Search Committee Guide

INTRODUCTION

This document provides an information resource for search committees for Student Affairs positions. The Student Affairs Human Resources Manager is available to answer search committee questions.

**Auburn University Strategic Diversity Plan**

Two goals of AU's Strategic Diversity Plan (SDP) are to:

1. Create, promote, and encourage a supportive and friendly campus environment that is welcoming for, and attractive to people of all races, ethnicity, nationalities, religions, gender, sexual orientation, and those with disabilities. (SDP Goal 1)

2. Assist Auburn University in its efforts to recruit and retain minority and women faculty, students, and staff at all levels. (SDP Goal 2)
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ESTABLISH THE VACANCY POSTING

Reviewing the Position Description

At the beginning of the search process, the hiring manager should review the current Position Description with the Student Affairs Human Resources Manager and revise if necessary before posting the position with AUHR.

It is important to review the detailed Position Description carefully since it will be used throughout the hiring process. It serves as the basis for preparing the posting, conducting job interviews, explaining the job to applicants, and communicating exact job expectations to the new employee. When a position becomes vacant, it is an opportunity to re-evaluate the associated job functions: ask if the job may have changed since last advertised, research why there was turnover, and identify possible new initiatives assigned to the position.

Make sure the Position Description wording reflects any Auburn University and/or Student Affairs initiatives or other strategic initiatives appropriately, such as departmental strategic plans, and thoroughly describes job expectations. The job description includes the position’s essential duties, minimum educational and experience requirements. Preferred qualifications are not listed on the job description but can be added to the position’s posting. Significant changes to the Position Description may impact the appropriateness of the position’s title, salary, or minimum qualifications. A change to the position’s title will require a job evaluation and approval by the Classification and Compensation Office. For guidance on the Position Description process as well as the job analysis process, contact the Student Affairs Human Resources Manager.

Once the position description is acceptable and updated, if necessary, this will be used to advertise the job through the applicant tracking system administered through Auburn University Human Resources.

ESTABLISH THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

Identifying Search Committee Members

Search committees are often used for positions within the division that require major decision-making responsibilities, or positions of unique titles and duties. Bringing a wide spectrum of backgrounds to such a search committee can serve to better identify the most qualified person for the position.

For any jobs in a grade 33 and below establishing a committee is optional and this decision is determined by the supervisor of the job.

For jobs in a grade 34 and above, a committee is required and should follow the guidelines presented below.

Some things to consider when appointing a committee might include:

- The committee should be diverse in race and gender.
- The committee should be broadly representative of the staff/students who will work with this position to accomplish the associated tasks. Committee members should be knowledgeable of position duties, represent different experience levels, and be seen as stakeholders in the decision.
- Ask the supervisors of potential committee members prior to ensure that schedules are allowable for the time required. A student(s) may also be on a committee when appropriate.
- Committee members should exhibit good judgment. Appoint people with personal integrity, independence of view, and devotion to institutional goals. Avoid anyone known to be incapable of maintaining confidentiality.
- Most committees have 4-6 members. A larger committee (7-9 members or more) is sometimes used for positions of sweeping responsibilities and cross over multiple departments.
• The person appointed as chair of the committee should have experience with search committee procedures. Duties will include working collaboratively to monitor committee meetings/interviews, and reporting proceedings to the Student Affairs Human Resources Manager as necessary.

• Under the direction of the committee chair a designated committee member, or administrative support employee should schedule meetings/interviews and correspond with applicants as needed.

• Detailed communication should be provided to the search committee including: the position and job description, outline of committee tasks and related time of completion, scale of the search, evaluation tools, and the defined scope of the committee decision (advisory/decision making).

• Committee chairs should create job related questions for the interview ensuring that all candidates are asked the same questions.

• Committee members should be made aware of the legal and regulatory requirements that surround their work. The Student Affairs Human Resources Manager can serve as a resource for this, can serve as a committee member, or in an ex-officio (non-voting) capacity to provide this assistance.

• Auburn University Confidential Agreement for Search Committee Members should be distributed and signed during the first meeting.

• In addition, copies of this search committee hiring guide and other relevant federal, state, and university employment guidelines should be made available to committee members.
RECRUIT QUALIFIED APPLICANTS

Auburn University Job Posting Site

All staff positions are posted online at https://www.auemployment.com/ for a minimum of 5 calendar days if internal only (internal posting can be posted with approval of the Affirmative Action Department) and 10 calendar days for externally posted jobs, but can currently be listed for a maximum of 6 months. At the end of the 6 months, Auburn University Human Resource Employment Services staff normally notifies the Student Affairs Human Resources Manager that the posting will be placed on hold or cancelled and no new applications will be accepted. A new posting is normally required to continue listing the vacancy and create a new applicant pool. The online employment services application system allows your posting to be viewed 24/7 around the world by anyone with access to a computer and the Internet. For specific positions, you may find it beneficial to supplement with additional advertising.

Broad Scale Advertising

Hiring departments may decide to place advertisements in designated newspapers and academic journals. These advertisements should mirror the posting requirements, including salary range, and state where the position is posted. All applicants should be directed to the online application process at https://www.auemployment.com/ and refer to the posting job number assigned to the position. All advertising must include required non-discrimination statements. Additional advertisements could come with an additional cost. This advertisement fee model is updated annually and provided by Auburn University Human Resources.

Increasing Diversity in your Applicant Pool

To enlarge the pool of candidates, the department head and search committee should advertise in publications and/or on Internet sites that will reach a diverse population, as well as make a special effort to attract underutilized groups. Advertising in appropriate publications, contacting relevant organizations, and listing on related Internet sites will not only help to enlarge the pool of candidates but will also convey the commitment of a department and an institution to recruiting diversity. Making direct contact with professional organizations and colleagues is an effective method of expanding your search. The informal “word-of-mouth” approach to recruitment is one of the most successful practices for identifying candidates. The following activities are recommended for specific searches, as well as for possible ongoing endeavors:

1. Establish a working relationship with similar departments or institutions with substantial numbers of diverse employees.
2. Consider encouraging candidates from diverse groups who have held part-time or temporary positions in your department to apply.
3. Inform alumni publications where diverse groups are well represented of available positions with Auburn University.

Acknowledging Receipt of Applications

Applicants are made aware immediately upon the closing of the position of their online application and whether their application has been referred to the hiring department. The process of filling positions should begin soon after the position closes to increase the chances of interviewing potential finalists.
IDENTIFY THE MOST QUALIFIED

Evaluating all Applications and Supporting Documentation

The search committee should select the individual that best meets the identified job criteria. A hiring matrix is an excellent way for the committee to identify the most qualified applicants to interview. It helps to better evaluate each applicant’s knowledge, skills, and abilities, and judge them in the context of the job requirements. This approach makes it easier for search committee members to score responses with greater reliability. A matrix for applicants can be obtained from the Student Affairs Human Resources Manager.

The hiring manager has the option of asking additional job-related questions to all applicants as part of the application process. These questions are added when the posting is posted and the questions/answers appear on each referred application. These questions can be an excellent way of identifying applicant education and related experience.

Some tips to help you detect falsifications/exaggerations on resumes and supporting documentation:

- Carefully note the order of the material given on the resume. What is given up-front is generally what the applicant wishes to emphasize, but what is hidden below will be more revealing.
- Concentrate on the most important points in the applicant’s resume. Diverting attention to too many insignificant details draws focus away from key areas.
- Look for conflicting details or overlapping dates.
- Look for gaps in dates. It is common for applicants who wish to cover something up to try to omit it.

Depending on the level of position, search committees may want to provide candidates who are not being considered with a communication regarding their status as no longer under consideration. A sample letter to interviewed candidates not being considered for an interview is attached at the end of this guide. The committee should wait until the process is complete and a hire has been finalized, and correspond with all interviewed candidates who were not chosen.
PLAN AND CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW

Preparing for the Interview

Interviewing and selecting the right person is an important responsibility of a search committee in ensuring the university reaches its goals. When interviewers rely on their intuition as a basis for making employment recommendations, the results may generate unreliable information, lead to poor selection decisions, and establish grounds for a legal challenge for discrimination. In contrast, a well-planned interview process provides evidence about the applicant’s ability to perform a job.

To conduct interviews that can predict job performance, a search committee should prepare for the interview by conducting a thorough review of job requirements, create a series of job-related interview questions, and seek job-related work examples in the interview. The sample interview questions provided at the end of this document can be tailored and used in any situation. This list of questions is not exhaustive. The set of questions and anticipated answers should be written and reviewed by the search committee in preparation for the interviews. Although all applicants are asked the same set of questions, the search committee members may ask more specific questions based on responses to initial questions or to clarify relevant work experience and education identified on the applicant’s employment application or resume.

If the search committee plans to use team or panel interviews, the same team or panel should be present during each interview to ensure consistent treatment of all applicants and consistent interpretation of the information obtained during the interview. Team or panel interviews are optional and are recommended for use when a position spans over more than one department and has sweeping responsibility.

If a committee decides to conduct a phone interview as a screening step or because one or more of the applicants reside outside the local area, each applicant under consideration must be treated in the same manner. All applicants under consideration must be invited to participate in a telephone interview for consistency and fairness.

General Interview Checklist

The search committee should do the following:

1. Prepare interview questions and expected answers based on job duties and requirements. The entire committee should review the questions prior to the first interview. Avoid asking illegal questions. Examples of these can be found at the end of this guide.

2. Arrange for an appropriate interviewing environment that is free from interruptions and is comfortable.

3. Explain the purpose to the applicant and set the agenda.

4. Gather measurable, predictive information based on the essential duties of the job. The key to controlling the interview is careful listening combined with good questions. Search committee members need to both encourage and guide the applicant’s sharing of facts. A common error of ineffective interviewers is to concentrate exclusively on the questions they intended to ask and not hear what the applicant is saying. Interviewers ideally should not talk more than 20 percent of the time. Ask open-ended questions to encourage thorough job-related answers, then listen and evaluate.

5. Take notes regarding the applicant’s responses. Taking notes helps ensure accuracy and often reassures applicants that the interviewer is interested in them as individuals. Prior to beginning the interview, the interviewer should explain to the applicants that notes will be taken and why. Notes should be job-related and should not contain discriminatory information.
6. Describe the job and organization to the interviewee. A detailed description of the job **should only be given at the close of the interview.** Describing the job earlier in the process may inadvertently coach applicants on how they should answer questions. When describing the job, the interviewer should provide sufficient positive and negative facts about the position, department, promotional opportunities, etc., to enable the applicant to make an intelligent decision about the job. However, the interviewer should avoid comments that might mislead the interviewee into misinterpreting the information as a promise of employment or future benefits.

7. Give applicants a chance to ask questions about the job and performance expectations.

8. Close the interview. Let applicants know what to anticipate as the next step. For example, “We still have several more interviews to conduct, which we anticipate completing next week. We will probably make a recommendation by the end of the following week.” This step will help relax applicants by letting them know what to expect. It also enables the search committee to control the interview by providing a “road map”.

9. Each interview should be scored or explained and placed in a numerical order for each candidate. The score can be derived from each committee member providing separate scores or the committee can score each interview together.

10. Interview scores are placed in the hiring matrix, if used. The average or totaled interview scores will be added to the application score in the hiring matrix to provide a total score for each applicant. The search committee members can then review and discuss the total scores of the applicants to identify the top candidates, and determine next steps for the process.

11. Identify whether a second interview is desired, document the questions, then schedule and process the interview. Feedback from second interviews should be documented if it is to be used in the hiring decision.

**Determining Whom to Hire**

When making the final hiring decision, the committee should use notes taken, and/or a weighted job-related criteria. Gathering, integrating, and evaluating interview information includes identifying applicants’ specific knowledge, skills, and abilities, and judging them in the context of the job requirements. Interview evaluations, in conjunction with other information gathered during the selection process (e.g., reference checks, application responses, resume, and correspondence), should form the basis for the final decision. The committee should select the individual that best meets the identified job criteria. Search committee members should be sure to note whether any hiring preferences are applicable to the final candidates, such as the veteran’s preference as indicated on the employment application.
MAKE THE JOB OFFER

Finalizing a Salary

Following a selection, the search committee chair or hiring manager should notify the Student Affairs Human Resources Manager of the names of individuals interviewed and the selected candidate. AU Human Resources will provide a salary referral that accounts for the selected candidate's education level, experience, and certifications. The Student Affairs Human Resources Manager will meet with the supervisor of the position to discuss an agreed to salary.

Checking References

We suggest at least 2 telephone references be documented for the applicant selected. If the person giving the reference says the candidate would not be eligible for rehire, you may want to consider removing that candidate from further consideration.

- The applicant's electronic signature at the end of the Auburn University Application for Employment gives consent for reference checks with previous employers. Do not put anyone's current job in jeopardy. We recommend the committee delay contacting the applicant's current employer until it is determined that the applicant is a finalist for the position and the salary has been approved.
- Search committee members should not raise any questions that fall under the EEO discriminatory practice areas, such as questions regarding sex, race, color, national origin, age, disability, religion or any other legally protected area. The same questions should be asked for all references.
- If an unsatisfactory reference is received, he or she should contact another reference.
- Should phone numbers or contact persons not be specified on the application or resume, the hiring manager should ask the applicant to provide the reference.
- Search committee members should not tell the applicant or the reference source(s) that he or she is conducting reference checks because the applicant has "been selected" for the position. He or she should only indicate that the applicant is "being considered".
- Search committee members should not accept references from friends, relatives, or persons who have not had the opportunity to observe job-related performance.
- Search committee members should be careful to avoid seeking or using information from social media websites or general internet searches of candidates. Such sources may disclose information that is not true, inappropriate or illegal for consideration.
- A previous employer may, on occasion, have rules regarding supplying references and may provide only the position title, dates of employment, salary, and eligibility for rehire. If this is found to be true, the search committee member should document this.
- Search committee members should document identified problem areas or responses and determine if this is a disqualifier for the job.

Offering the Job

Once the salary is approved and references have been verified and are considered satisfactory then the selected candidate can be verbally notified that they are being offered the job with the approved salary. Notification may be done verbally, but the applicant should also receive an official written offer letter confirming the salary, job title, and start date.
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS

As a member of the Search Committee for the position of at Auburn University, I understand that the ultimate success of our endeavor and the integrity of the University depend on the search being conducted in an impartial, ethical and professional manner. In consideration of my designation as a member of this Search Committee, I hereby agree to the following:

1. I understand that this Search Committee’s role is determined by the hiring supervisor, who has the ultimate authority to recommend the Finalist candidate through management channels.

2. As a member of the Search Committee, I accept the responsibility of conducting myself in a professional manner as a representative of my department and Auburn University.

3. I acknowledge that all information concerning the candidate pool is extremely confidential and agree to permanently protect the identity of individuals who have expressed interest in exploring this opportunity, including individual qualifications and merits.

4. I agree to maintain absolute confidentiality about all discussions of the Search Committee, both during the search process and after its completion. I understand that any breach in confidentiality could result in considerable damage to the reputations and/or livelihoods of the candidates, the members of the Search Committee and the University.

5. I agree that any and all information in the form of papers, books, files, documents, electronic communications, or in any other form or format, which comes into my possession and relates to the work of the Search Committee, is confidential other than information that is or becomes publicly known other than through my disclosure.

6. I acknowledge that only the Chair of the Search Committee or designee is authorized to speak on behalf of the Search Committee.

7. Upon the request of the Chair of the Search Committee, I agree that I will return or destroy all materials which I have received.

8. I understand that I may be removed from the Search Committee if I breach any of these confidentiality obligations or fail to act in a professional manner. I also understand that should I be removed all the terms of this agreement are still applicable and binding upon the termination of the committee.

I have read, understand and agree to abide by all of the terms of this Confidentiality Agreement, as a condition of my service as a member of the Search Committee.

Signed __________________________ Date __________________________
SAMPLE OFFER LETTERS
*Note that additional wording must be included in the offer letter for hiring of foreign nationals related to work authorization

CONTINUING TERM APPOINTMENTS

DATE
[Employee name]
[Employee address]

Dear :

I am pleased to extend you an offer for the [POSITION/TITLE NAME] in the Department of [DEPARTMENT NAME]. This offer includes an [ANNUALIZED SALARY] paid on a [PAY SCHEDULE TYPE] of [INDICATE MONTHLY OR BI-WEEKLY RATE]. Upon acceptance, your date of employment will begin on [HIRE DATE]. Please report to our office located at [ENTER THE OFFICE LOCATION] on the scheduled date.

This offer of employment is contingent upon verification of the appropriate identity and employment eligibility documentation on the Form I-9, as required by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Upon acceptance, you will be provided additional information about the I-9 form, other required new hire documents, and a New Employee Orientation session. During this session, you will be provided information regarding Auburn University Policies and Procedures and Benefits.

Prior to the new employee orientation session, you may visit http://www.auburn.edu/administration/business_office/payroll/benefits.html for detailed information regarding benefits and eligibility.

This is an administrative professional/staff position and your first three months are considered probationary and you will be reviewed at that time. Your probationary period may be extended up to an additional three months. Your supervisor will provide information to you regarding your expectations.

In closing, I would like to personally welcome you to our institution, and I am looking forward to your contributions to the department and university.

Sincerely,
Department Head/Chair

By signing below, I understand that this appointment is subject to Auburn University’s Policies and Procedures. This offer does not constitute an expressed or implied contract of employment. Any provision contained herein may be modified and/or revoked without reason, in accordance with AU Policies and Procedures. Auburn University is an at-will employer; this document does not constitute a guarantee of continuing employment for any term.

___________________________________________ ______________________________
Name Date
SAMPLE INTERVIEWQUESTIONS

Typically, a wide variety of questions can be used to gain information about a candidate’s ability to perform a job. The search committee members should use these questions as a guide to develop measurable questions that target specific job skill requirements.

1. Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
2. Give an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task, because you did not have enough information. What did you do?
3. Tell me about a time when you had to use your verbal communication skills in order to get a point across that was important to you.
4. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
5. Can you tell me about a job experience in which you had to speak up and tell other people what you thought or felt?
6. Give me an example of when you felt you were able to build motivation in your coworkers or subordinates.
7. Tell about a specific occasion when you conformed to policy even thought you did not agree with it.
8. Describe a situation in which you felt it necessary to be very attentive and vigilant to your environment.
9. Give an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem, and then tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
10. Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.
11. Describe the most significant document, report, or presentation that you have completed.
12. Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
13. Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate successfully with another person, even when that individual may not have personally liked you.
14. Describe a situation in which you were able to “read” another person effectively and guide your action by your understanding of his/her individual needs or values.
15. In this position, how do you think you might be able to support the university’s philosophy toward diversity?
16. What did you do in your last job in order to be effective with your organization and planning? Be specific.
17. Describe the most creative work-related project you have completed.
18. Describe a time when you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
19. Give me an example of a time when you had to analyze another person or a situation carefully in order to be effective in guiding your action or decision.
20. What did you do in your last job to contribute toward a teamwork environment? Be specific.
21. Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job and tell me how you solved it.
22. Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in a desired direction.
23. Tell me about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
24. Describe a situation in which others within your organization depended on you.
25. Describe your most recent group effort.
26. Describe the worst customer or co-worker you have ever had and tell me how you dealt with him/her.
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS to AVOID:
You cannot ask any question during an interview that relates to an applicant’s race, color, religion, age, gender, national origin, or disability. The following questions are merely a few of the questions that you should not ask:

- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- What is your birth date?
- Where were you born?
- How old are you?
- Are you married?
- Do you have a disability?
- What is your spouse’s name?
- Do you have any children?
- What is your maiden name?
- Do you have any children?
- Do you have child-care arrangements?
- What is your race or ethnic origin?
- Which church do you attend?
- What is your religion?

Tips for Conducting the Interview

Before the Interview
- Book an appropriate location
- Review job description
- Ask everyone to sign the confidentiality agreement
- Draft and agree upon the interview questions to be asked
  - Questions can be situational, behavioral, and/or informational
- Agree on the format for the interview

During the Interview
- Introduce the search committee members
- Describe the format of the interview
- Let the candidate do most of the talking
- Keep the interview on track
- Observe nonverbal behaviors
- Take notes
- Leave plenty of time for the candidate to ask the committee questions
- Describe the remainder of the search process and the time it will take

Search Committee Information
- Recruitment/Overview (user/password info to review applications)
- Job Description
- Confidentiality agreement
- Sample allowable interview questions
- Sample non-allowable interview questions
- Rating matrix (optional)