

Appendix G. Guidance for Interviewing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- ✓ **Refer to the Office of the Dean of Faculties for up-to-date guidance on hiring procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
<http://dof.tamu.edu/Hiring/2020-Hiring-Authorization>

- ✓ **Refer to Texas A&M Covid-19 information page for up-to-date guidance on travel restrictions.**
<https://www.tamu.edu/coronovairus/travel.html>

- ✓ **Consider the equity implications of having candidates travel to participate in interviews.** Assuming your unit is able to obtain approval for job candidates to visit the campus, consider how on-campus interviews introduces an equity issue. Not all job candidates will be able to participate in on-campus interviews due to travel restrictions at their home locations (including many international applicants). And, not all job candidates will feel comfortable traveling during a pandemic. This has the potential to create an inequitable interview experience where some candidates have a campus visit, while others do not.

- ✓ **Consider the other downsides of having candidates travel to participate in interviews.** Asking candidates to travel during the middle of a pandemic might send the wrong signal to candidates about the work environment at Texas A&M University. Even if candidates do visit campus, they will not have the same experience that they will have during a normal year given social distancing measures on campus and the high number of remote courses. Faculty participation in the search will be limited to faculty who feel comfortable meeting in person (with a mask). Job candidates will be left to wonder whether some faculty opted out because they were not interested in their candidacy for a position. One of the benefits of a campus visit is to show candidates what it is like to be on campus, but the campus experience is lacking normal energy due to the pandemic.

- ✓ **Send short videos of your department and facilities to candidates who have been short-listed for your position.** Use these videos to showcase classroom space, lab facilities, etc.

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- ✓ **Be aware that recruitment efforts may need to intensify for some positions.** Position openings for junior faculty positions are likely to be quite competitive in disciplines where the typical applicant is likely to be a recent PhD graduate and/or postdoctoral scholar, and less competitive for senior faculty hires and administrative faculty hires where the typical applicant is already employed at another institution. Even for junior faculty positions, strong candidates are often people who are already employed in a similar position. During a pandemic, search committees may need to be more aggressive when it comes to encouraging potential applicants to apply for a position. (See p. 13 of this handbook.)
- ✓ **Communicate frequently with job candidates.** Whether you have more applicants than usual, or fewer applicants than usual, you want to
- ✓ **Use a web-based platform (e.g. Interfolio and Zoom) to review and discuss candidate application materials.** The use of Interfolio should make it easier for committee members to review applicant materials without the need of a copy machine, and the use of Zoom should allow for safe video-conference meetings.
- ✓ **Encourage short-listed candidates to review information for prospective faculty available on the ADVANCE website.**
<https://advance.tamu.edu/Resources/Resources-for-Job-Candidates-and-New-Faculty>.
- ✓ **Make sure the host and the candidate are comfortable using Zoom prior to the interview.** Make sure your job candidate is a “co-host” of the meeting so they can share their screen. Offer to do a practice run so they can practice using the share screen function (if using Powerpoint), and/or practice any other Zoom features they might use during their job talk lecture (i.e. polls, chat, etc.)
- ✓ **Be as professional as possible in virtual spaces.** Faculty conducting interviews should take steps to ensuring that lighting is ideal for the web camera and that voices are audible. Faculty interviewing candidates should use their full names as usernames and mute themselves when not speaking (if there are background noises).

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- ✓ **Understand the potential implicit bias of Zoom interviews AND the inherent inequities of Zoom virtual backgrounds.** Implicit bias may be at play when candidates interview via Zoom, as interviewers might pick up on social cues and codes in the background (i.e. the appearance of somebody's home office, children, partners, pets). To mitigate against this, some candidates may choose to use a virtual background in an effort to appear more professional and/or to block out aspects of their personal life. Search committees should realize that the face-detection algorithm that Zoom uses does not work as well for people of color. (Specifically, heads are more likely to disappear.) Allow candidates to decide on their own whether or not to use a virtual Zoom background, but be mindful of why some candidates may opt against using a virtual background, and be careful to avoid forming any opinions based on any real life backgrounds.
- ✓ **Retain essential aspects of the finalist interviews, but factor in Zoom fatigue and work-life balance issues when scheduling Zoom alternatives for campus visits.** Job candidates typically have fully packed schedules for campus visits. This makes sense when you are trying to fit a lot of activities into a short visit. It is less practical for a Zoom alternative for a campus visit, as job candidates are likely to have home responsibilities that they need to balance with the interview (including child care). In addition, participating in one Zoom meeting after another is likely to be more tiring than a typical campus visit.
- ✓ **Record essential aspects of the interview to allow greater participation in the process.** If interviews are conducted via Zoom, it is easy to record the job talk lecture (or open forum for administrative hires). These recordings can then be viewed later by individuals who are unable to participate.
- ✓ **Be creative in creating the Zoom interview itinerary.** Find ways for finalists to meet a mix of people, including students, staff, and faculty. For example, you might want to arrange a Zoom meeting with a select group of students. Have students prepare questions for the candidates before the meeting.

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- ✓ **Be prepared to address concerns about the financial security of the institution.** This is a stressful time for everybody, and candidates are likely to be wondering whether it is a good time to relocate. There are likely to be real financial impacts of the pandemic at ALL institutions of higher education. Relatively speaking, large public universities like Texas A&M are likely to “weather the storm” better than other institutions due to relatively stable enrollments and high levels of investment from endowment funds. As a state institution, however, Texas A&M is likely to face some budget cuts as the state responds to the pandemic.
- ✓ **Consider inviting the finalist to visit campus after an offer has been made.** If your department decides against having campus visits, this will still provide candidates with the (optional) opportunity to visit the campus and the community, and to ask additional questions in person before accepting an offer.

Some Additional Resources Specific to Interviewing during COVID-19:

Bryan A. Banks, Stacy Blersch, Patty Chappel, Amanda Rees, and Eric Spears
“Keep Calm and Hire On” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (May 6, 2020)

Kim Brettschneider, “How to Ace the Virtual Interview” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 22, 2020)

Brian T. Edwards, “The Job Season Without In-Person Interviews” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 8, 2020)

Lucy Leske and Ann Yates, “As Classrooms Go Virtual, What about Campus-Leadership Searches?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 19, 2020)

Julia Piper, “When COVID-19 Makes Campus Visits Impossible, How are Colleges Hiring?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 6, 2020)

Links to these articles can be found at:

<https://advance.tamu.edu/Resources/Resources-for-Faculty/COVID-19-and-Academia>