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Best Practices for Interactions with Candidates

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Best Practices for Interactions with Candidates

GVSU Libraries

February 2018

Thank you for engaging in this important hiring process. We appreciate that you are excited to get to know our candidates as well as to share your knowledge of GVSU, the Libraries, and the surrounding area. Because we all play an important role in this process, we want to be sure we are starting from the same understanding of best practices for interactions. These best practices apply whether our candidates are internal or external, and to all positions we interview for.

When sending feedback to the search committee about candidates, be as specific as possible. The GVSU Division of Inclusion and Equity encourages us to avoid using words like ‘fit’ and instead to explain the specific skills, experiences, actions, or qualifications of an individual as they relate to the position. Everyone’s feedback is valued. Keep in mind you may observe something that other colleagues do not; our varied perspectives all contribute to the overall process and decision.

Make them comfortable

No matter how qualified or experienced a candidate is, a job interview can still be a daunting situation. So as interviewers, it’s important that you make the candidate feel comfortable and relaxed.

This includes simple things like letting them know where they can leave their belongings safely, where the washrooms are, and not keeping them waiting.

Listen with your ears and eyes

Remember that you have two ears and one mouth for a reason.

This means that you should listen twice as much as you talk. Never oversell the role.

Ensure your candidate feels comfortable but also don’t spend an hour just chatting to them either. You want to make the right hire so make sure you run an effective interview.

One tip from observational studies is to keep a list of observation notes. Make a line so the right third of your page you can note what you saw, such as how slides were laid out, typos, eye contact, etc. while the left side is what you heard the candidate say.

Staying out of dangerous territory with questions

Any time spent with candidates during a campus visit is considered “interview time” and we all need to be intentional to avoid questions of a personal nature. Questions should be focused on their professional experiences – even at less formal parts of an interview day, such as receptions, lunches, or dinners.

It is important to ask questions that a candidate can answer even though they have not worked here. In other words, the question need to be specific enough for you to get a sense of the candidate’s approach and knowledge, but be detached from GVSU specifics. For example:

- Best: How do you envision providing services from different locations?

- OK: How should downtown branches offer services? [presumes knowledge that downtown tend to be urban and mixed populations]
- Least: How should the Frey Library change its services in the next 3 years? [presumes knowledge that Frey is health, the location and environment of Frey, and of the programmatic/curricular changes]

Even accidentally asking a personal question can leave the University open to charges of bias or discrimination and have the potential to make negative impressions on strong candidates.

GVSU's Human Resources office has compiled a list of questions not appropriate be asked in conversations during the day of the interview. Ed Aboufadel, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, recently provided some other examples from the book *Job Interviews For Dummies* by J.L. Kennedy. Here are some examples:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you a U.S. citizen? • Where were you born? • What is your birth date? • How old are you? • Do you have a disability? • Are you married? • What is your spouse's name? • Do you have a maiden name? • Do you have any children? • Do you have child care arrangements? • What is your race or ethnic origin? • Which church do you attend? • What is your religion? • Are you a member of the local country club? • Do you plan to start a family? • Do you have a girlfriend? • Do you have a boyfriend? • What's your sexual preference? • Have you encountered any health problems recently? • Have you ever been arrested? • Have you ever been convicted of a crime? • What conditions of personal business, health, or family would limit your flexibility in taking this position? • How do you feel about gay marriages? • How do you keep in shape? • Do you devote any time or financial resources to charity work? • Do you get along with your parents? • Do you drink? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever used illegal drugs? • What did your mother do? • Are you content in your private life? • What is your IQ? • Do you own a home? • Are you a member of a political party? • For whom did you vote in the last presidential election? How does your spouse affect your career? • Do you use birth control? • What is your weight? • How tall are you? • What size pants do you wear? • What is your shoe size? • Is that an Irish name? • Does your spouse's employment cause problems? • How much time do you need for your family? • What country did your mother's family come from? • What country did your father's family come from? • If you were a coffee, would you be regular or decaf? • Are you afraid of flying? • If you were a bird, would you want a big beak or a little beak? Are you family---oriented? • Who else are you interviewing with in your job search? What kind of people do you hang around with? |
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- Does your social life include co-workers?
- Do you own a car and have a driver's license?
- I notice that you live quite a distance from the university. Are you really going to commute that distance everyday?
- How did you learn to read, write or speak a foreign language?
- Etc...

If you feel your question might be interpreted as a personal question, consider reframing to focus specifically on the profession and open position.

- How do you view inclusion in the workplace?
- How has humor fit into your professional work to date?
- How do you cultivate community within your departments?

Some aspects of a candidate's personal life might impact their ability to successfully complete all aspects of the job. In these cases where there is a bona fide, job-specific reason to ask these questions they must be worded carefully and asked of all candidates consistently. It's best to leave those questions to the Search Committee or Hiring Authority. Examples include:

- Do you have any responsibilities that conflict with the job's attendance or travel requirements?
- Are you able to work in the United States on an unrestricted basis?
- Are you able to perform the duties on the job description with or without reasonable accommodations?
- Have you ever been convicted of a felony crime?
- If hired, can you provide proof that you are at least 18 years of age?
- Do you have any conflicts that would prevent you from working the schedule discussed?
- What languages do you speak or write fluently?
- Have you worked under any other professional name or nickname?
- Do you have any relatives currently working for this institution?
- Would you have any problem working overtime, if required?
- Would anything prohibit you from making a long-term commitment to the position and the institution?
- Etc...

During a candidate visit, the candidate may ask you questions that do not pertain to the position that you feel uncomfortable answering. In that case, suggest that the candidate ask either the Search Committee Chair or Dean Annie.

Sources

This document was largely inspired by and adapted from the Math Department's "Inappropriate Questions" interview guide and GVSU's "Hiring Supervisor Resources: Interview Questions to Avoid":

<http://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/8C0B809B-0726-4E3B-1EBA4A40A82D8597/hiringsupervisorresources-interviewquestionstoavoid.pdf> and GVSU's "Safe Interview Questions":
<http://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/8C0B809B-0726-4E3B-1EBA4A40A82D8597/hiringsupervisorresources-safeinterviewquestions.pdf>

Other tips:

<http://recruitloop.com/blog/recruiter-tips-how-to-make-a-great-impression-with-your-candidates/>