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Chronicle Careers<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2009/01/2009012201c.htm>**HEADS UP****The Proper Way to Court****Search committees need to understand that the campus visit is a two-way vetting process**By GARY A. OLSON

Winter is the season of the campus interview. Newly minted Ph.D.'s, midcareer professors, and even candidates for high-level professorial and administrative posts have, by now, survived several rounds of vetting and interviewing. The most successful have been invited as finalists to visit the campus, usually for a grueling few days of formal meetings and presentations, informal meet-and-greets, and countless meals and receptions.

Each year columnists, advisers, and career counselors weigh in with advice for the job seekers, but what about tips for the interviewers? What are the dos and don'ts for those who are organizing a campus visit?

Arguably, the most crucial stage of the recruitment process is the campus interview: When it's poorly executed, potential recruits leave with a bad impression of your institution; when it's well done, they not only walk away impressed, but people on the campus also will have had enough interaction with the candidates to make a meaningful recommendation.

Perhaps the single most-important strategy in building a strong institution is aggressive recruiting of first-rate candidates (as opposed to passive "searching" — i.e., posting an ad and waiting to see who applies). That is just as true for entry-level faculty members as it is for new deans and presidents. Investing substantial effort in the recruitment process is likely to pay considerable dividends in the future. In fact, a deftly choreographed campus visit can make the difference between losing your top candidate to a major competitor and convincing the person that your institution is infinitely superior despite rankings that might suggest otherwise.

Effective recruiting takes a considerable amount of thought and planning. The first step is to help the committee members and others involved in the search understand that the process requires wooing recruits. A natural impulse among some committee members is to play the role of grand inquisitor and to grill candidates as if they were defendants in a criminal trial. Certainly, you want to arrive at an accurate assessment of a candidate's capabilities, so a certain amount of rigorous questioning is warranted. But some people go on the attack, often embarrassing not only the candidate but other committee members as well.

Everyone involved in the process needs to understand that the campus visit is a two-way

vetting process: While the institution is attempting to determine which finalist is the best fit, the candidate is similarly sizing up the campus to see if it would be a supportive and comfortable intellectual home. By the time an institution narrows a candidate pool to three or four finalists, any one of them is likely to perform well in the job. And many of them may have other interviews lined up as well. A wise committee will work diligently to treat the candidates so well that they return home impressed with the quality of the institution and feeling that they were given the red-carpet treatment.

A provost at a large research university told me that before accepting his current post he had been a candidate at another institution, where he had experienced a "dreadful" campus visit.

"I was under consideration to become the second-in-command of the university, but they treated me as if I were an entry-level worker of some kind," he said. "They had me find my own way from the airport to the hotel, failed to arrange a dinner with committee members the first night, neglected to send me an updated agenda, and on several occasions had forgotten to arrange for escorts from one meeting to the next." He couldn't help but conclude that the university was not serious about his candidacy, and he withdrew.

The objective of any search is to give candidates wide exposure to people on your campus, in formal and informal settings.

In a faculty search, that typically means plenty of opportunities for everyone in the department, including staff members, to meet with the candidate, as well as arranging for the obligatory meeting with the dean or associate dean. Some committees also schedule sessions with people outside of the department with whom the new faculty member would likely interact — the director of the teaching center, the head of the honors program, the graduate dean, or key faculty members in a discipline relevant to the candidate's research or teaching interests. The list would vary according to institutional context.

In an administrative search, the circle would be proportionately larger. Department-head candidates would need to meet with their college's council of chairs and various college officials, and they would likely have entrance and exit interviews with the dean. Vice-presidential and presidential candidates would need campuswide exposure as well as to meet key university trustees and local leaders. In a multi-campus university, candidates for positions in central administration should visit each branch campus.

Innovative search committees have devised a number of simple practices to court candidates and enhance the campus visit. Some of the ones I will list here might be reserved for high-level searches, but they are all approaches that work:

- A carefully crafted agenda is a must. Establish the schedule well in advance so that committee members and others can reserve specific dates and times on their busy schedules. Some committees set the date of the campus visit at the very beginning of the search process, months before the actual interview.
- Provide a little free time for the candidates periodically throughout the schedule, but especially right before they have to give a public presentation. That allows them time to freshen up, collect their thoughts, and so on.
- Provide each candidate with a detailed agenda and a list of committee members in

advance of the visit.

- Arrange for someone to greet each candidate at the airport and provide transportation to the hotel.
- Choose a decent hotel, not the least expensive or the one closest to the campus with lumpy beds. Some committees put the candidate up in the most interesting places available locally — a charming bed-and-breakfast, for example or, in the case of institutions in especially desirable locations, seaside resorts, casino hotels, or establishments in historic districts. Remember: The objective here is to impress.
- Take the extra step of arranging for the candidate to receive a gift basket at check-in time. Typically it would include fruit, nuts, snacks, bottled water, and gifts containing the university logo — coffee mugs and the like.
- For administrative searches, provide a stipend to pay two or three student ambassadors to usher candidates from meeting to meeting and to provide a campus tour.
- For meals, choose restaurants that will leave a good impression, especially those that might be unique to the culture of the community. (And always inquire in advance if the candidate has dietary restrictions; you wouldn't want to take someone with fish allergies to the local seafood bistro or sushi bar.)
- Assemble a packet of brochures, booklets, and magazines that showcase university programs and community attractions. They help candidates imagine themselves as part of the community.
- Arrange for the candidate to spend time with a realtor to tour neighborhoods.

There is no "correct" set of procedures for running an ideal search. Each committee will need to make choices given the institution's unique circumstances. The key point here is that the committee that makes a conscious effort to recruit — that is, to actively woo — candidates during the campus visit stands the best chance to win over its top choice.

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