

## CASE STUDY – (Associate Professor)

(Slightly adapted from JoAnn Moody, *Rising Above Cognitive Errors: Guidelines for Search, Tenure Review, and Other Evaluation Committees*, 2005. Information about Dr. Moody's book, *Faculty Diversity: Problems and Solutions*, and her other publications can be found at [www.DiversityOnCampus.com](http://www.DiversityOnCampus.com))

The search committee below is seeking to hire an associate professor in a large, research-intensive public university. The successful candidate will be responsible for teaching undergraduate and graduate courses, mentoring graduate students, and conducting a strong research program. The committee members include: a full professor who has been in the department for 20 years, a recently tenured associate professor, two associate professors who have been in the department for 12-14 years, one of whom is chairing this committee, and a departmental administrator.

**Member A:** Well, I think Dr. Peterson is the strongest candidate, by far. His PhD from the University of Michigan and his experience in his current position at Cornell are all we need to know. He's got to be sound; he's just that type of guy. That's my judgment. I don't need any more evidence. He's number one with me.

**Committee Chair:** I don't think we can move that fast. We have four people coming in for face-to-face interviews. I'd like to hope that we'll gather new information about them and have time to sift through their strengths, weaknesses, and evaluate their ability to meet our needs for this position.

**Member A:** Yes, yes, of course. All of you gather as much info as you like. I have no problem with that. It's just that I don't have much time right now. Oh, another reason that Dr. Peterson seems like the top candidate is that he reminds me so much of Mervin. Man, how this school misses that guy! He was really able to bring in the research dollars and bring prestige to the department. Getting someone very much like Mervin would certainly be a plus for us.

**Chair:** Look, I'd like for us to review what additional info we want to gather about each of the candidates coming in. As you recall, I had wanted to figure out some ground rules before we started all this but it didn't happen. So let's just move on. Can we talk about Manuela? She has the right kind of experience, given her position at the University of Arizona. Her most recently published article was really good and her letters of recommendation are superb. Does anyone want to call up the references and get more details?

**Member B:** Well, I have trouble giving much credence to those letters. None of Manuela's letters were written by people whom I know or have ever heard of. I can't put much stock in them, to tell you the truth. And to boot, did you notice that one of her letters of support had two grammatical errors in it? Come on, now. That tells you something.

**Member C:** You've got to be kidding! Can we get back to Manuela herself? I'd like to make sure that our interview takes at least two hours. I want us to get to know her. I think we'd better go slow and give this candidate plenty of time to prove her qualifications. And it'll take us some time to really feel comfortable with her, I would bet. Besides, some of us – who will go unnamed – might have some negative stereotypes about Mexican Americans and other minorities in leadership roles to work through.

**Member A:** Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Why in the world should we give Manuela such an advantage? Interviewing her for two hours! Be serious! We'd gather more info than we could ever use. Seems like a colossal waste of time to me. And I for one don't have a minute to waste this semester. I say we stick with the program: every candidate gets a 45-minute interview; we'll use our standard questions. Every candidate gives a research talk and then meets with

deans, staff, and the usual suspects. These procedures have never failed us in the past, have they?

**Chair:** Well, maybe they have. Basically, I don't think an hour is enough time for *any* candidate, but especially for a non-traditional one like Manuela. I'd like to see if we can have the candidates participate in a seminar, see how they interact with students; or participate in a research team meeting, see what research questions they raise or what advice they give. Maybe we can revisit this time question later.

**Member A:** May I ask why you're so eager to give Manuela some extra breaks. Look, we're supposed to be looking for the very best person for the position. I really could care less if the person we hire is black, purple, green, polka-dot, male, female, or whatever. I know that I am gender-blind and color-blind. All I care about is *excellence*. And we'll know it when we see it. Do you want to know one of my hesitations about Manuela? Her PhD is from a second-tier school. I'd really feel better about her if she had a degree from a top school. And I think we should get a few more letters of reference from her. Just to be cautious, you know.

**Member C:** Cautious about what? Why in the world would you want extra letters from Manuela but not from the other candidates? Is it because she doesn't fulfill our expectation of what a faculty member should look like? Why such uneasiness?

**Member B:** Well, I don't like to admit this. But, okay, I'm a bit uneasy about Manuela because I'm not sure how other faculty members or graduate students working with her would like it. You know, answering to her as the boss or relying on her as the expert. We could really be asking for trouble.

**Chair:** Well, allow me to remind you that when "you know who" left, he created a multitude of personnel problems, coming and going. That guy was impossible to work with. A sheer autocrat. So we have to be on guard against such personality traits and work habits in all our candidates. If anything, Manuela seems more mature and seasoned than the other candidates.

**Member B:** Well, I have another hesitation. Is Manuela single or married? Will we have a spousal hire issue to contend with?

**Chair:** Listen, why don't we take 10 minutes to decompress and get some coffee?

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**Consider some of the following questions:**

- What assumptions are revealed in the case above?
- What factors mentioned in this case could disadvantage any minority candidate?
- How do you prevent search committee members from prematurely favoring a particular candidate?
- What problems arise in this case because ground rules were not established?
- What ground rules would you recommend be established?
- What do you think of the suggestion to give "Manuela" a longer interview? Or to request additional recommendation letters for her?
- How effective was Member C's suggestion that negative stereotypes were present?
- How would you respond to Member A/B?