CACUSS / ASEUCC

Addressing some myths about equitable hiring

Myth: Equitable hiring focuses on identity rather than qualifications. This is unfair for some candidates.

The goal of equitable and inclusive hiring is to remove and reduce biases and barriers in the recruitment process that may disadvantage or discriminate against *qualified* candidates from equity-deserving groups. Some of these biases and barriers exist as early on as the screening stage. For example, Artificial Intelligence and algorithms used for recruitment may have bias coded into their programming, which could exclude diverse candidates from being considered. Furthermore, the assumption behind this myth — that certain candidates are 'diversity hires' — not only devalues and demeans the candidate's merit and strengths, but can also reveal your own expectations and bias towards what a successful candidate 'should' look like.

What is an equity-deserving group?

Equity-deserving groups are social groups whose members face marginalization (both historically and presently) because of their social identity. Within Canada, while each province or territory's human rights legislation may differ slightly, aspects of identity that are protected from discrimination under the law include race, age, mental or physical disability, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.

Myth: We tried, but there just aren't enough diverse candidates in our pool or pipeline.

While Student Affairs has a shared commitment to improving student success and the student experience, the field can attract a diversity of professionals across various fields — health education, data science, career services, and more. Given the breadth of the field, positioning the issue as a lack of qualified applicants in the candidate pool places the onus on underrepresented groups and assumes that they lack the skills and experience required to be successful in Student Affairs. If we focus on a perceived "pipeline problem", we end up ignoring existing biases and barriers — within our organizational cultures, hiring practices, and processes — which contribute to perpetuating the current status quo.

Myth: I don't have conscious bias against members of particular groups, so my hiring decisions will be unbiased.

Cloning bias

Cloning bias is a phenomenon where hiring managers tend to favour candidates they perceive as being similar to themselves — this perpetuates the status quo, as those being hired are similar to those doing the hiring.

In-groups and out-groups

Hiring managers may also unintentionally have higher (and double) standards for candidates who are dissimilar to themselves (out-group members), as they may view candidates who are more similar (in-group members) as ones that better meet notions of professional " t". Notions of in-group and out-group can be based on a variety of factors including identity-related characteristics, but it can also be something as simple as the hiring manager feeling a connection with (and therefore having a more positive impression of) a candidate who is an alumnus of the same graduate program.

From unconscious bias to being bias-conscious

It's challenging to avoid a bias that you aren't aware of. That's why it's important to shift the conversation from unconscious bias, to being bias-conscious.

Diversity training — what it is and isn't

While diversity training is a popular approach used by institutions to show that they're hiring in an equitable way, several studies indicate that diversity training on its own doesn't get rid of biases. In fact, it can sometimes even lead to less equitable decisions. For example, on one hand, resistance towards the idea of mandated diversity training can further deepen an individual's preconceived notions and biases; on the other hand, choosing to engage in diversity training can lead to some individuals feeling overly con dent in their hiring

The Paradox of Meritocracy

According to Castillo and Bernard (2010), the paradox of meritocracy in organizations involves two concepts: moral credentials and self-perceived objectivity.

- **Moral credentialism:** individuals are more likely to act on their biases when they feel that they have sufficiently demonstrated that they are an unbiased person. Voluntarily attending diversity training could be one way that an individual might feel that they've demonstrated this.
- **Self-perceived objectivity:** the more individuals view their decisions as objective, the more con dent they feel about their decisions and beliefs.

The combination of these two factors results in individuals being less likely to re ect on or scrutinize their decision-making, which then leads to them being more likely to act on possible biases.
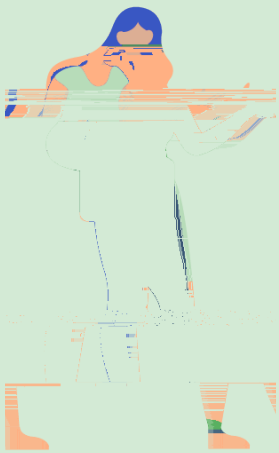
Present information in an accessible manner, using plain language. Avoid using jargon and acronyms within the posting. Structure the posting so that it is easy to determine the essential responsibilities and requirements of the role. Being transparent and clear about expectations will support prospective candidates who aren't familiar with your organization or office, as they will be better positioned to understand the job and decide whether it aligns with their skillset and career interests.

> To align with values of transparency and equity, it is best practice to provide salary information as well (whether it is a specific figure or a salary range), as well as information on working conditions (hours, flexible work arrangements).

Include a statement demonstrating your departmental and/or institutional commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). This includes a commitment to equity in the recruitment process, but also in the work and values of the department within which the role is situated. While the job posting is a tool to communicate with and attract prospective candidates, it is also something that candidates can use to assess a prospective workplace.

> Beyond EDI statements, how are you demonstrating to equity-deserving applicants that you foster inclusion in the workplace, and that your department is deserving of their talents?

When advertising the position:

Advertise the role in a variety of spaces. While jobs will typically be posted on an institutional job board, consider sharing the posting more broadly so that it can reach more people. You can also take the initiative to advertise with specific listservs, websites, or organizations that serve different equity-deserving groups in order to attract a diverse candidate pool.

> Sharing your posting via CACUSS is one way to increase your candidate pool when recruiting new professionals, due to a wide membership base.

Be mindful when relying on personal networks to circulate the job posting. While referrals are considered an effective recruitment tactic, it is important to consider: who is doing the referring, and what might their networks look like? Referrals typically tend to reproduce the status quo, and privilege those who have connections and/or insights into the recruitment process.

> One way to counter the impact of referrals reproducing the status quo effect could be to encourage referrals from underrepresented populations. However, it is important to remember that people need to have a level of trust in the organization or department to feel comfortable referring qualified colleagues. Would individuals from equity-deserving groups feel confident referring their contacts to your department?

"When targeting an employer that presents itself as valuing diversity, minority job applicants engage in relatively little resume whitening and thus submit more racially transparent resumes. Yet… organizational diversity statements are not actually associated with reduced discrimination against unwhitened resumes. Taken together, these findings suggest a paradox: minorities may be particularly likely to experience disadvantage when they apply to ostensibly pro-diversity employers." — *Kang, DeCelles, Tilcsik, & Jun (2016).*

Candidate selection
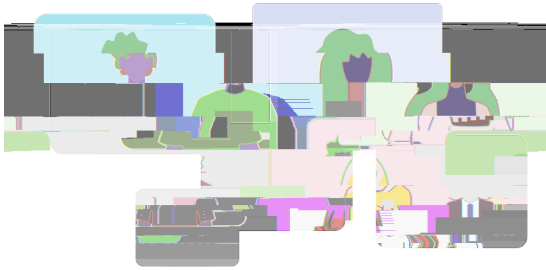
- Consider various stakeholders and/or partners who might be impacted by the portfolio you're trying to ll and include their perspectives. Stakeholders and partners could include colleagues from a different team or department, or inviting a student peer to participate in the panel.

    - **Ask early.** This will help you avoid feeling rushed at the interview stage and will also establish clarity across the panel in terms of the qualities a promising candidate might bring to the role.
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- As a panel, have a direct conversation about implicit and common biases. One example is the horn/halo effect, in which a singular aspect of a candidate skews your overall impression of them to be overly positive or overly negative. How might you account for or mitigate this through the evaluation process? What cultural cues, experiences or characteristics may sway the panel to prefer one candidate over another? Additional questions you may what to consider as a panel include:

  - What biases might we each bring toward the position?
  - What might each of us value in a candidate based on those biases?
  - What will we do when we come up against a bias that's in uencing our decisions?
  - What experiences are currently over- or under-represented on the team, and how can we remain open to a diversity of experiences from a range of backgrounds?
  - How can we be mindful of the fact that what might be seen as a strength or skill for one candidate, may not be perceived as such for another, and therefore our assessment of competency may be impacted by identity?
  - How do we hold space for cultural differences when it comes to the self-promotion that is expected in interviews?

Unpacking 'Fit'

'Fit' — along with 'likeability' — is a term that is commonly used in hiring conversations. However, it is highly subjective and can have coded expectations that can be implicitly discriminatory. 'Fit' can perpetuate the status quo by creating more room for cloning bias, where like attracts like; this could be based on identity, preferred credentials or speci c experiences, and how well a candidate measures up to unspoken expectations that aren't explicitly required in the job descrio unspokxpla20 (y)20 (e(al dif)40 (f)30 (e r)20 (os 42 m5TJE,oP ⁄d ho)15lⁱd on the t)20 ((, a(y r)20

Take your time when reviewing applications and rely on a rubric to guide you as you begin selecting candidates to invite for an interview.

- Re ect on any biases or preferences you bring to the applicant screening process that may lead you to assign individuals a higher or lower score. For example, do you value a credential from a particular post-secondary institution over another? How open are you to transferable skills and non-traditional pathways?

  - If you feel that perceived bias might interfere with your ability to evaluate a candidate fairly, consider seeking support from the hiring panel to 'double check' potential marking in ation or de ation.

- Review the job description and assign a numerical score to each skill and quali cation based on how important it would be for a candidate to meet a particular requirement or asset. You can then use this information to create a rubric to score and rank applications.

  - When possible, it's helpful to have multiple individuals review and rank candidates for a more balanced assessment of applicants.

If you notice that shortlisted candidates form a fairly homogenous pool, pause to ask yourself why this might be, and consider what could be done differently at the application review and/or job posting circulation stage.
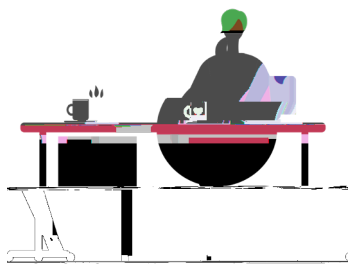
Sending an interview invitation

Interview invitations are a great opportunity to highlight the values of your department and do your part to ensure that the candidate feels supported during the interview process. Being intentional with your language, sharing relevant information, and demonstrating a willingness to accommodate a candidate's needs can contribute to a more inclusive process for prospective candidates.

When drafting the invitation, it may be helpful to:

- **Re-share a copy of the job description.** Particularly if you're recruiting for a student staff role, consider sharing career resources that students can leverage to better prepare for the interview.
- **Indicate the scheduled length of the interview along with the time and date.** Be mindful of major religious and cultural observances when scheduling the interviews.
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Developing Interview Questions

Decide which competencies and strengths are essential for success in the role. You may have already done this when drafting the job posting or meeting with the hiring panel. Base your questions and evaluation process on these core requirements.

Offer a variety of questions, and consider the following:

- Are both interpersonal and technical skills included?
- Do you invite candidates to share relevant transferable or direct experiences?
- Will candidates have an opportunity to demonstrate their values and their approach to various challenges?
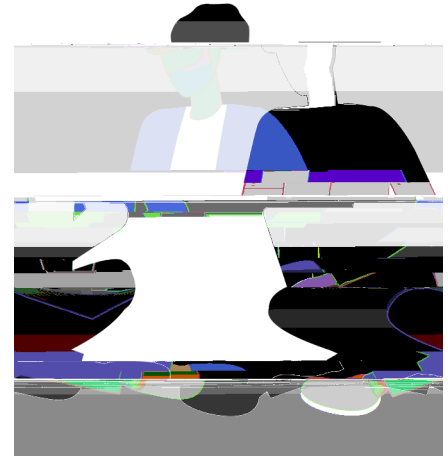
The following examples are intended to provide some guidance on how you might approach a couple of different question types when interviewing either students or new professionals.

Question on subject matter knowledge:
If you require the candidate to demonstrate subject matter knowledge, specify this within the phrasing of the question.

- **For student staff:** "If you were asked to support the creation of a workshop on useful academic skills, what topics would you consider, and what types of activities would you recommend to keep students engaged during the workshop?"
- **For new professionals:** "Tell us about a time you developed a program that supported academic skills development for undergraduate students. What theories and strategies did you leverage and why?"

**Question inviting transferable experiences:**
If direct experience is not a requirement to meet a required competency, create enough openness in the question so the candidate can share a parallel experience.

- **For student staff:** "Can you tell us about a curricular or co-curricular experience where you supported a peer in developing a skill? What was the situation, how did you provide support, and what was the end result?"
- **For new professionals:** "Describe your experience developing programming that support skills development. Please share details in relation to program conception, execution and assessment."

The Interview

Interviews are often nerve-wracking. Setting a welcoming tone and engaging in inclusive practice can support candidates in feeling set up for success. One recommended practice is to offer interview questions to the candidate ahead of time — even if it's just half an hour before the interview — or provide the questions in writing during the interview. This gives candidates the opportunity to collect their thoughts, and be better positioned to demonstrate the strengths and skills that the hiring panel is interested in learning about.

Although interviews are an opportunity to get to know a candidate better, veering into more personal information can increase the likelihood of deviating from job-related information, and can potentially create space for bias early in the interview (for example, based on how likeable you find the candidate). Consider having a conversation with the hiring panel on the difference between being personable and being too personal in an interview, and discuss how you'll keep each other in check.
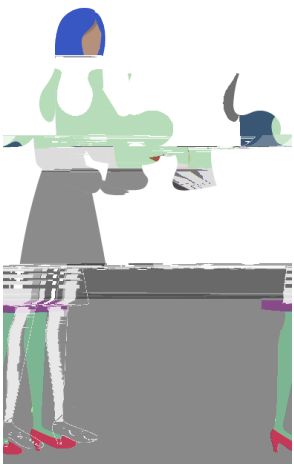
Setting Up:

- **Introduce yourselves.** All panelists should have the opportunity to share their names, pronouns if comfortable, and a little bit about their current role.

- **Outline the interview structure.** For example, "We have 8 questions we'd like to ask you, and each of us will take turns asking a question. At the end, there will be an opportunity for you to ask us any questions you might have in relation to the role."

- **Foster a comfortable environment.** Consider adding statements that can foster a more comfortable environment for the candidate, for example:
    - "Before responding to any of the questions, feel free to take a few moments to collect your thoughts and think about how you might want to answer."
    - "If you need a question clari ed or repeated, please don't hesitate to ask."
    - "We'll be taking notes throughout, so we may not always make eye-contact, but we are listening attentively to your responses."

- **Take notes.** During the interview, take factual notes — capture what the candidate shared, rather than how it may have made you feel. When possible, it can be helpful to mark a candidate after each question, as opposed to waiting till the end; this decreases the likelihood of feelings or memories clouding your judgment, and supports a more accurate review process when debriefing with the hiring panel.

- **Beware of common pitfalls.** When marking candidates, be mindful of a few common pitfalls, such as central tendency and contrast effect.
    - **Central tendency** is the inclination to avoid assigning very high or very low scores, and instead picking more moderate scores.
    - **Contrast effect** is the tendency to compare candidates as you're engaging in the interview process. This can lead to a lower or higher score comparatively across candidates, rather than aligning with the criteria established in the rubric. Try to ensure that the evaluation of candidates is based on meeting specific qualifications, rather than relative performance.

- **Weighting each question.** Consider the weight of each question when assigning an overall score to the candidate. Not all competencies are equally important to being successful in a role, and some questions may be weighted more than others. Try to use whole numbers in your evaluation to decrease variance and better align with the rubric.

- **Don't make decisions before the interview.** Steer clear of comparing rankings at the start, as this may lead to group think. Avoid discussing or making any decisions around how promising a particular candidate is prior to reviewing their individual responses. In general, rather than focusing on candidates who stood out (positively or negatively), review each candidate individually, going question by question, and take the time to discuss any significant variances in scores.

"People will say that you can't have a maybe in interviews because you want to force people to pick one side or the other [...however] we should not be so scared of "maybe" responses in interviews. If the interviewer is clear on what they are interviewing for, has a trusted/consistent rubric they follow for structured interview questions and is thoughtful and meaningful about how they give feedback, the maybe is an opportunity to find more about, and perhaps even hire, a potentially incredible candidate that may have fit outside the traditional (ahem: biased) norms of the role.." — Merill (2019)

Strategies for equitable and inclusive hiring

While equitable and inclusive hiring is important, engaging in improving process can sometimes feel challenging due to time constraints and a lack of clarity on where and how to start. The following lists of strategies and re ective questions are not comprehensive by any means — they're designed to be a starting point for you to feel supported in considering what actions (big or small!) you can take to improve your hiring practices.

Long-Term Strategies

Time investment: Substantial time (and nancial resources)
Who can implement? Departmental or organizational culture change required

- **Support staff members.**
    - How are staff supported to engage in equitable and inclusive hiring practices?
    - Are staff offered the opportunity to learn about and participate in a hiring process?
    - How are staff resourced to implement the changes that need to be made, and given the space within their portfolio to be intentional about hiring?

- **Allocate and protect time.** Developing equitable hiring processes may involve considerable time for reviewing, re ecting and discussing various aspects of the recruitment cycle, including applicant reviews, interviewing, and onboarding. Time is also needed to implement these processes and practices. Ask yourself, is hiring perceived as an interruption to the operations of the department, or is it valued as an opportunity to advance equity and build a diverse team? Allocating sufficient time to the hiring process can help deter the inclination towards a 'quick' hire over an equitable hire.

- **Invest in relationships.** If you have inclusive hiring processes at the interview level but not at the application stage, your efforts will only go so far.
    - How can you move beyond referrals and relying on the same promotional avenues?
    - What measures can you take to build strong relationships across and external to your institution, and build a reputation for inclusion as a department?
    - How can you meaningfully involve partners and stakeholders in this process?

- **Determine and live your values.**
    - Does your department have established values?
    - How are these leveraged when creating and communicating the culture of the department?
    - Is a commitment to equity one of those values?
    - How do these inform your strategic and annual plans?
    - How might this show up in job descriptions, interviews, onboarding, and transition?
    - How are staff members supported in enacting these values?

- **Pay attention to retention.** Hiring diverse staff is not the same as retaining them.
    - Is there a 'revolving door' for candidates belonging to particular social groups?
    - How might you continually invest in a culture of inclusion?
    - What policies and practices are needed to better support individuals from equity-deserving groups, and create an environment where they can thrive?

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