

“Golden Rules” for a Successful Faculty Search Process
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When conducting national searches for tenure-track faculty positions, our goal is hire a person we are certain will be an outstanding teacher, a superb and productive scholar, and a congenial colleague who will be an exemplary university citizen. In the process, we work hard to be sure that the communication and participation of our faculty members is open and healthy. And, we strongly share a commitment to making the process positive and constructive for every candidate who applies for our position.

Here are some of the key elements we have found to be extremely valuable in achieving the objectives noted above:

1. **Always be guided by the “Golden Rule” of treating other people as you would like to be treated.** This applies not only to the candidates, but also to people providing letters of recommendation and other materials for candidates, and our own faculty members, staff, and students. We have all been students, candidates for faculty positions, people writing letters of recommendation, etc. Continually approaching steps in the process with a commitment to treat other people as we would hope to be treated were we in their position contributes in multiple ways to strengthening relationships and fostering goodwill. More than 100 teacher-scholars who seek the position will not be successful, but we want each person both to know we value their interest in our program and to come away with a very positive impression of OU.
2. **When the position announcement is finalized, utilize the networks of scholars and colleagues to begin the search process.** By contacting colleagues at universities with graduate programs in the field related to the search, you both help get the word out about the position and often receive information on some potentially strong candidates. While most people looking for jobs will find the published announcements, being proactive with others in your field can help elevate a hiring process to an active search process.
3. **Endeavor to interview as many candidates as possible.** Inevitably, when one narrows the list of 120-150 applicants down to 10 or so, there are two or three or four who look extremely strong and two or three or four others who on paper don't quite make the “intermediate” list. Expanding the list of interviews at the American Academy of Religion or AAR (or by phone in some instances) very frequently yields substantial benefits. It is often the case that one or

more of the top candidates on paper is not nearly as strong in the 40-minute interview with six or seven of our faculty members gathered at the AAR. And, it is often the case that one of those who just barely made the interview list does a superb job in the interview and is subsequently invited to campus for the "short list" interviews. Having chaired or participated in many faculty searches over the past three decades, it is clear that expanding the number of intermediate list interviews is far from the norm. It does require a good deal of time and commitment from the faculty. But, it can yield great benefits for the search. And, it also results in several more teacher-scholars becoming personally familiar with our faculty and the University of Oklahoma.

4. **Include as many permanent faculty members as possible in the interviews with candidates on the intermediate list.** We interview almost all "intermediate" candidates at the AAR in November. We are fortunate since this annual meeting occurs on the Saturday through Tuesday before Thanksgiving and virtually all of our internal RELS faculty present papers and participate actively each year. Thus, we have a good schedule and wide participation of the faculty. Normally six people will interview candidates at the AAR. Having a larger interview team is very helpful when narrowing the intermediate list to the final three people to be invited to campus.
5. **Have a clear plan for the interviews and keep on schedule so that everyone interviewed has equal time and opportunity to address key questions as well as ask questions about OU and/or the department.** Prior to the AAR interviews, every faculty member is expected to be thoroughly familiar with the dossiers of each candidate. In the interviews, we have an established plan for how we begin the conversation and who will ask the first question about research interests and teaching. We provide as much information about the RELS program and OU as we can, making sure the candidates understand we have a very high bar in terms of teaching, scholarly productivity, and university and professional service. Knowing such interviews are stressful as people seek jobs in a tight market, we endeavor to punctuate the process with humor and personal touches drawn from each candidate's dossier.
6. **Seek to be as open and transparent as possible with the candidates.** We let them know the time frame we plan to follow and promise to let them know when the decisions are made about campus interviews. When that narrowing process occurs, I (as chair of the search and/or director of the program) communicate directly with each person we've interviewed. We want them to know that they are not out of the search, but the strong probability is that one of the

people coming to campus will be hired. I underscore, of course, how many truly outstanding candidates applied and how difficult it has been to narrow the list to three for campus interviews when many more are also so strong. Time after time, we hear from candidates who don't make the final three how different and more positive their experience with OU has been. Many institutions it seems simply go silent and candidates know nothing for weeks (unless they happen to see items posted online by candidates sharing information on where they are going for interviews). This is one of the key points where remembering and practicing the Golden Rule makes a huge and very positive impression.

7. **Prepare a thorough schedule for the campus visit/interview process.** Our candidates are in Norman for a full day and a half. Typically, the candidate will arrive late afternoon on a Sunday with a full schedule beginning on Monday morning and concluding by lunch on Tuesday. Unless there is a major conflict, the Chair/Director personally picks up the candidates at the airport take provides a tour of Norman and the campus before a casual meal (Charleston's works nicely as a restaurant that allows for everything from a salad and light fare to steak or seafood.) Candidates meet with the chair (at the beginning and end of their visit), all faculty members (many individually, many in groups of three or four over dinner or lunch), a group of students (8-10 is a good number), and an Assoc. Dean in CAS. We have each candidate teach a regular class (the class and focus are worked out well in advance with the candidates) as well as do a "job talk" for the RELS faculty that highlights their research foci and goals. We invite and encourage participation (in the job talk and at meals) by faculty colleagues who are in related fields (e.g., faculty with specialization in Asian Studies will be invited to participate and provide feedback for a candidate in Hindu or Buddhist studies). In addition, we seek to provide reasonable breaks so candidates can catch their breath and relax a little here and there during an intense two days on campus. We allow for some flexibility in the schedule so someone who shows particular interest in the Fred Jones or Sam Noble Museums will have an opportunity to visit. We include campus tours and driving tours around Norman as well.
8. **Be as candid and transparent as possible when dealing with the finalists after the faculty has ranked them and you receive the green light to negotiate with the candidate(s).** Frequently, the finalists will have one or more additional campus interviews. In our experience, most will self-disclose about other interviews or timetable they are dealing with at other universities. Within reason, we seek to give candidates ample time and space to complete their interviews and hear back from all universities where they are being considered.

While this can be challenging when two or three weeks may be involved for one, two or three of our finalists, we believe the Golden Rule should be the guide. If you put yourself in the position of the candidate, you would want to have the opportunity to visit campuses and complete the job searches in each setting before making a decision. When dealing with the top choice, we convey that we very much hope she will join us at OU, but we also want what is best for her. If it turns out another job opportunity works better for her and her family, we will celebrate that opportunity. Put another way, we want to convey that we not only care about building a great program at OU, we care about them as colleagues in Religious Studies who are seeking to find the best opportunity possible to pursue their vocation as a teacher-scholar. As noted, this can be tricky to negotiate. But, it can and should work well for all concerned in the end. This past year, for example, RELS conducted two entry-level faculty searches. Each of the six finalists had one or two other campus interviews. In the end, we hired our top candidate in both searches. And, each of the other four finalists landed permanent positions with other institutions.

9. **When the position has been filled, write personally to every applicant.** This final communication provides an opportunity to thank each person again for their interest in OU as well as let them know the outcome of the process. A standard letter (personally signed) goes to everyone who applied but was not interviewed. Another letter, which is personalized with name and address, goes to each person who was interviewed at AAR (or by phone). Another slightly different letter goes to the two finalists who did not get the job.