

Graduate Student Input in the Faculty Search Process

Last Revised: 21 September 2021

Why should graduate students be involved?

Engaging graduate students in the faculty search and interview process is beneficial to graduate students and to departments for the following reasons:

A. Graduate students offer unique perspectives on candidates

Although individual graduate students are transient, as a group, they are a permanent population in the department. As such, they are positioned to provide valuable feedback on how candidates will advance departmental goals related to graduate coursework, justice/equity/diversity/inclusion, and graduate student mentoring. For example, graduate students are directly affected by the lack of diversity on the faculty, which contributes to the isolation of students from marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds. Graduate students can also provide candid feedback on interactions with candidates in settings where faculty are not present.

B. Engaging in the search process is a valuable professional development opportunity

Some/many graduate students will go on to apply for positions at Universities or other institutions that involve an interview and selection process. Gaining insight into this process by engaging in it (e.g., attending seminars, reviewing CVs, asking and responding to questions) is a valuable professional development experience.

C. Graduate students help showcase departments and attract high quality candidates

Graduate students can help demonstrate the breadth and depth of scholarship by discussing their work and highlighting what they view as the strengths and areas of growth for the department. Having a large cohort of graduate students attend seminars and meetings with candidates reflects well on the department.

For these reasons, graduates students should be invited and encouraged to participate in all faculty searches, even those focused on positions that do not include graduate student teaching, advising or mentorship.

What are best practices for graduate student engagement?

To maximize the benefits of engaging graduate students in the hiring process, departments should adopt the following practices:

A. Be transparent about search goals

The search committee should share position descriptions (including required and preferred qualifications) and motivations for hiring (e.g., to replace a previous faculty member, to teach particular courses, to fill a gap in knowledge/expertise) with graduate students.

B. Be transparent about candidate qualifications

Application materials (CV, cover letter, statements of research/teaching/diversity) of final candidates (those invited to campus) should be shared with graduate students in advance of on-campus interviews.

C. Be open to new insights on candidate's strengths/shortcomings

If graduate students have personal knowledge of a candidate and have serious concerns (e.g., candidates have a history of sexual harassment or racist behavior), they should speak with the search chair, EO Coordinator, Hiring Authority, and/or to the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) in confidence so these individuals/offices can evaluate and address these concerns. Similarly, if graduate students have interacted with candidates in the past and have a unique perspective on strengths, they are also encouraged to share these insights with the search committee.

D. Actively schedule graduate students into on-campus interviews

- i. Graduate students should be invited and strongly encouraged by their advisors and Department Heads to attend seminars (research, teaching, demonstrations, performances) that are part of the interview process. Seminars should be recorded so graduate students (and other stakeholders) can view the seminar at another time if they have a conflict. If one seminar is recorded, all seminars must be recorded, and candidates must be aware of and agree to the recordings.
- ii. The on-campus (or virtual) interview should include a designated time(s) for graduate students to meet with each candidate without faculty present. This provides graduate students the opportunity to ask and answer candid questions. Ideally, these meetings should involve breakfast, lunch or light refreshments to cultivate a comfortable setting, encourage graduate student engagement, and to thank students for their time invested in the search. Graduate students should be educated on the appropriate questions to ask during an interview, as some questions are not permitted. [OEO has a table titled "Appropriate and Inappropriate Questions" in the search manual](#) that should be shared with all individuals meeting with the candidates, including graduate students.
- iii. Where appropriate, graduate students could also be asked to escort candidates between meetings.

E. Invite timely feedback from graduate students

All graduate students that interact with candidates should provide written feedback via a standard form that includes an emphasis on strengths and shortcomings, and an indication of whether or not the candidate is "acceptable", "not acceptable", or "acceptable with reservations". A graduate student representative (e.g., president of the departmental Graduate Student Association) should request this feedback, and synthesize feedback in a word document organized by candidate, and then strengths and shortcomings.

F. Feedback shared with search committee

Graduate student feedback should be shared with the search committee in both a written and oral format. If a graduate student is not on the search committee, then a graduate student

representative could be invited to a search committee meeting to present feedback (in 5-10min) and respond to questions. Given the confidential nature of the search committee meeting, the graduate student attends only for the period of time the graduate student is providing feedback to the search committee.

G. Outcome of search should be reported back to graduate students

Graduate students should be reminded that both the decision and negotiation process is confidential, so these details cannot be shared. However, after the search is complete and a candidate has accepted the offer, the search committee should share the outcome of the search with the graduate students and thank them for their participation and feedback.

H. Process should be transparent and accountable

The department's process for engaging graduate students in faculty hires should be codified in the graduate student handbook and/or departmental code. These documents should be readily available to graduate students and be explicitly shared with incoming students. This text should include the reasons why graduate student engagement in the search is beneficial for both students and the department.

Other practices to consider:

Graduate student representative on search committees

Adding a graduate student representative to a search committee has benefits as well as several potential costs that should be considered. Benefits include providing graduate students, an important stakeholder group in many departments, with a vote. This may be particularly appropriate for Department Head searches. Such a vote can make graduate students more invested in the process, and confident that they have a role to play in the outcome. However, the following should also be considered: i) serving on a search committee is extremely time-consuming and may overburden a graduate student; ii) there is rapid turnover in the graduate student population (particularly MS students) so some departments may feel that votes should be reserved for faculty who have a long term vested interest in the department); iii) other stakeholders in the department (e.g., undergraduate students, postdocs, adjunct/NTTF faculty) usually do not have a vote. It is not usually practical or feasible to achieve equity by giving each group a vote; iv) The size of each search committee varies by department and search, so a graduate student vote would hold a different weight in each search; and v) there may be confidential information that is not appropriate to share with graduate students. As such, their vote may be based on incomplete information.

This living document was written by members of CSUs' [Graduate Center for Inclusive Mentoring](#) and [Graduate Student Council](#) and reviewed by the [Office of Equal Opportunity](#).