

Search Protocols for Internal Candidates

Searches with internal candidates are common and require extra attention. Below are recommendations on what departments should and should not communicate and how to go about searches.

Communication Prior to the Search Deadline

1. Anyone can apply for the faculty position. However, if the department believes that the internal candidate is not a good fit for the position and is highly unlikely to become a finalist, it is useful to have a constructive conversation in advance. Rather than convey that the candidate should not apply, it is appropriate for the search committee chair to have an honest conversation about the candidate's fit and what the individual would need to accomplish to be considered competitive. Departments often times do not have such frank conversations in order to avoid hurting the faculty member's feelings, but failing to do so often ends up causing increased tensions and harm. The search committee chair can reach out to individuals to gauge their interest in the position rather than wait for faculty members to come to them. An invitation to apply should not convey the expectation of an interview, since internal candidates are not guaranteed an interview.
2. It can be stressful for a candidate to be in the hallways, having lunch, and in meetings with department members while the search is unfolding. It is appropriate to provide internal candidates with a timeline of the search process so they do not feel in the dark. The chair should ask internal candidates if they want to receive departmental communications that reference the progress of the search.
3. Communication about the search should funnel through the search committee chair. No information about the position or department should be shared that would not be shared with an external candidate.

The Application and Search Process

4. A member(s) of the department might be asked to write a letter of recommendation about the candidate, such as of their teaching, service, post-doctoral research, etc. As a general practice, it is appropriate to decline such requests. Faculty can share their first-hand insights of the internal candidate during deliberations if relevant. An exception is when such a letter is expected in a discipline and the application would appear incomplete without it (e.g., writing for a post-doc working in one's lab). The letter-writer should not chair the search and, if possible, not serve on the search committee.
5. It is important to follow the same interview procedures for the internal candidate as for external ones. For instance, if the department does Zoom interviews to develop a long list, the internal candidate should be interviewed over Zoom if under consideration.
6. First-hand knowledge by department members of the candidate can be taken into account (e.g., classroom observations, discussions with the candidate). If there is a contradiction between the application materials and what faculty members have heard from or witnessed about candidate, this should lead to further inquiry.

7. Search committee meetings should be scheduled for times when the candidate would normally not be at such meetings. If these discussions take place during a standard department meeting, candidates should be notified in advance as to avoid them attending and needing to be told to leave.

On-Campus Visits

8. A significant proportion of student representatives involved in the search should not have taken a class with the internal candidate. If this proves highly impractical or would lead to distorted representation of the department's majors, then steps should be taken to ensure that student feedback represents the department as a whole and is not biased towards or against the candidate. Students' relationship with the candidate should be known and taken into account when assessing their feedback. Student feedback on the internal candidate should be solicited only in comparable ways as for external candidates.
9. Visits by external candidates are public events. Internal candidates, whether still under consideration or not, should be told when people will be visiting. If still under consideration, they should be advised not to attend the external candidates' public events (e.g., job talks), but no one can be denied attendance.
10. On-campus interviews should include all of the formalities as for external candidates (e.g., a dinner, job talk, classroom demonstration, lunch with students, etc.). This includes the opportunity to stay in the same local accommodations as for external candidates.
11. A teaching demonstration, if part of your department's search procedures, should mimic the format as for external candidates. This means the internal candidate's teaching demonstration should not be in one of their current classes. Out of respect for the internal candidate (whether still under consideration or not), their class should not be the site of external candidates' teaching demonstrations.

Finalizing the Hiring

12. Formal communication about the search process with the internal candidate should take place using the same platforms as for external candidates. Informal discussions should not substitute for emails, for instance. An exception is when it has been concluded that the internal candidate is no longer under consideration. Out of respect to the internal candidate, it is better to communicate this in person and follow up with whatever correspondence is standard in the department. Providing constructive feedback and consolation is in order.
13. If internal candidates are interviewed and if hired, it should be because they were the best qualified to advance the department and the best fit out of the pool. This should be the message given to both internal and external parties

Sources Consulted

https://gustavus.edu/provost/concertFiles/media/searches/Tenure-Track_Search_Process_Guide_2020-21.pdf
<https://www.kenyon.edu/offices-and-services/office-of-the-provost/departmental-affairs/faculty-hiring/protocol-for-searches-with-internal-candidates/>

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