

“It’s Not About ‘Fit’: Myths and Legends of the Academic Hiring Process”

MRFA-PSGC Event, Friday March 28, 2014 (2:00-3:30 pm), MRU Faculty Centre

This event featured short (5-10 minute) general observations by four presenters, followed by an open discussion between all participants.

1. Dr. Gerry Cross, President of the MRFA, discussed general points regarding department hiring committees and the importance of committee members being thoroughly acquainted with Article 4 of the Collective Agreement.

The composition of department committees as outlined in the agreement works very well when hiring for full-time positions. The three principles for ensuring a successful hire are as follows:

1. Develop a clear understanding of the position’s requirements and what qualities/skills are required to select the best candidate for the position.
2. Be certain to gather all the information necessary to best determine what is required for the position and to find the best possible candidate for the position.
3. Adhering to the first two principles and Article 4 of the Collective Agreement ought to yield a hiring decision that is both fair and unbiased.

2. Dr. Karim Dharamsi, Chair of the General Studies Department, addressed important issues pertaining to hiring contract faculty, which generates the majority of hiring grievances dealt with by the MRFA. Among the points he discussed were these:

Contract faculty carries a great deal of the institutional teaching load, but they also face much uncertainty since the availability of teaching positions varies from semester to semester and year to year.

This general situation creates anxieties on all sides; contract faculty cannot be guaranteed work every semester, and department hiring decisions are fraught with moral dilemmas, particularly when multiple qualified candidates apply for a position.

Ideally, contract faculty will feel a sense of “citizenship” within a department, but this cannot always be maintained, particularly in times of budgetary austerity.

The biggest problems involve balancing budget constraints with the desire to treat applicants fairly and hopefully ensure a teaching load that enables contract faculty to meet their own economic needs.

One way to help ensure that applicants are treated fairly is for departments to develop clear reappointment criteria, as per the Collective Agreement.

3. Keith Black from Human Resources offered a brief and concise description of HR’s role in academic hiring. In particular, HR is concerned with “process,” and helping to ensure that best practices are followed by department hiring committees.

HR has no voting role in the hiring process, but it does get involved in the initial phase of the process, and provides valuable advice to ensure that job advertisements are appropriate and hiring committees are provided with all the information necessary to carry out their duties.

4. Dr. Scott Murray, Vice President of the MRFA responsible for handling grievances, rounded out the initial panel observations by offering some cautionary advice:

Departments must post all open positions, and they must develop hiring criteria consistent with the terms of the Collective Agreement.

Some departments have no little or no developed hiring criteria and this can and probably will lead to problems.

Hiring criteria should be standardized across the institution.

Finally, hiring processes for both full-time and contract faculty must be transparent to ensure that applicants are treated fairly and committee members remain objective and unbiased in their decision making.

These main points were followed by participants taking refreshments and engaging in a wide-ranging discussion of academic hiring processes.