top candidates after the initial screening, consider doing pre-interview reference checks on all your top candidates.

What should units do with perceived pressure for a “courtesy interview”?

- It is important to apply the criteria selected for evaluating applicants consistently to all applicants. Interviewing someone who is not as qualified as other applicants on a ‘courtesy’ basis can raise unrealistic expectations on the part of the interviewee and may form a basis for a complaint of discrimination by other applicants. This includes internal applicants that you know are not qualified based on personal prior knowledge of the applicant’s performance.
- You may wish to offer an informal meeting with the individual to discuss their interest in the position and explain why they were not selected for an interview.

How many applicants should I select for Interview?

- The number of applicants you select for interview will depend on many things: how large to pool is, how qualified the applicants are and how much time you can make for interviews, etc. If you find that you have too many well-qualified candidates to interview, consider using tools in FAQ #21 to narrow them down to manageable number.