

Formative Review of WISELI's *Searching for Excellence and Diversity: A Workshop for Search Committees*

Christine Maidl Pribbenow and Jessica K. Winchell
January 6, 2009

This report documents data gathered from post-workshop surveys conducted between Fall 2004 and Spring 2008, and a focus group conducted in July 2008 with three former workshop attendees. It is intended to provide WISELI staff—specifically, Eve Fine and Jennifer Sheridan—with information for mid-point changes to the WISELI workshop series that is offered both on-campus and off.

Data Collection

Post-workshop Surveys are conducted with each of the participants who attend the workshop series. Since Fall of 2004, approximately 410 people have responded to the survey; around 250 participated in workshops based at UW-Madison, and approximately 160 were from off-campus workshops. These surveys are conducted electronically after the final session of the workshop series and the results have been reported to the WISELI staff as individual stand-alone reports. The data presented here are averages of key questions asked of the participants from all of the workshops.

Focus Group Interviews were conducted with participants in the workshop series. The names of potential participants were randomly drawn from all of the attendees and a sample was invited to participate. Approximately ten individuals replied back and were unable to attend. Ultimately, three participants attended; 2 male and 1 female, representing CALS, L&S, and one of the Professional Schools (Vet/Pharm/Med). The focus group was planned with five participants but two were unable to attend due to emergencies that occurred on the scheduled date. The focus group questions and responses were taped, transcribed and analyzed (using ATLAS.ti) to identify common themes and suggestions for the workshop developers.

Results

The results are broken into three sections found below: *Satisfaction with and Value of the Workshops*, *Impact of Workshops*, and *Suggestions*.

Satisfaction with and Value of the Workshops

The participants rated the workshop series highly, with both on and off-campus participants responding equally positive to the question: *Please provide an overall rating for this session*. The respondents used a three-point scale to respond to this question (1= *Not at all Useful*, 2= *Somewhat Useful*, 3= *Very Useful*). For all participants, the average was 2.64 (n=406). On-campus participants averaged 2.63 on this question (n=247) while the off-campus average was 2.65 for this question (n=159).

When asked if they would recommend the workshop to others, 94% of the participants said “yes” (n=397). On-campus participants said, “yes” slightly more often (95.5%, n=242) than off-campus participants (91.7%, n=155).

The focus group participants gave voice to their satisfaction through their responses to various questions. Responses to questions about their satisfaction with the workshop series included:

I thought it was worth it.

I was pleased that I got some things out of it that seemed to be useful...I was pleased when I walked out that I had something concrete.

All three of the focus group participants agreed that having something “concrete” was very valuable. In particular, they appreciated the discussion about the unconscious biases and assumptions. Karen notes:

I thought the sharing of the information by people who have researched [bias]...and presented the data and summarized the data was excellent. I learned a lot about that.

This particular section, entitled Evaluating the Pool of Applicants: Raising Awareness of Unconscious Assumptions and their Influence, is consistently the highest rated portion of the workshop series. In the post-workshop surveys, the respondents used a three-point scale to evaluate each component: 1=*Not at all Valuable*, 2=*Somewhat Valuable*, 3=*Very Valuable*. The average ratings for each of the sections are found in Table 1. The sections are also ranked ordered from the most valuable, according to the respondents, to the lowest.

	Mean
Raise Awareness of Unconscious Assumptions and their Influence	2.70
Ensure a Fair and Thorough Review of Candidates	2.63
Develop and Implement an Effective Interview Process	2.61
Run an Effective and Efficient Search Committee	2.60
Actively Recruit a Diverse and Excellent Pool	2.59
Introduction	2.49
Close the Deal Successfully	2.44

Table 1. Rank-ordered average ratings of workshop components, for *all* post-workshop survey respondents (n=396).

On-campus workshop participants differed slightly in their views of various components of the workshops, as compared to off-campus workshop participants. Table 2 and Table 3 indicate the differences in rank ordered components and averages for each.

	Mean
Raise Awareness of Unconscious Assumptions and their Influence	2.74
Ensure a Fair and Thorough Review of Candidates	2.64
Develop and Implement an Effective Interview Process	2.63
Run an Effective and Efficient Search Committee	2.62
Actively Recruit a Diverse and Excellent Pool	2.57
Introduction	2.57
Close the Deal Successfully	2.41

Table 2. Rank-ordered average ratings of workshop components, for *on-campus* post-workshop survey respondents, n=254.

	Mean
Raise Awareness of Unconscious Assumptions and their Influence	2.65
Actively Recruit a Diverse and Excellent Pool	2.63
Ensure a Fair and Thorough Review of Candidates	2.61
Develop and Implement and Effective Interview Process	2.59
Run an Effective and Efficient Search Committee	2.58
Close the Deal Successfully	2.45
Introduction	2.37

Table 3. Rank-ordered average ratings of workshop components, for *off-campus* post-workshop survey respondents, n=163.

Despite minor differences in average ratings and rankings, both groups found the section entitled Evaluating the Pool of Applicants: Raising Awareness of Unconscious Assumptions and their Influence to be most valuable. In fact, 96.7% of on-campus participants and 96.8% of off-campus participants rated it as *Somewhat Valuable* or *Very Valuable*.

Impact of Workshops

The focus group was intended to offer former participants an opportunity to describe how they have used the information gained in the workshop while participating on or serving as chair of a search committee. Despite the low number of participants, all three had valuable experiences serving as the chair of their respective search committees and two are currently serving as department chairs. As such, they have unique perspectives about search committees and departmental structures when hiring faculty.

Two of the focus group participants thought that the workshops helped them to either diversify the pool or to interview people whom they would not normally have interviewed. In general, the participants agreed that they were more careful when reviewing CVs. In particular, one noted that the workshop helped the committee to, “be more open-minded in searching for faculty” and that some of the faculty on the committee talked about “diversity for diversity’s sake” as a goal for their department. This participant specifically noted diversity as race, gender, ethnic background, and research interests. She notes that the department, “recalibrated how they read CVs” because of the workshops.

Specific activities the participants did included recruiting in different journals, creating more welcoming environments, and sharing information with their committees. The participants especially noted the usefulness of the brochure and the data about biases and assumptions. They wondered about the “damage” that particular faculty members can have on searches and in the interviewing process when some of these biases surface. The participants noted that they continue to struggle with particular issues, especially domestic partners and benefits and also, dual-career hiring.

Ultimately, the participants had a difficult time attributing the hiring of faculty directly to participating in the workshops. According to one participant, the WISELI workshops could have played either a “very small role or maybe not that small” but there are “too many variables to say what influenced what.”

Suggestions

In general, the participants felt very positively about the workshops and noted that department chairs should have to attend, as well. In regards to hiring, the Chair is responsible for “closing the

deal” and in some cases, mishandling negotiations. If department chairs do not attend all of the sessions, the participants thought that they should attend the final session. Regardless, more time needs to be spent on “closing the deal” in the final workshop session.

The participants also suggested using web-based technology to videotape particular sections of the workshops to be played to the committee as a whole. These “mini-lectures” may be more effective than having the attendees report back to the group. Perhaps the workshop could be distilled into a short handout with best practices on interviewing, especially the one-on-one meetings between candidates and individual faculty, as well as how to recognize and address bias.

In regards to topics, as department chairs and search committee members, they felt that they needed more guidance to deal with the “bind” of dual-career hiring and how to work with other department chairs/deans from other schools to help find a spouse/partner a position. They noted that they are continually challenged in recruiting minority candidates and that a targeted session about writing PVL’s would be valuable. Lastly, they continue to struggle with the hundreds of applications they receive while acknowledging the careful review needed of each.