

Faculty Search Advisors

At Penn, senior members of the Standing Faculty have long been asked to serve as advisors for the faculty search process with the goal of ensuring that faculty search processes are fair, open, and consistent with School and University policies and guidelines. This is the role of a “Faculty Search Advisor” or FSA.

This document provides resources as well as guidelines and expectations for those who serve in this role. Please reach out to the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty (provost-fac@upenn.edu) with general questions, concerns, or recommendations. School-specific questions should be directed to the School Faculty Affairs staff.

Role and Responsibilities of Faculty Search Advisors (FSAs)

FSAs are senior members of the Standing Faculty (tenured associate professor or professor) or Standing Faculty Clinician-Educators (associate professor or professor) who help ensure that faculty search processes are fair, open, and conducted in compliance with University policies and guidelines.¹ The University’s [Equal Opportunity Policy](#) and its [Confidentiality of Records Policy](#), which includes retention of faculty employment records, apply to faculty appointments, promotions, and terminations.

FSAs are appointed by Schools to serve for a two-year term. Serving as an FSA supports Penn’s mission and should be included as part of the faculty member’s overall effort and reflected on their academic plan, if the School has such plans. In instances in which the responsibilities exceed the FSA’s usual faculty service duties, the School may provide additional compensation or teaching release time.

FSAs are expected to be knowledgeable about School and University search policies and procedures. Those who serve as FSAs do not need to have held a formal role in their School’s appointment and promotion processes.

It is the FSA’s responsibility, to the best of their ability, to ensure that each faculty hiring process reflects Penn’s commitment to equal opportunity and nondiscrimination. The University of Pennsylvania prohibits unlawful discrimination based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, creed, national origin (including shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics), citizenship status, age, disability, veteran status or any class protected under applicable federal, state or local law.

Pre-Search Work

In all cases, it is expected that the FSA will: (1) assist with the formation of the search committee; (2) serve as a member of the search committee; (3) ensure that the needs and requirements cited for the available position are broad enough to generate a pool of well

¹ In the Perelman School of Medicine, Academic Clinicians may serve as FSAs for Academic Clinician searches.

qualified candidates to meet the department's research, teaching and/or clinical needs; and (4) evaluate the plan for posting and publicizing the position to ensure both breadth (wide ranging) and depth (expertise-specific). Each School should determine whether the FSAs in their School are voting or non-voting members of faculty search committees. With approval of School leadership, FSAs may designate another faculty member to assist with meeting these expectations, provided that faculty member is knowledgeable about School and University search policies and guidelines.

Wherever possible, search committees should have members with a range of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences as well as individuals with research and clinical interests that align with those sought through the search. The FSA (or their designee) should serve as a member of the search committee and participate in committee deliberations.

Before approving a position description, the FSA should discuss it with the department chair. Consider whether the stated preferred academic fields are sufficiently broad to capture all individuals who could be well-qualified for the position, recognizing that different academic areas and sub-fields may attract different hiring pools. The FSA should also encourage discussion of qualifications that should be expressly included in the job description and advertisement that are related to the University's commitment to excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship. Related qualifications may include experience working with and mentorship of populations and students with a wide variety of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives; research interests that contribute unique and critical new perspectives and expertise; and research interests compatible with or complementary to the work of others in the School. Job-related qualifications based on the position description may be used to generate a list of potential candidates for targeted outreach to suggest that they consider applying for the position. If these individuals do apply, they will be considered along with the rest of the applicant pool.

Outreach

Faculty positions are advertised on Penn's [faculty job board](#) and the University provides funding for advertising open positions on several job boards through its relationship with [JobElephant](#). In addition, departments should post descriptions on job boards, listservs, conferences, and engage in other forms of outreach, including those specific to the relevant field/sub-fields and those intended to reach a wide range of potential candidates.

Personalized and proactive outreach is essential to reaching and encouraging a sizable pool of excellent candidates. FSAs should encourage and advise search committees on strategies that ensure a fair and open process.

Evaluating and Selecting Candidates

During the search committee's deliberations, the FSA should ensure that all candidates are evaluated in the same manner and using the same criteria. The FSA should work with the

committee to generate a list of relevant questions based on the position description and encourage committee members to discuss and agree upon the criteria that are important for success in the position – before the committee begins a review of applications. Search committees are encouraged to look deeply at individual candidate qualifications. For example, search committee members should read publications rather than relying only on a candidate's CV or application letter. To avoid viewing letters from references from close friends/colleagues more favorably than letters from others and help ensure fair consideration of all applicants, we recommend that letters of reference be used only to inform understanding of the qualifications of finalists.

The FSA should discuss with the committee – at each stage when the pool is narrowed (e.g., when candidates are selected for interviews, job talks, etc.) – why the decision was made to advance particular candidates over others based on the candidates' qualifications. If the FSA believes there are qualified candidates who should have been advanced or that further outreach should be conducted to expand the pool because the current candidates' qualifications do not sufficiently align with the qualifications for the position, the FSA should raise this with the committee. The FSA should review and approve the shortlist of candidates to be interviewed and the reason the finalist is being recommended.

Once a final candidate is recommended for hire, the FSA is asked to confirm that a search was conducted in accordance with University policies and guidelines. A completed [Faculty Search Report Form](#) must be uploaded into Interfolio for any search that results in an offer of employment at Penn. The search record retained must include the names/titles of members of the search committee and the name/title of the person making the hiring decision/recommendation.

FSAs should also remind committees about best practices post-search, including ensuring that all candidates are notified of their application status. It is important that all candidates, particularly finalists and others who were interviewed, have confidence that the selection resulted from a fair and open search. Questions about family and other personal transition issues – whether from a finalist or other candidates in the pool – should be directed to the School's Faculty Affairs staff.

We also encourage the FSA to debrief with the committee after the search concludes to discuss potential areas for process improvement. As a reminder, please reach out to the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty or your School's Faculty Affairs staff with feedback, questions, and recommendations.