

**Search and Interview Guidelines Revised June 2018**

All of us are aware that there are certain questions or topics of conversation that are inappropriate when interviewing. These guidelines for hiring authorities and members of search committees provide a refresher on these “do’s and don’ts” – including both what may seem “obvious” and also subtler areas for awareness.

The key to avoiding missteps in interviews is to focus on the nature of the job and the candidate’s ability to perform successfully, rather than any *assumptions* you may have about someone’s personal characteristics or personal life – whether those assumptions are your own, or assumptions you are presuming to make on behalf of the job candidate, given where *you* think he or she might be coming from personally and/or culturally.

Focus on the *job*. Find out how fluent the candidate is with the College’s needs and expectations for the position by asking pertinent questions: What are the key challenges for colleges today? How do you share your research interests with your students? Can you tell me about an experience that demonstrates your philosophy of student service? These are valid, job-related questions that will give you the answers you need.

**SOME SPECIFIC FAUX PAS – AND THEIR PREVENTION**

**DON’T ASK:** Do you have children?

Or any variations on this theme: How many children? Do you plan to have (more) children? Will you continue to work after you have children?

And don’t try to be sneaky either: “Am I the only one whose kids text me with silly questions all day long?”

**DO ASK:** Our regular office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Are you typically available during those hours?

This position requires some evening and weekend work (or regular travel). Would this pose any difficulty for you?

We are looking for stability and continuity in this area. How would you perceive your commitment to this position if you are hired?

**DON’T ASK:** Are you married? Do you have a partner?

**DO ASK – YOURSELF:** Why do you want to know? If your interest relates to the candidate’s commitment to the position, see the “DO ASK” questions above. If you’re just making conversation (or being nosy), the candidate will probably satisfy your curiosity eventually, whether pre- or post-hire.

**CLARIFICATION:** Organizations are rightly concerned about accommodating the professional needs of both parties in a couple; such concerns can indeed be significant for a family contemplating a move to a new geographical area. The key here is to let the *candidate* bring up the topic – at that point, discussion is appropriate.

**DON’T ASK:**  Just so you know, you’d be OK with reporting to a

gay

Latino

supervisor

with a disability

who is younger than you are, right?

The principle here is simple: no one *should* have a “problem” working

with someone “different” from herself – which is why it is inappropriate to raise such questions (or again, to exclude a qualified applicantfrom further consideration based on how you *think* the applicant would feel).

**DO ASK:** This position requires the ability to work with students and colleagues from diverse backgrounds. Can you tell us about experiences you have had in multicultural settings?

What do you see as some of the primary challenges facing students of color/adult learners/international students/etc.?

**IN ADDITION:** Candidates invited for on-campus interviews should have the opportunity to meet with prospective co-workers and the individuals to whom they would be immediately accountable. Any rapport-related concerns are likely to become evident at that time, to interviewer and interviewee alike.

**DON’T ASK MISCELLANEOUS INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS, ESPECIALLY “CLEVER” ONES:**

* What challenges have you had to deal with as a blind professor? [*The candidate will almost certainly address this topic in his or her own way. If an interviewer raises the subject of an applicant’s disability, the connotation is negative and can easily be construed as discriminatory.]*
* I finished my doctorate when I was in my late twenties, about the same time you did, I imagine? OR Once I hit 50, I really noticed that our students see me as “old.” I wonder how you’ve dealt with that? OR So tell me, what do you hope to achieve before you retire? [*If you think there are “clever” ways to figure out how old somebody is, there aren’t. And the clever candidate who doesn’t end up getting the job may pursue a complaint of age discrimination if interviewers have been asking questions, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that make reference to age.]*
* As you can imagine, Daemen puts a premium on student safety and expects all its employees to be of good character. Of course, that wouldn’t be a problem for you...would it? [*Generally speaking, it is illegal to consider arrest records or ex-offender status in employment. All new hires are subject to background checks, so you are best advised to leave this issue to the experts in the HR Office, should it arise after an offer has been made.]*
* What a beautiful and unique first name you have! Where does it come from? [*It may very well come from an ethnic origin that is none of your concern unless the candidate chooses to mention it herself.]*
* Is there a religious significance to the medallion/ring/tattoo/animal

bones you’re wearing? [*If there is, you don’t need to know about it. If the individual’s Sabbath is Wednesday through Friday inclusive, you’ll find that*

*out when you ask, nondiscriminatorily, about his availability for the position’s work hours.]*

**DON’T SEND NEGATIVE SIGNALS**

Be aware of your body language, conversational style, and basic social etiquette. For example:

* Repeated requests of the candidate to repeat him or herself or repeated failures to recall or correctly pronounce the candidate’s name give a negative impression. If you find the candidate’s name or manner of speaking unfamiliar or difficult, take it as a cue to listen extra attentively.
* Failure on your part to make “small talk” when socially appropriate sends the signal that you feel you potentially have little in common with the candidate – an assumption that may relate or can be seen by the candidate as relating to cultural difference.
* Be aware of non-verbal behaviors that can signal exclusion – e.g., lack of eye contact, turning one’s back, focusing on colleagues to the exclusion of the candidate. Be aware of seating arrangements that can make a candidate feel “set apart. “Conversely, be aware of cultural differences potentially informing the candidate’s behavior – for example, someone’s degree of formality, differences in personal space boundaries, or degree of eye contact. The best advice is to act naturally oneself but not to jump to conclusions about the candidate’s behaviors if he or she is from a cultural background other than your own.
* Ask a candidate with a disability *if* you can assist him or her, if assistance seems warranted; don’t *assume* the candidate needs assistance. Touching a disabled person (or his wheel chair, or her service dog) without permission is considered very rude, and may actually interfere with the individual’s mobility.

**DON’T DWELL ON POTENTIALLY DISCRIMINATION-RELATED TOPICS — EVEN IF THE CANDIDATE BRINGS THEM UP**

Candidates will often volunteer information about their personal background and personal life, and may freely discuss their experience of race, gender, cultural identity, etc. in the workplace. Such discussion between a candidate and interviewers is entirely appropriate – up to a point. Be aware of the overall shape and content of the interview. Excessive attention to the candidate’s “difference” may have two undesirable consequences: (i) lack of attention to other important areas for discussion and (ii) an unsuccessful candidate’s perception that “difference” is precisely why he or she didn’t get the job – given the relative amount of discussion, even positive discussion, of the topic.

**DO FOCUS ON THE CANDIDATE’S JOB-RELATED QUALIFICATIONS AND ENJOY YOUR INTERVIEWS!**

**RED FLAGS** 

“I don’t think he would be comfortable here.”

“She just isn’t fitting in.”

“Collegiality is an issue.”

Common enough remarks – and perhaps spoken without any discriminatory intent or component – but department heads and all employees are well-advised to take a moment to reflect on what is actually being said in such instances.

*Why* isn’t she “fitting in”? Is she a born-again Christian in a department where other employees use profanity and tell risqué jokes? Does she miss out on social activities because of the nature of her disability? Is English her second language?

Similarly, is an application set aside because it is *assumed* that an eminently qualified applicant wouldn’t “feel comfortable” here? Is the interviewer thereby making an improper decision *for* the applicant rather than allowing him – and the College – the opportunity to make an informed decision?

To what extent are collegiality concerns related, directly or indirectly, to the fact that someone is the only gay or international or person of color in the department? Might this person’s lack of optimal participation in departmental life relate in any way to failures on his colleagues’ part to welcome and include him, in both formal and informal ways?

To be sure, collegiality and rapport among employees are critical to the smooth and effective functioning of a department. Collegiality is typically a legitimate criterion for positive personnel actions (e.g., granting of tenure). However, it is essential – legally, professionally, and ethically – that “lack of collegiality” not mask what may be discriminatory behaviors or attitudes on the part of colleagues.

It is always good practice when such issues arise for the department as a whole and individual members of the department to engage in honest self-examination. If interpersonal relationships can be repaired and improved, much anguish on the part of everyone involved (as well as the time and expense of a new search) can be prevented.

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Questions?

If you have questions or concerns at any time relating to search protocols, please contact Marissa Pace, Director of Employee Engagement, or Alvin Roberts, Daemen’s Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Officer. Thank you for your participation in this important task!