

Preventing Problems with Advertising for Recruitments

Although writing an ad for a faculty recruitment seems to be a simple task, UCSC has encountered a number of problems that stem from the wording of advertisements. The job ad is a public record of the criteria we claim we'll use for a search. When we later deviate from the ad, it may raise questions of fairness. If you'd like to avoid these problems, heed the following:

Leave some “wiggle room” in your job description! Don't specify the required field(s) of expertise too narrowly. More than one department has required a Ph.D. in their own discipline, only to later find themselves interested in someone with a degree from another field. If you specify a discipline, consider adding “or equivalent fields” or “or related fields.” If there's a good possibility of applicants with foreign degrees, add “or non-US equivalent” to your Ph.D. requirement. When a job description is **overly detailed** about areas of expertise, it can exclude many people. Readers also may think that it's been written to fit a particular person and won't bother to apply.

If you list a qualification as *required*, ask yourself if you would, under any circumstances, consider a brilliant applicant who just happened to lack that qualification. If you would, word it less absolutely, e.g. as a preference. One department stated in its advertising, “postdoctoral experience required,” because it was the norm in that discipline for candidates to serve as a postdoc after receiving the Ph.D. However, someone from a closely-related discipline applied without having done a postdoc, and his experience was both relevant and very impressive. If the department had interviewed this candidate, they would have risked a complaint from other people without postdoc experience who would have applied, had the ad not made this a requirement.

Search committees often list “**evidence of superior teaching ability**” as a requirement, which seems perfectly reasonable, given our emphasis on teaching. However, it is possible that a particularly brilliant student might be fully supported by fellowships and research assistantships all the way through graduate school, and never have taught a course. Think through in advance what would constitute adequate evidence in such a case.

Some search committees, wanting to avoid the problem of hiring someone who turns out not to have finished a dissertation, specify that “**Ph.D. must be in hand no later than September**” of the next year. Of course there is no way to know for sure if a candidate you interview in February will complete her/his dissertation by the following September, so such a statement can't guarantee anything. It can, however, create a problem simply because we put new hires on the payroll in July -- if that person does not complete the degree by September, not only do they not have a job, but they also owe the University 3 months' salary. If you are not willing to make an acting appointment, consider requiring the Ph.D. in hand at time of application. If you are willing to make an acting appointment, word the ad in such a way to allow for such, e.g. “Ph.D. in hand or within one year from completion at time of appointment.”

The wording of advertisements sometimes can be read as hinting at discrimination, especially in untenured recruitments. One department, wishing to stress that this was an untenured position and that they would not give preference to scholars further along in their careers, stated in their ad that they wanted a “**newly trained scholar**.” Sure enough, one potential candidate (with a not-so-recent Ph.D.) complained that this appeared to put the emphasis on the age of the applicant. This didn't result in a lawsuit, but it did take several hours of the chair's precious time to resolve. It's fine to

ask that people be up-to-date in the field, both in content and in methods, but don't assume that only a new Ph.D. would have "recent" knowledge.

Early ads: It can be a problem to put an ad in a journal before the search committee/department have agreed on what they want. Sometimes the pressure of advertising deadlines tempts people to write a quick ad, only to find later that they actually want something different. Be sure that **job descriptions distributed at conferences or sent out via e-mail** are consistent with published ads.

Occasionally a journal will "edit" an advertisement, leaving out a crucial piece of information. Try to follow up with journals to ensure that they don't omit something important.

A note about applicant requests for access to records:

Although applicants generally do not have a right of access to their University files pursuant to the Academic Personnel Manual Section 160, they do have a right of access to their files pursuant to the Information Practices Act.

The Information Practices Act (Section 1798.38 of the California Civil Code) states that information compiled for the purpose of determining an individual's qualifications for employment must be disclosed to that individual. If the information was received with the promise that the identity of the source would be held in confidence, then the identity of the source may be withheld.

Based on the above and for the sake of consistency, it is now campus practice to identify all letters of recommendation as "confidential" in the text of the flyer regardless of whether the letters are solicited by the applicant or the department.

If you have any questions about the wording of a job description, please call your Divisional Academic Personnel Coordinator or the Academic Personnel Office for consultation.