

INTERRUPTING BIAS IN THE FACULTY SEARCH PROCESS

Adapted from Moody (2010). Rising above cognitive errors: Guidelines to improve faculty searches, evaluations, and decision-making. Retrieved from www.diversityoncampus.com

Common Shortcuts:

Shortcuts in the faculty search process can lead to biased assessments in evaluating applicants if we are not motivated to avoid them. These shortcuts can lead to erroneous conclusions that women, minorities and other underrepresented candidates are unqualified or a bad fit. The following shortcuts are listed in the order of most common, easily recognizable shortcuts.

- * **Cloning** – Replicating oneself by hiring someone with similar attributes or background. Also refers to undervaluing a candidate’s research because it is not familiar, as well as expecting candidates to resemble someone whom the search committee is replacing. Cloning limits the scope and breadth of *approaches and perspectives* in research, teaching and services.
- * **Snap Judgments** – Making judgments about the candidate based on insufficient evidence. Dismissing a candidate for minor reasons or labeling a candidate “the best” and ignoring positive attributes of other candidates. Having a covert agenda furthered by stressing something trivial or focusing on a few negatives rather than the overall qualifications. Often occurs when the hiring process feels rushed.
- * **Good fit/Bad Fit** – While this may be about whether the person can meet the programmatic needs of the position, it often is about how comfortable and culturally at ease one feels.
- * **Negative Stereotypes** — Characterized by presumptions of incompetence. The work of women and underrepresented minorities is scrutinized much more than majority faculty, at all stages of the academic career.
- * **Positive Stereotypes** – Dominant group members are automatically presumed to be competent. Such a member receives the benefit of the doubt, negative attributes are glossed over and success is assumed. Also called the “original affirmative action” because the dominant group members are automatically presumed qualified and thereby given an unearned advantage.
- * **Elitist Behavior** (also called “Raising-the-Bar”) – Increasing qualifications for women and minority candidates because their competency doesn’t strike committee members as trustworthy. Downgrading the qualifications of women and minorities, based on accent, dress, and demeanor. In short, uneven expectations based on a candidate’s social identity.
- * **Wishful Thinking** – Insisting racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice no longer exist.

* Euphemized Bias:

- **Visionary**: Members of dominant groups are evaluated based on their potential whereas underrepresented groups are judged on their accomplishments and their track record only. For example: “He has vision” or “She lacks vision.”
- **Star**: Used when the speaker is an infatuated fan of the candidate under consideration. When you hear it, ask the speaker to explain their use of the term and support it with evidence. For example: “She’s not a star” or “It’s clear that he is a rock star.”
- **Committed, single-minded focus or hard worker**: These terms could be cloaking a bias against care-givers, those faculty members who cannot depend on what Williams (2000) calls a “flow of family work” which allows ideal workers to log long hours in the office while still having their material needs met.