American Society for Theatre Research

ASTR Concept Paper
on Best Practices for Searches in
Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies

In 2022, members of the ASTR community approached the Executive Committee with the request that the organization establish a task force to develop a guide for best practices in conducting academic job searches. The guidelines were brought to the ASTR Executive Committee in 2023, and after revision, ratified by the EC in 2024.

We all see concerns about materials tailored for specific institutions, the rushed process of soliciting recommendation letters, inconsistent information for candidates who reach the stage of the campus visit, and a lack of courtesy about rejection letters.

We are mindful that the labor demands on applicants and on search committees continue to grow. Applicants on the job market apply to dozens of positions each year. References are often asked to write letters on short notice.

Faculty on search committees are also charged with reading and evaluating these applications on top of their already extensive research, teaching, and service loads. The labor of serving on a search committee is often additive without any sort of additional relief from other responsibilities or compensation.

Our goal is to create a concept paper that offers best practices to search committees for conducting an academic job search. This will include advice for those conducting searches for tenure-stream and contingent positions. This paper will explore the process from writing the job ad to staging the campus visit. Although we understand that every institution has its own set of bureaucracies that mandate certain things throughout the hiring process, we believe that greater clarity and respect for the labor involved in a job search can create a more inclusive and equitable process for all involved.

Respectfully Submitted,

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American Society for Theatre Research

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Materials requested from the candidate

Given the nature of the academic job market, a committee can expect to see a large pool of applicants. Search committees are advised to request as few documents as possible from candidates across the search process. Search committees are strongly encouraged to request nothing beyond the CV and cover letter/letter of interest in the initial application. As the candidate list grows shorter, more documents may be requested.

It is additionally recommended that committees underscore to candidates that they should *not* send documents which are not requested. Committees should not consider documents sent as additions and not specifically requested. This is a matter of equity as the consideration of additional documentation from candidates who know, think, or are advised to send said additional documents creates an unfair advantage to those who are likely to receive this degree of hands-on mentorship (i.e.: it unfairly biases towards candidate groups who are historically overrepresented in the academy).

Standardizing the kinds of documents requested from candidates across the field will both improve the quality of documents received by search committees and create a more humane hiring process. As such, below is the standardized list of documents we recommend might be chosen from, given a committee's needs, as well as guidelines for when these documents might be requested.

- CV
- Cover Letter/Letter of Interest
- Letters of Recommendation/Reference Lists
- Portfolio
- Research statement
- Sample syllabi
- Statement of teaching philosophy
- Writing sample

Standalone statements addressing equity, diversity, and inclusion are not recommended. The work of equity, diversity, and inclusion cannot be segregated from teaching, research, and service. As such, candidates should be encouraged to address their EDI contributions in documents such as the cover letter, statement of teaching philosophy, and research statement.

When considering expectations around tailoring materials to an institution, search committees are encouraged to consider the labor conditions for the position to be filled. Requiring or encouraging extensive tailoring for short-term contingent positions (VAPs, lecturers, etc.) asks a candidate to do an unfair amount of emotional and mental labor given the potential outcome for the candidate. When hiring for contingency, committees should ask for nominal tailoring of candidate materials. Contingent searches should not be treated in the same terms as searches for tenure-stream positions.

Under no circumstances should a candidate be asked to create custom-drafted syllabi for an institution. Soliciting sample syllabi from the candidate ensures that a committee can understand how a candidate might approach the work of teaching, but committees should not ask candidates to draft completely new syllabi for courses (particularly courses the institution currently offers). This opens the door to potential abuse of candidates' materials, and is an inappropriate amount of uncompensated labor for a candidate to be asked to do.

Standardized materials glossary

- **CV**

A *Curriculum Vitae* is a foundational document to the job market process. Candidates should not be asked to do extensive tailoring to their CV, but may be asked to send a shortened or selected CV.

- **Cover Letter/Letter of Interest**

A cover letter or letter of interest details the candidate's background and fit for the given position. At the contingent or assistant level, the cover letter/letter of interest should be two full pages. At the associate or full level, this can be lengthened to three.

- **Letters of Recommendation/References**

It is standard to ask for 3-5 references for an academic position (3 at the assistant/contingent level, 5 at the advanced/full level). That said: committees should delay requesting full letters from references until at least a long list has been made, and preferably until a short list of candidates has been made. At preliminary stages, the contact information for references should suffice. Letters should be requested directly from recommenders rather than go through the candidate to coordinate. Alternatively, search committees may ask references to take a reference call via phone or Zoom. A reference call should include a list of questions asked of all references, and should be recorded and temporarily saved so that the full search committee may access it.

- **Portfolio**

As many jobs in the field of theatre and performance studies span tasks that require artistic practice, requesting a portfolio is a standard ask. Depending on the nature of artistic practice, the portfolio may contain: examples of work (photography/video), testimonials from collaborators, explanatory notes from the artist, press clips about work, etc. Institutions should not request that candidates create proprietary portfolios.

- **Research statement**

A one to two-page statement about the scholar's research trajectory, their plan for the next few years, the questions that drive their work on a meta level, and the resources the scholar needs to produce the work described.

- **Sample syllabi**

Institutions may ask candidates for 2-3 sample syllabi in order to see their pedagogy in action. Sample syllabi requests should be as generic as possible while allowing the committee to see the things they need to see in the candidate's background. This is to ensure that the candidate can have the best possible opportunity to send a syllabus they have already drafted (and, ideally, taught) rather than needing to create proprietary material for a job application.

- **Statement of teaching philosophy**

A 2-3 page statement from the candidate that outlines the overarching tenets of their pedagogy. This statement will generally include anecdotes that demonstrate these tenets in action in the candidate's classroom.

- **Writing sample**

A writing sample may be requested. If so, it is recommended that the committee request a "section of a published piece or dissertation chapter" to prevent the candidate from having to draft new material for an application.

Notes

Some HR systems may require committees to bundle these requests because of an upward limit of PDFs that may be attached to an application. If so, the job ad should specifically name how the candidate is expected to bundle their documents (and, ideally, a naming convention for doing so).

While a candidate might reasonably be asked to bundle sample syllabi and teaching philosophy into one PDF, it is not recommended that a committee request a generically-named package of information such as "evidence of teaching effectiveness." Since there is no industry standard for what this package is, such requests create confusion and stress for candidates and committees. Additionally, such evidence can be gleaned from well-honed interview questions and it is recommended that the interview become the place where questions about the candidate's teaching effectiveness arise.

Additionally, because of known biases introduced by student evaluations of teaching (SETs), it is not recommended that SETs ever be introduced to the hiring process. Studies have shown that SETs privilege white male-presenting able-bodied instructors, even in courses where the instructor is never seen but their name appears on a page, and will accordingly bias a hiring committee similarly.

Interviews

Zoom or Phone Interviews

Search committees should be aware that in-person interviews often require candidates to spend significant amounts of time and their own money traveling to the interview site, and that this can cause special difficulties for candidates who have reduced access to funds, who are precariously employed, or who have disabilities that make travel difficult. Additionally, requesting time off for such travel can be complicated for the under or precariously employed. For this reason the committee recommends that first-round interviews be conducted over the phone or over Zoom, to be followed by in-person campus visits when the search committee has narrowed the pool of candidates to a short list.

Preparing for the phone interview

A first-round interview (whether on Zoom or on phone) requires a significant amount of preparation from the candidate. Additionally, the interview process can be inaccessible to candidates with differing access needs. For these reasons we recommend:

- Whenever possible, candidates should be notified that they have been selected for a phone interview *at least* 2 weeks before the interview is to take place.
- At this time, candidates should be notified who else will be on the call/in the Zoom room/in the room when the interview is taking place.
- Candidates should also be notified how long the interview will be (20-45 minutes is standard).
- Candidates should be sent all questions that they will be asked at least one week before the interview is set to begin. This ensures that candidates can be fully prepared for the interview and also makes the phone interview format more accessible.
- Candidates should be offered a point of contact in case of emergency or if there is any trouble accessing the call. This allows a clear line of communication between the candidate and the committee should an extraordinary event occur.

During the interview

- The candidate has prepared to answer the questions courteously sent in advance by the committee. As such, the committee should ask those questions of the candidate. Sending the candidate questions in advance of the interview only to change which questions are being asked is not fair or respectful to the candidate.
- Each interviewer should clearly identify themselves before asking each question, so that the candidate knows to whom they are speaking. This is particularly important if the interview is conducted by phone and the candidate cannot see the person asking the question. This is an accessibility step and might be crucial for candidates with visual impairments.
- The committee should be prepared to offer a timeline to the candidate for next steps, even if this timeline is somewhat in flux (and that should be communicated to the candidate if it is indeed the case). Additionally, it is best practice for the committee to offer the candidate a point of contact if questions should arise as the interview process unfolds.

Campus Visits

Preparing for the Visit

Search committees should be aware that campus visits can be disruptive to a job candidate's teaching and service responsibilities at their home institutions, and that a significant amount of time and labor are required for a candidate to prepare a job talk in preparation for the campus visit.

For these reasons we recommend that:

- Whenever possible, candidates should be notified that they have been invited for a campus visit *at least* two weeks before the campus visit is scheduled to take place.
- Whenever possible, offer candidates scheduling options.
- When they are notified of the campus visit, candidates should be provided with a preliminary schedule of people with whom they will meet on the campus visit. (The exact day and time of these meetings need not be finalized until a few days before the visit, but it is helpful for candidates to know whether they will be meeting with deans, students, other faculty members, etc, so that they have time to prepare for these meetings.)
- When they are notified of the campus visit, candidates should also be notified of the length, audience, and parameters of any job talk or teaching demo so that they have time to prepare. (More details on the job talk and teaching demo below.)

During the Visit

- To ease the financial burden on interviewees (many of whom are living on a limited budget or with precarious employment) the host institution should provide 3 meals a day, as well as travel and accommodation expenses, to the candidate, for the entire duration of the campus visit.
- Candidates should be provided with a sense of their menu options as well as meal timing so they can pre-plan the very personal and crucial act of nourishing themselves. These are important accessibility steps for candidates with medical or ideological dietary restrictions and needs.
- Candidates should be provided with WiFi access as soon as they enter the campus environment. Many candidates will need to look at notes or materials that might be best accessed online over the course of the interview, and should be allowed the opportunity to have full access to their documents.
- Candidates should be provided with at least 10-minute breaks throughout the day, between meetings and interviews.
- The schedule should include at least a 30-minute break before any formal presentation (job talk and/or teaching demo) for the candidate to prepare.
- Ideally, the candidate should be offered a private, quiet space during this break to prepare.
- If the candidate will be asked to do a great deal of walking, it would be best to offer them a safe place to house any large bags or seasonal garments that they do not feel comfortable navigating campus with.
- Dinner with the job candidate can create complications for both the candidate and for the search committee. Although the dinner can serve as a space for the candidate to learn more about the department and institutional culture, it can also be a place that can introduce bias

into the job selection process as well as create the potential avenue for inappropriate and illegal questions about the candidate's home and family life. It can also create discomfort for immunocompromised individuals who do not wish to put their health at risk as well as neurodivergent people, who may face difficulties with informal and unstructured gatherings. If a search committee feels as though dinner with a candidate is necessary, all attendees should be mindful of best practices for what one can and cannot ask about during an interview. Committees should also have plans in place should a candidate wish to dine outside, or decline the dinner altogether. Alcohol should not be normalized as part of the on-campus interview process. If a dinner meeting must happen, it is not advised for the interviewers to order alcohol and candidates should not be pressured (directly or indirectly) to drink.

Job talks and other presentations

- The standard job talk is 45 minutes long, with 30-45 minutes of questions to follow, and written for a scholarly audience (professors, as well as PhD or master's students in the department).
- Job talks require a lot of labor and preparation, and candidates might be interviewing at several different institutions. In recognition of this, the committee recommends *against* asking candidates to prepare a job talk that addresses a specific set of questions particular to the institution, or that is a non-standard length. Institutions that have specific questions that they would like the candidate to address should ask those questions during the job interview or during the question and answer session after the job talk.
- If the campus visit includes a teaching demonstration, the candidate should be notified when they are invited for the campus visit. They should also, at the same time, be told:
    - The length of the teaching demo
    - Who the demo should be geared towards (i.e. should the candidate assume that the class they are teaching is a beginning undergraduate class? An advanced undergraduate class? A graduate seminar?)
    - Who will actually be in the room during the teaching demo (i.e. has the department invited undergraduates, or will faculty members in the department be playing the role of undergraduates?)
    - What kind of space will the demo take place in. Approaches to pedagogy will vary drastically given spatial relations: will this be in a seminar room with tables? Onstage in a large theatre? An auditorium?
    - Approximately how many people will be in the room (teaching to 10 undergraduates around a seminar table requires different pedagogical strategy than lecturing to 100 undergraduates in a lecture hall). If the number of people in the room at the time of the demo is drastically different from the number of people the candidate was asked to address, the hiring committee should be aware that this will impact the quality of the teaching demonstration. The ballpark number given to the candidate should be viewed as a commitment.
- Search committees should offer to photocopy any materials candidates require ahead of their teaching demo so that candidates do not have to incur photocopying expenses on their own.

On-Campus Zoom Interviews

- It is not recommended that on-campus interviews happen via zoom. However, if a zoom interview is requested or required as an accommodation for a candidate, then the following best practices should be kept in mind. If the campus "visit" is held virtually (i.e. on Zoom or another platform), search committees should be cognizant of and sensitive to "Zoom fatigue." Candidates should never be asked to be on Zoom for more than 2 hours without a brief (10-minute) break away from the screen, and they should never be asked to be on Zoom for more than 5 hours in a single day.

Transparency and Communication Throughout the Process

- Candidates spend a lot of time preparing for and attending interviews and campus visits. Those who spend that time but who do not receive a job offer deserve to be notified in writing that they have not been selected for the job, and they deserve this notification in a timely manner (i.e. as soon as the department's offer has been accepted by another candidate, or at the very most six months after interviewing). In instances where an institution's human resources department forbids following up with candidates, search chairs should check in with HR to make sure that they are setting up timely notifications.