

Addressing Avoiding Unconscious Bias in the Hiring Process

A Workshop for Cal Poly Humboldt Search Committee Members

Presented by: Cal Poly Humboldt Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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Image by Adolfo Valle from

<https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/creating-bias-detectives-blowing-up-stereotypes-and-writing-essays-that-matter/>

Pre-Session Survey: <https://forms.gle/Z54UC6ozHpb7u7yeA>



Why This Session Matters: Purpose and Learning Goals:

- **To refresh our understanding of implicit bias.**
- **To learn how bias manifests in the hiring process.**
- **To gain strategies for creating a more equitable hiring system.**

The Biology of Thinking: The "Fast Brain" vs. The "Slow Brain"

- Our brains use shortcuts, or **schemas**, to process information quickly. This is a natural, neurological function. Our schemes are unique to each person, and are comprised of all of our direct and indirect experiences.
- Daniel Kahneman's "Thinking Fast and Slow"
 - The "fast brain" relies on these shortcuts to make automatic judgments. Positively, this creates efficiency.
 - The "slow brain" is intentional and deliberate, but it requires conscious effort.
- **Unconscious or Implicit Bias often occurs when we rely on our "fast brain" without intentional self-monitoring.**

As a search committee member, which thinking strategy should we employ?



Historical Context of Bias: Our History Informs Our Present

- Bias is not just about individual belief or behavior; it is also a product of **historical and societal messaging**, beliefs and behaviors we inherit or are exposed to.
- Our schemas and mental shortcuts are often based on stereotypes and beliefs reinforced by our environment including our educational systems, not just personal experience.
- Understanding this helps us see bias as a systemic phenomenon that impacts us all.



Pause point:

What about the term
“implicit”?

Implicit is the opposite of
explicit.

Explicit is what we say directly,

Implicit is what we what is
implied or inherent, even
though unspoken

***Can my implicit bias goes
against my explicit values?***

Common Biases in Hiring

Halo/Horns Effect: When a single positive or negative trait sways your overall impression of a candidate.

Halo:

- Manifests as favoritism and giving some applicants both more attention and the benefit of the doubt
- Bias is when we focus on a particular outstanding feature about a person. Everything else is viewed through a positive light, blinding us about any other trait.

Horns:

- Manifests as neglect; absence of care, assistance, or attention
- Bias is the opposite of the Halo effect. We focus on a specific negative aspect about a person, blurring the view of other characteristics.

Affinity Bias: The tendency to favor people who are similar to you.

- Affinity bias means that we prefer people who share qualities with us over someone else. This could be someone who attended the same university or share the same hobbies.

Contrast Effect: When you compare a candidate to others you've recently interviewed, rather than to the job criteria.

- Contrast effect bias occurs when we compare two or more similar situations, making an assessment based on such comparison, instead of forming an opinion based on their own merits.

Attribution Bias: Attributing a person's behavior to their character, rather than to external circumstances.

- Attribution bias refers to the judgments and assumptions we make about why other people behave in a certain way. These are perceptions or interpretations instead of objective assessments

Practice the Pause

Before reviewing a resume or interviewing a candidate, take a moment to pause.

Breathe deeply and remind yourself to be intentional.

Focus on the job criteria and the evidence, not your first impression.

Every Step is an Opportunity

Every stage of the hiring process—from the job announcement to the final offer—is an opportunity to either reproduce or interrupt inequity.

Our goal is to build an equitable process from start to finish.

Today, we're going to cover the steps most pertinent to you as a committee member:

Screening Interviewing Deliberating

Fair and Consistent Screening

- Use a standardized rubric to evaluate all applications. Have consensus of the terms of the rubric.
- All committee members review all applications.
- Advance candidates when there is disagreement to give them the benefit of the doubt.
- Make sure there's enough time to review! ***Practice the pause!***

Standardizing Your Approach to the Interview Process

- Use a consistent set of questions for all candidates, ask in the same order. All questions pertain to the skills and abilities from the vacancy announcement.
- Have a diverse interview panel. Avoid groupthink.
- Consider how “small talk” may increase bias (affinity, halo, horns)
- Take detailed, factual notes during the interview.
- Use a universal design approach to ensure access to success for each candidate.
- Ensure the same amount of time for each interview. ***Practice the pause!***
- ***Avoid unstructured discussions about candidates.***

What might ***bias*** sound like during a search? And how might we respond with care?

Signs of Affinity Bias:

“Culture fit”

“Someone we can grab a beer with”

“A real-go getter”

“A true leader”

Signs of Gender or Age Bias:

“Digital Native”

“High energy”

“Maternal”

Signs of Biased Judgement:

“A very polished candidate”

“From a top school”

“A confident handshake”

The Final Recommendation: Making an Evidence-Based Decision

- Avoid discussions immediately after each candidate's interview.
- Return to the criteria you agreed upon at the start of the search.
- Base your decision on the evidence from applications and interviews.
- Compare each candidate to the vacancy announcement and job description, ***not to other candidates.***
- Normalize conversations about potential biases during the final deliberation. Reflect on the types of biases we've covered. Are any of these biases coming up?
- Ensure enough time to consider each candidate. ***Practice the Pause!***

The Equity Advocate Model: A Valuable Resource

The Equity Advocate's role: To observe and participate in the search process to guide the committee toward fair and equitable decisions.

Action: Contact the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to request an advocate for your search.

POPCORN PAUSE:



Let's use slow brain for a moment to popcorn about our thoughts:

“As you finish this required training as a committee member, what are you thinking about?”

Key Takeaways: Your Commitment to Equity

- We all have implicit biases that are activated when we are rushed or emotional.
- Managing these biases requires **intention, practice, and deliberation**.
- By implementing specific strategies at each stage, we can create a more equitable and inclusive hiring process.

Post Session Survey:

<https://forms.gle/crRidTQ3UCPHBKaN6>

Additional Resources: For Continued Learning

Implicit Association Test (IAT):

[Harvard Implicit Association Test](#)

Thank you!

Please contact the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion with any questions

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