GUIDELINES FOR SEARCH COMMITTEES:
ASSESSING PROSPECTIVE COLLEAGUES' POTENTIAL TEACHING ABILITY

As McGill is committed to employment equity and diversity, search committees should make themselves aware of University practices that promote diversity among the professorial corps. See Employment Equity Guidelines - Academic Recruitment. In addition, it is recommended that search committees address the potential influence of unconscious biases and assumptions on the selection process. Fine and Handelsman (2012) make a number of suggestions for search committees on how to minimize the influence of bias and assumptions, among them:

- "Learn about and discuss research on biases and assumptions and consciously strive to minimize their influence on your evaluation.
- Develop and prioritize evaluation criteria prior to evaluating candidates and apply them consistently to all applicants.
- Be able to defend every decision for eliminating or advancing a candidate."

The information below is intended to provide search committees with guidance on how to assess the potential teaching ability of candidates for faculty appointments.

1. Ensure the committee has a shared understanding of how McGill values teaching.

At the beginning of the selection process, ensure that each member of the search committee is aware that McGill is a *student-centered* research-intensive university. McGill values pedagogical practices that emphasize engaging learning, and promotes a "University-wide curriculum demanding critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving." Read more at the McGill Commitment.

2. Ensure the committee has a shared understanding of the criteria it seeks.

The committee should discuss criteria for the position in question. The University Guidelines for Developing a Teaching Portfolio can inform this discussion. Committee members might address questions such as:

- What are the most important qualities of instructors at this institution?
- What qualities comprise excellence in teaching?
- How do we identify these qualities in candidates?
- What will we accept as evidence of teaching excellence/potential?

3. Develop a set of interview questions and prompts that elicit candidates' different perspectives on teaching.

The committee should keep in mind that candidates' ability to speak robustly to different elements of teaching will depend on whether the candidate is entry-level or experienced.

Example questions and prompts:

a. To situate candidates:
- Please provide a brief summary of your teaching experience, and tell us how it has prepared you for teaching at *this* university.
- What attracts you to teaching at *this* university?

b. To elicit comments about candidates' approach to teaching:
- What do you believe is important for students to learn in [[topic] courses]?
- What do students typically find confusing about [field/topic]?
- What are some of the most topical issues related to the teaching of [field name]? How are they relevant to your teaching practice? Please provide a concrete example.
- How do you engage students in learning?
- How do you assess students' learning?
- How do you think new technologies (e.g., polling software; peer assessment software) have influenced the teaching and learning of [subject matter]? If you have used new technologies to support student learning, what was your rationale for selecting these particular technologies?
- Can you describe a situation that illustrates how your teaching addresses diversity (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability) in the classroom, in supervision or other teaching contexts?
- If given the opportunity, what course would you like to develop, and why?

If you are in a context where candidates are being hired with the teaching of specific course(s) in mind, then the committee may wish to include questions about candidates' comfort level with the topic of the course(s) and the course outline content.

c. To learn about candidates' approach to working with others in the context of teaching:
- What experience have you had supervising others (course lecturers/adjunct lecturers/graduate student Teaching Assistants)?
- How have you trained graduate student instructors (e.g., Teaching Assistants) to teach and/or grade assignments in the context of your courses?

d. To learn about candidates' approach to graduate student supervision:
- How do you see the supervisory role?
- What is your approach to ensuring a shared understanding of expectations?

e. To allow candidates to reflect on how they learn from mistakes, resolve conflicts, and solve problems:
- Tell us about a situation where you
  - [assigned a group project and several members of one group informed you that their peer was not cooperating on the project.]
  - [had to address negative feedback on your teaching.]
- What pedagogical challenges do you foresee in this position? Describe how your experience has prepared you to address them.

     f.   To end the interview:
- How does teaching at this university align with your research interests?
- What have we not asked you about your teaching experience that you wish we had?
- What questions about the teaching responsibilities do you have for us?

4. Require a teaching demonstration.

To get a sense of how candidates interact in the classroom, it is recommended to invite them to give a teaching demonstration where they will either teach an actual class or teach faculty members acting as students. Often, search committees request that candidates give a job talk. While job talks may serve as opportunities to assess the extent to which candidates can explain major concepts, the intended audience is experts in the field rather than students, and therefore, job talks are not necessarily representative of *teaching ability*.

Encourage candidates to display their finest teaching qualities by allowing them the opportunity to prepare a topic of their choice for the demonstration. If committees prefer to narrow the topic for comparison purposes, they might propose a short list of topics from which candidates can select. Committees may wish to provide candidates with context, such as the class level (e.g., 200, 300, 400) and class size.

The committee should establish criteria for assessment of the teaching demonstration. Questions that might help to establish the criteria include:

- What qualities does the committee want to see the candidate exemplify?
- How does the candidate engage students in learning? How does the candidate assess (perhaps informally) student learning?
- Do the teaching practices fit with the unit's mission? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
- Does the candidate appear to fit into the unit and institution? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?

Using a rubric to assess teaching behaviours (Green & Ciez-Volz, 2010, p. 91) may assist the committee in doing the assessment in a systematic way.

The committee might find it helpful to hold a debriefing meeting immediately after the teaching demonstration (without candidates) to address the extent to which the criteria were demonstrated. If meeting is not possible, committee members can be encouraged to takes notes for discussion at a later date.

5. Request a teaching portfolio.

Request a teaching portfolio. Examples of documents found in teaching portfolios:
- teaching statements (also referred to as teaching philosophies or statements of teaching approach)
- descriptions of teaching interests
- student evaluations
- course outlines
- examples of instructional strategies
- assignments and assessments
- evidence of participation in future faculty preparation initiatives (in the case of early-career instructors)

The committee can decide which documents they would like candidates to submit.

See McGill's Guidelines for Developing a Teaching Portfolio for details about the evidence of teaching ability/potential that our university seeks. When assessing candidates' documents, look for descriptions of specific instances of how candidates have supported student learning and how they handled challenging teaching situations rather than general statements unsupported by actual experience. Teaching statements can provide evidence of: dedication to teaching; writing and communication skills; reflection on teaching; a learning-centered orientation; and fit between the applicant and the hiring institution. Overall, look for alignment between candidates' evidence and McGill's teaching portfolio criteria.

6. Learn about candidates' self-perceived teaching support needs.

Consider asking candidates to describe to the search committee what kinds of teaching support they feel they might benefit from. Responses might afford the search committee further insight into candidates' self-perceptions of teaching ability.

Teaching and Learning Services believes that all instructors have the potential to be excellent teachers. Contact Teaching and Learning Services with questions or comments.

The information in this document is drawn from the following sources:

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