



## Recruiting Strategies: Social Media

The goal of this guide is to provide search committees with advice for using social media in faculty recruitment. At the forefront, we want to acknowledge that social media is a changing and evolving landscape. As social media platforms shift and change, advice in this section may need to be modified. It has long been standard advice for committee members not to use search engines or social media to research the applicants because of inequities in the information publicly available that could bias evaluators and instead evaluate the candidates based on materials they submit with their application. We agree with this advice. Despite this advice, research suggests that the use of social media in the hiring process has grown increasingly common and shapes the evaluation of applicants.<sup>1</sup> There are some benefits to using social media to advertise the position and help ensure a larger, and potentially more diverse, pool of applicants that spans disciplinary boundaries. In an era where sites like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Mastodon are increasingly used to share professional and academic opportunities, using these powerful tools for candidate recruitment may provide unavoidable opportunities to learn characteristics of candidates that could increase bias or contribute to biased assessment. It is important to acknowledge this and utilize strategies to maximize the potential of social media to improve the recruitment of a diverse and excellent pool of candidates for your position, while minimizing the potential for bias that could occur in these online forums.

To maximize the benefits of social media:

- The committee should strategize about how to reach the most diverse audience possible via social media. In addition to having members of the committee or department post to their own networks (if they are active on social media), we recommend using popular hashtags that help circulate listings across all academic disciplines, disciplinary specific hashtags that will help circulate information to the relevant audience, and hashtags for specific groups with members that are underrepresented in your field. While hashtags are constantly evolving, and disciplines vary, #AcademicTwitter and #AcademicChatter are good places to start. We recommend departments consult someone who is savvy about social media to put in the effort and

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<sup>1</sup> Sameen, S., & Cornelius, S. (2015). Social networking sites and hiring: How social media profiles influence hiring decisions. *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly*, 7(1), 27.

learn what relevant hashtags are for the moment and for each discipline. This is one of the great opportunities of social media; people's networks are often bigger and more diverse online than they are in real life.

- The committee should consider using social media to follow affinity groups and relevant hashtags before the job ad has been released. There are also specific job lists on social media, some of which are disciplinary specific, which may be good to learn and follow to help expand the reach of the job advertisement.

To minimize the potential for bias when utilizing social media:

- Standardize job-search related language to be used on social media sites. Just as any job advertisements should use standard language that is consistent with the position listing, so too should any postings on social media. The search committee should discuss and agree upon the text to use in job advertisements and social media and then have all committee members who are active on social media share the agreed upon posting. The goal of using standardized language is to ensure that you are providing the same information to all applicants. This language should also be communicated to all departmental members active on social media who may be sharing the advertisement.
- Committee members should also be cautious to avoid sharing information that is not in the job listing (for example, preference for research specialty if no preference is in the listing) as this can influence the information different applicants have, and which in turn can influence the content of their applications, and hence, their evaluation. This information may also not be reflective of the evaluation rubric or of the majority of the committee's expectations.
- Consider identifying a point person, such as a the Chair of the committee, for questions and concerns. When a job ad is shared on social media, it is likely that interested parties will comment or direct message the poster with questions<sup>2</sup>. These interactions leave room for candidates to be provided with different information and for search committee members to engage in conversations about the job in different, and potentially unfair and biased, ways. It is also during these interactions that a candidate may disclose, or a committee member will learn, potentially sensitive information. For example, someone's profile picture or display name could provide information about family status, gender, sexuality, nationality, or disability status. Research done in

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to acknowledge that this phenomenon also happens outside of social media. Individuals with connections may contact people they know in departments or on committees. While this is a consideration related to social media, it is not limited to this format.

Belgium shows that professionals used profile pictures on Facebook to draw conclusions on personality dimensions and behavior in a problematic way.<sup>3</sup>

- Prospective applicants may ask questions about the position. In that case, those questions should be sent to the Chair of the committee. The Chair should answer these questions to the best of their ability and should aim to provide everyone with the same information while keeping in mind that the goal is to recruit. At this stage, no-one should be discouraged from applying. Interested individuals should be making their own decisions about whether they will apply for the position.
- Prospective applicants may ask questions about what it's like to live in a specific area or work in your department/university when they respond to postings on social media. These questions may be general, or they may ask specifically about conditions or resources for specific groups (e.g., parents, members of gender racial/ethnic groups underrepresented in your discipline, people with disabilities). Consider providing candidates with links to resources about what it is like to live in and work in your area rather than relying heavily on one-on-one interactions, either publicly or privately via social media outlets. People's experiences with and knowledge about a specific area range depending on a variety of factors. Providing links to guides allow all candidates access to the same information.

While providing the same resources to all applicants is important, it may not be sufficient. In order to be responsive and welcoming to prospective applicants, the chair, committee members, and department members may need to answer questions. If this is the case, provide answers to the best of your ability and acknowledge that these answers are based on your personal perspectives and experiences and that others may have different perspectives. Consider noting that if they apply and become a final candidate that will have an opportunity to meet with several people and gain additional information and perspectives. Be sure not to expand into areas other than the question/s actually asked and avoid using the discussion to raise additional questions about aspects of the prospective applicant's identity or concerns as this could inadvertently lead to the impression or the actuality of relying on aspects of an applicant's identity unrelated to their qualifications for the position when evaluating their candidacy

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<sup>3</sup> Caers, R., & Castelyns, V. (2011). LinkedIn and Facebook in Belgium: The influences and biases of social network sites in recruitment and selection procedures. *Social Science Computer Review*, 29(4), 437-448.

(see Lam 2016<sup>4</sup>). We also encourage you to look at our advice for interviewing final candidates for additional guidance on answering questions from candidates<sup>5</sup>.

- Despite taking all precautions, it is likely in a social media environment that members of the search committee or department will at some point come across personal information about candidates that would be inappropriate to ask about directly during an interview. Research suggests that those reviewing information found on social media may alter their previous decisions based on learning subsequent information via social media – even if that information is subjective or unrelated to the job.<sup>6</sup> Thus, this information could bias evaluation of the candidate. It's important to ensure that you recognize this potential for bias in yourself, and also are careful not to share that personal information about the candidate with other committee members, as it may also invoke bias for those members.

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<sup>4</sup> Lam, H. (2016). Social media dilemmas in the employment context. *Employee Relations*, 38(3), 420-437. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-04-2015-0072>.

<sup>5</sup> Fine, E. & Handelsman, J. (2012). *Searching for Excellence & Diversity: A Guide for Search Committees*. pp. 81-109.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, T., & Almand, A. D. (2014). THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIRING DECISIONS. *Journal of Information Systems Technology & Planning*