

CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSIONALS

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

It is often stated that in positions of academic leadership, “Getting the job is more difficult than doing the job!” Particularly in the interview phase of the process, knowing who you are and what strengths you possess is critical to your success.

The interview process, both as a semifinal candidate and as one of the final candidates for the position, is key to selection. The four essential factors for predicting success on-the-job and, therefore, where you have to “shine” to get the job, are;

- (1) Intellectual capacity,
- (2) Interpersonal skills,
- (3) Personal motivation, and
- (4) The ability to motivate others.

These four factors need to be conveyed during the interviewing process.

Prepare, prepare, prepare, and then prepare a little more!

Once you become a candidate, following is a list of materials that are helpful in researching the college. If you cannot find the materials online, request them from the college. In addition, review the profile to identify what their key issues are and be prepared to answer questions about them.

- List of members of the search committee and their position titles;
- Organizational chart;
- Current catalog,
- Student and faculty handbooks;
- Strategic plan;
- Collective bargaining agreements;
- Summary report of last self-study;
- Current budget;
- Maps of area and college;
- Student newspapers and local news articles about college;
- Annual Report and/or alumni magazine.

Review your application letter, identify any criteria items that are particularly strong accomplishments and speak about them if you are not asked a question that elicits

them. However, do not attempt to weave your accomplishments into a question to which it does not pertain. You will be seen as trying to control the interview.

Answer the questions asked. At the close of the interview, if there is time, remind the committee of additional accomplishments or qualities which they did not inquire about and which are important to their criteria.

Be prepared to enjoy the interview. If you don't relax, the interview committee won't either. They are judging you as a potential leader and co-worker. The committee members are asking themselves, "How would it be to work for this candidate?"

Dressing for the Interview

Dress the part of the senior college administrator. If you wear eye makeup, beware to the effect of eyeliner underneath your eyes. Men and women should be aware of perfume and after shave. In addition, be aware of personal habits. For example, some women and men have a habit of pushing their hair back or playing with their hair.

For men, white, long-sleeve shirts are the norm; no short-sleeve shirts, even in the summer. Ties should reach the top or middle of the belt buckle, with no shirt showing. It is not possible to be too conservative.

Your goal is to have people identify you as a positive candidate as you walk through a group. Women, in particular, need to present a strong 'presence' and strong does not mean loud or boring. Also, conservative does not mean that you have to wear a black suit. For women, red, bright blue and navy, even deep pink, are also appropriate.

During the in-person interview, walk around the room, look at each person, shake hands, and say hello. It is not necessary to repeat your name, they know who you are. Repeat the committee member's names. "Hello, Bill, I'm delighted to meet you." You're beginning to build a relationship with each person.

The hand shake is also important. Your hand shake should be firm, using your whole hand, not just three fingers.

At your chair, sit down comfortably, and look at the committee chair. Sit with your feet flat on the floor, slightly to the front of the chair. Aim to be relaxed, alert, and attentive. Do not slouch or lean on the table with your elbows. Show the group that you're ready.

Have a colleague or two "interview you" using standard candidate interview questions. How do you look, are there any mannerisms that you can learn to control,

i.e. what do you do with your hands, do you have a nervous giggle? How does your voice project?

Focus on the person asking the question, but do not ignore the others. Look at the individual asking the questions as you begin to speak. Then slowly move your eye contact to others in the group.

Typically, each person in the room will ask a question and possibly a follow-up. Be sure your answers are succinct, clear and short. Learn to make mental checklists and tick off each item as you discuss/report it. If you have a question as to whether you understood the meaning of the question, check back with the questioner to see if you've answered the question fully. Give specific examples of activities to respond to the questions, and avoid philosophy. As much as possible, use concrete examples from your career to demonstrate your suitability for the position you are seeking, not the position you currently hold.

Don't be afraid to ask for a question, or a subpart of a question, to be repeated. If you're comfortable jotting down some key words as soon as the interviewer is finished asking the question, do so. It will help keep you focused and remind you of points you want to make. Don't, however, read your answers or your notes to the committee.

At the close of the interview, there will usually be time for questions that you may have of the committee. Salary and benefit questions should not be asked at this time. Ask about something you really care about learning and ask a question that relates to the position you are seeking, rather than the position you currently hold.

If you do not have a question or have something to discuss with the committee, it is more effective to ask if you may make a statement to summarize your interests in, and qualifications for, the position. Most effective of all is to tell the committee, why you want to be their leader not just a leader.

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MANAGING TECHNOLOGY DURING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The age of technology is here and, with greater regularity, it is being used in the interview process for community college administrators. While many can and do argue about the validity and impact of technology on the hiring process, nonetheless, it is likely here to stay. Therefore, it is best to prepare for the methods of conveying information to the search committee.

Videotaped Interviews

Videotaped preliminary or semi-final interviews are common. While on-campus interviews provide the most complete review of each candidate, candidate videotape interviews are an attractive alternative for colleges with tight travel budgets. Typically, videotaped interviews are conducted using a standard set of questions, and are generally 30 to 45 minutes in length. The videotapes generally become the property of the college.

Interactive Videoconference Interviews

Using the campus telecommunications network and external telecommunication sites, committees can communicate real time with candidates without the expense of candidate travel. This method of interview has long been used in the business sector, as the cost savings and reliability of the process have been demonstrated.

The mixing of on-campus, videotaped, or videoconference interviews of semi-final candidates is highly prejudicial and strongly discouraged.

Maximizing your Onscreen Presentation

- Speak at a normal volume. Talking too loudly will give feedback on the committee's end.
- Gesture naturally, but be careful not to wave your hands around too much. A lot of movement will appear as a blur on the screen.
- Blouses and shirts that are light pastels, muted colors, and have simple patterns or stripes come across best on camera. If you're wearing a scarf or tie with your outfit, a contrasting color looks terrific with a light-colored blouse or shirt. Very bright colors and all light or all dark clothing don't pick up well on camera. Stay away from busy patterns on a tie or scarf.
- Avoid wearing excessive jewelry and having a lot of paper near the microphone. For example, bracelets and cuff links can clink on the desk near the microphones. Likewise, shuffling paper near the microphones is distracting.