DISRUPTING COMMON SHORTCUTS IN THE FACULTY SEARCH PROCESS

Faculty searches are deliberative, labor-intensive processes. We often resort to short cuts, which can lead to hasty or biased judgments, especially regarding members of under-represented groups. This can thwart our goal of recruiting the best hire. The most achievable solution is to become conscious of our short cuts (see below) so that we might avoid them. And, when search committee members converse, ask for concrete examples and refer to the position description and shared understandings of what the department is looking for. Here are some common shortcuts:

- **Cloning** – Replicating oneself by hiring someone with similar attributes or background. Undervaluing a candidate's research because it is not familiar; expecting candidates to resemble someone whom the search committee is replacing. Over time, cloning limits the scope and breadth of the department's approaches and perspectives in research, teaching, and service.
- **Snap Judgments** – Making judgments about the candidate with insufficient evidence. Dismissing a candidate for minor reasons or prematurely labeling a candidate "the best" and ignoring positive attributes of the other candidates. Often occurs when the hiring process feels rushed.
- **Good Fit/Bad Fit** – "Fit" is a common term that is best used when attached to the explicit duties/profile in the position description and programmatic needs of the department. Otherwise, it can be about how comfortable and culturally at ease one feels.
- **Raising-the-Bar** – Increasing qualifications for certain candidates because their competency doesn't strike committee members as trustworthy. Downgrading qualifications based on accent, dress, demeanor, etc. In short, uneven expectations based on a candidate's social identity.

- **Negative/Positive Stereotypes** – Characterized by presumptions of competence/incompetence based on identity. The work of women and underrepresented minorities is often scrutinized more than majority faculty. Dominant group members often receive the benefit of the doubt: negative attributes glossed over, positive attributes amplified.
- **Euphemisms:**
  - "Visionary": "He has vision" or "She lacks vision." Members of dominant groups are often evaluated based on perceived potential whereas underrepresented groups are judged on their accomplishments and their track record only.
  - "Star": "She's clearly a rock star" or "He's not a star." Used when the speaker is an infatuated fan of the candidate under consideration. When you hear it, ask the speaker to explain the term and support if with evidence.
  - "Committed," "Single-minded," or "Hard-worker": Be mindful of terms that might cloak a bias against care-givers or other family commitments.
- **Wishful Thinking** – Insisting racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice no longer exist when it comes up in search committee conversations.

Adapted from JoAnn Moody, *Rising Above Cognitive Errors: Guidelines to Improve Faculty Searches Evaluations and Decision-Making* (2010)

WE AREN'T ALONE! SIMMONS'S EFFORTS ARE PART OF A LONG, NATION-WIDE CONVERSATION.

Resources on Faculty Hiring and Diversity

Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012)

Jeffrey L. Buller, *Best Practices in Faculty Evaluation: A Practical Guide for Academic Leaders* (2012)

JoAnn Moody, *Rising Above Cognitive Errors: Guidelines to Improve Faculty Searches, Evaluations, Decision Making* (2010); *Faculty Diversity: Removing the Barriers*, 2nd ed. (2013)

Daryl G. Smith, *Diversity's Promise for Higher Education: Making It Work*, 2nd ed. (2015)

Lauren A. Vicker & Harriette J. Royer, *The Complete Academic Search Manual: A Systematic Approach to Successful and Inclusive Hiring* (2006)

How some other institutions address implicit bias

Cornell University: Cornell Interactive Theater Ensemble (CITE)
https://www.hr.cornell.edu/life/career/cite.html

Harvard University, Faculty Development and Diversity, "Best Practices for Conducting Faculty Searches" (2016)

University of Oregon: Best Practices in Faculty Hiring
http://facultyhiring.uoregon.edu/special-concerns/

University of Washington, "Best Practices for Faculty Searches" + online toolkit