Tips on Checking References

When to contact references. References provided with applications should be checked before any interview process begins. References not specifically provided by the candidate should always be checked, but must be done under the following circumstances. 1) Early in the search process (before candidates are scheduled for campus visits) the committee can contact people who are not on a candidate’s reference list only with prior approval from the candidate. 2) After candidates are committed to on-campus interviews the process becomes public and anyone may be called; however this should be discussed first with the candidates, as there may be special circumstances about which they may wish to inform the committee.

Who conducts the telephone reference check? The Recruitment Committee should decide whether the chair of the committee, an appropriate administrator, or a designee from the Recruitment Committee will contact references. The same person may talk to each reference for a candidate to ensure consistency in how questions are handled and to compare information gathered.

Arranging the telephone reference check. Contact the reference well in advance to set a convenient time. Usually 15 to 20 minutes are sufficient for each interview.

What to ask. The Recruitment Committee must formulate a list of questions to be asked of each reference for each candidate. Questions should be job-related, focusing on performance, interaction with colleagues, teaching abilities, supervisory skill (or potential for such), and other open questions that would shed light on a candidate’s suitability. Often, a good final question is, "What else should we know about the candidate that would be relevant to our assessment of his or her suitability for this position?"

It is wise to confirm that, if asked in the near future, the reference will submit a letter in support of the candidate. The administrator making the final decision may require such written documentation to aid in the decision if she or he has not been part of the complete recruitment process.

Q. How should the committee deal with international applicants?

A. On occasion, Recruitment Committees have asked international candidates to submit videotaped presentations in lieu of on-campus interviews. In cases such as these where travel costs are prohibitive, committees should consult both the ODAA and the Office of International Studies.