

## DRAFTING INCLUSIVE JOB APPLICATIONS

### About The Program

An inclusive job description captures as many applicants in the hiring pool as possible, but also provides the search committee with valuable insight for how to select within the pool to hire the applicant with the best job performance. There are four things that departments can do to make their job descriptions more inclusive: (1) limit qualifications to the essential functions, (2) reduce ambiguity in priority of qualifications and preferences, (3) use gender-neutral language, (4) include a department mission statement, (5) encourage applicants to demonstrate cultural competency.

### Limit qualifications to essential functions

Search committees should evaluate the qualifications for the position prior to drafting the job application. Job descriptions should be written broadly and with a focus on the “essential functions” of the position. Essential functions is sort of a term of art from disability discrimination law. Essential functions are core functions that the employee must perform to be valuable to the company in their role. Following are some barriers to diversity and equal opportunity that can be created with a job description that lists competencies as qualifications, abilities, or requirements rather than preferences. The first barrier this presents to hiring is that applicants from marginalized communities may not apply unless they meet all qualifications or abilities requested for the position. This is especially the case with persons with disabilities. For instance, if a job description for a lecturer position states, “Must be able to lift 50 pounds overhead.” Although a person with a disability may still apply and request a reasonable accommodation, the placement of this as a physical requirement suggests it is an essential function of the position. In that context, the prospective applicant with a disability may believe that the requirement will

not be waived. Even if a candidate had been selected with this qualification, it could have come at an enormous cost to the employer in terms of discouraging candidates with higher competencies in core functions. Although some applicants may be undeterred by these additional qualifications, these undeterred applicants will likely be those who enjoy a privileged status in the existing community. To the extent these additional criteria are listed, they should be listed in an expansive list of preferences rather than qualifications. This makes these additional qualifications less of a deterrent because it gives people from varied experiences make their case to prove their value.

### Reduce Ambiguity

Even after it has differentiated qualifications from preferences, the search should rank each qualification and preference. If the job description is ambiguous regarding the importance of the underlying qualifications, then the search committee may implicitly insert its bias to fill in gaps (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005). If the search committee defines the characteristics it seeks in the successful candidate before interviewing candidates, then it is much less susceptible to being influenced by bias.

### Reduce gendered language

The search committee should be not to describe the position in a way that uses terms that have historically been used in gender stereotyping. Research has shown that the use of words that have historically been used to stereotype masculine behaviors discourage persons who identify as women from applying (Friesen, Gaucher, Kay, 2011). This is because use of these words suggests a high percentage of persons who identify as men and that those who are not men do not belong. In this context, the search committee should

avoid using the following words to describe the successful candidate in the job description: active, adventurous, aggressive, ambitious, analyzing, assertive, athletic, autonomous, boasting, challenging, competitive, confident, courage, decisive, determining, dominant, forceful, greedy, headstrong, hierarchical, hostile, impulsive, independent, individualistic, intellectual, leader, logic, objective, opinion, outspoken, persist, principles, reckless, stubborn, superior, self-confidence, self-sufficient, and self-reliant (Friesen, Gaucher, Kay, 2011).

### Include a diversity mission statement

Marginalized communities may be seeking a community that affirmatively states it is working on creating a diverse, inclusive and welcoming department (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009). Some departments have already developed their own diversity and inclusion statements at Iowa State University. An example of a model statement is used by the College of Veterinary Medicine:

In recognition of the importance and value of diversity in everything we do, Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine is committed to actively promoting diversity and inclusion that embraces the value of the many areas of the veterinary medical profession, and the value of varied cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientations, ages, religions, physical and mental abilities of our students, faculty and staff.

### Encourage applicants to demonstrate cultural competency

The job description should emphasize a preference for the successful applicant to have the ability to help the department and Iowa State University create an inclusive climate. For instance, a job description could state, "Candidates with

experience interacting with diverse populations are preferred."

### References

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Friesen, J., Gaucher, D., Kay, A. C. (2011). Evidence that Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0022530.

Stewart, A. J., Valian, V., Recruiting Diverse and Excellent New Faculty, (July 19, 2018), <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/07/19/advice-deans-department-heads-and-search-committees-recruiting-diverse-faculty>.

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Uhlmann, E. L., Cohen, G., L. (2005). Constructed Criteria: Redefining Merit to Justify Discrimination. *Psychological Science*, 16, 474 – 480.



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