

# AALI WEBINAR

## *SEMI-FINALIST CANDIDATE INTERVIEW SKILLS*

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## AGENDA

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- Key Steps in the Search Process (5 min)
- Reference Call Guidelines (5 min)
- Interviewing with the Search Committee
  - Preparing for your Interview (25 min)
  - The Actual Interview (30 min)
  - Post Interview (15 min)
- Wrap-Up (5 min)

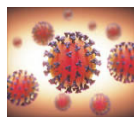


## KEY STEPS IN THE SEARCH PROCESS

- Step 1: Assessment/Analysis of your Career and Career Path
- Step 2: Submitting the Application
- Step 3: Reference Calls and Interviewing with the Search Committee
- Step 4: Preparing for the Campus Visit
- Step 5: Managing Contract Negotiations
- Step 6: The Benefits of Onboarding and Transition Planning



## NOTA BENE



*The possible effects of COVID-19 on your search process. It could influence....*

- ✓ where you apply and perhaps even the position itself
- ✓ the priorities of the job description
- ✓ the way the search committee evaluates your application package
- ✓ the type of questions posed to your references
- ✓ what the search committee will seek from you during a semi-finalist interview
- ✓ how you are evaluated by the hiring authority, leadership team and institutional community during your campus visit
- ✓ your contract negotiations

## IMPORTANT SKILLS IN THE COVID AND POST-COVID WORLD

*Although these skills are not new, they have taken on a heightened priority:*

- ✓ Budget management
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Technology and online learning knowledge
- ✓ Strong communication
- ✓ Crisis management
- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Flexibility and fluidity
- ✓ Positivity
- ✓ Emotional intelligence



## STEP 3: REFERENCE CALLS



- ✓ What are the guidelines for selecting your references?
- ✓ What do you do if you are an internal candidate and plan to select references on-campus?
- ✓ How do you provide the search committee with reference information?
- ✓ What if you select references that are employed at the campus where you are interviewing?
- ✓ How should you prepare your references – what information should you share with your references?
- ✓ What do search committees look for in reference calls?
- ✓ Should you ask for feedback from your references?



## STEP 3: INTERVIEWING WITH THE SEARCH COMMITTEE (SEMI-FINALIST INTERVIEWS)

### PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

- ✓ How can you best prepare for the semi-finalist interviews?
- ✓ What type of research should you do on the interview?
- ✓ How can you determine the financial health of an institution (COVID/post-COVID) to assess if the institution is financially sustainable, and/or in conversations about a merger or acquisition?
- ✓ Should you research peer and aspirant institutions? If so, why?
- ✓ When is the appropriate time to ask questions about salary and benefits?
- ✓ When do you ask about spousal employment?
- ✓ When is the appropriate time to discuss the position and possible relocation with your family?
- ✓ Should you share confidential information with the search consultant or committee chair and when should you do so?
- ✓ What information should you request from the institution in advance of your interview?
- ✓ What information should you not ask for prior to your interview/what is considered an inappropriate request?
- ✓ What if you suspect that you're a "diversity" candidate?



## STEP 3 INTERVIEWING WITH THE SEARCH COMMITTEE (cont.)

### PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

- ✓ What if you are provided with a scenario or case study as part of your interview? (note: the case study may be very revealing about the priorities of the position and institution)
- ✓ What are the key components of a good answer to a question?
- ✓ What is appropriate attire for your interview? How can your attire derail your interview?
- ✓ Does your timeslot in an interview schedule matter?
- ✓ What type of questions do you ask the search consultant as you prepare for your interview? How should you best utilize the consultant?
- ✓ How should you explain breaks in your career, demotions, other challenges?
- ✓ Are you expected to research members of the search committee?
- ✓ Can you expect a separate interview with the hiring authority (i.e. board chair, president, provost)?
- ✓ How do you utilize your time effectively if you meet separately with the hiring authority?

## STEP 3: INTERVIEWING WITH THE SEARCH COMMITTEE (cont.)

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### PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

- *It's not rocket science* - What questions can you anticipate from the search committee?
- How do the foundational responsibilities of the position influence the way you prepare for your interview? (e.g. builder versus aspirational)
- Sample questions – how can you practice in advance of your interview?
- How do you calculate the approximate time to allocate for each of the questions?
- What are the key components of a good answer to a question?
- How can you stumble on the “diversity” question?
- When is it appropriate to provide examples and what type of examples work well?
- Will you be provided time toward the end of the interview to ask questions of the committee?
- How many questions should you prepare?
- If so, what are considered “excellent” questions?



## STEP 3: INTERVIEWING WITH THE SEARCH COMMITTEE (cont.)

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### The Actual Interview

- ✓ What is the protocol when you enter the interview room?
- ✓ What are each of the constituent groups on the search committee looking for as they interview you?
- ✓ How do you manage the time you spend on each question?
- ✓ What are the signs that the interview is not going well?
- ✓ How can you salvage an interview that is tanking?
- ✓ What type of mannerisms should you avoid during an interview?
- ✓ How should you handle inappropriate questions by the search committee?
- ✓ How can humor help and hurt you?
- ✓ What is the appropriate way to exit the interview room?



## STEP 3: INTERVIEWING WITH THE SEARCH COMMITTEE (cont.)

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### Post Interview

- What is the appropriate way to thank the search committee post-interview?
- What happens if you're not moved forward?
- Should you ask for feedback from the search consultant?
- How can feedback from the search consultant be helpful to you?
- What if the search consultant isn't willing or able to give you feedback?
- How do you strengthen your interview skills the next time round?
- What are the typical interview mistakes?

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## TOP 10 INTERVIEW MISTAKES

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1. You've not done your homework on the institution
2. Your answers are superficial
3. Your attitude is that we will go back to the way things were post-COVID
4. You are overly negative (doomsday) about the outlook on higher education post-COVID
5. You're cocky about your accomplishments
6. Your heart isn't in the position and the institution
7. You're inappropriately critical of your current or former institution
8. You don't properly explain a demotion or break in your career
9. You're inappropriately dressed
10. You don't project confidence as a leader
11. You ignore staff and/or students during the interview
12. You drone on and on ....

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**THANK YOU!**





## Sample Questions – Dean/Vice Presidencies SEMI-FINALIST INTERVIEWS

*Please do not copy or amend without permission.*

1. Please take a couple of minutes to tell us why you are drawn to the deanship/vice presidency at XYZ University and why you want this job?
2. As we grapple with the COVID-19 virus and its effects on our institution, what do you anticipate are the top 3 – 5 most pressing challenges you will face in your deanship/vice presidency? Do you have thoughts on how you will address these challenges?
3. Share with us your experience in crisis management. What are the most critical steps you will take in a crisis? What are some of the lessons you have personally learned about managing a crisis, or from watching others manage a crisis?
4. XYZ University cannot escape the current stark economic realities affecting higher education. We anticipate further stress on our budgets as we deal with COVID-19 and as we emerge from the post-virus realities. Our new dean/vice president will need strong financial acumen to judge how finite resources can best be used to support current initiatives and future dreams. Please tell us how you would approach dealing with budget reductions? Also, share with us your experience managing significant budget cuts in your current or former positions.
5. A change in a deanship/vice presidency provides an opportunity to renew and recast elements of its future design. How does our current reality living with COVID-19 affect the way you will develop a cohesive vision for the deanship/vice presidency at XYZ University? Given what you know now about XYZ University, do you have any specific elements that you would want to include in that vision?
6. We recognize that we are living in very troubling times and that we may never be able to go back to the way things were before COVID-19. In the spirit of trying to find a silver lining in our new reality, what do you see as some of the opportunities that can emerge for your division and for our institution over the next few years?



7. Describe your leadership/management style generally as well as in this period of social distancing. How would you work to build camaraderie with your team in our current reality of interacting with each other online?
8. As the dean/vice president, you will need to establish a strong and healthy relationship with the college/school/campus community. You will also need to demonstrate your commitment and ability to advance the mission of the school/college. What are some ways you plan to communicate this commitment particularly in our realities of social distancing and communicating with each other electronically?
9. Can you give us some specific examples of your accomplishments in helping institutions to achieve greater diversity with faculty and staff? What strategies were most effective in recruiting and retaining a more diverse faculty and student body? What specific actions have you taken to promote a culture of inclusivity?
10. How do you handle conflict and what is the most critical professional problem you have faced in your career? What values did you draw on to handle it, and what did you learn from it? Would your approach to addressing conflict change in the era of COVID-19?
11. The expectation is widely held that our next dean/vice president will develop a more robust philanthropic culture and will be a successful fund-raiser. What is your comfort level with this expectation? Describe your experience in this area and tell us a story about your most memorable fund-raising experience.
12. Now more than ever, XYZ University relies on student tuition as its primary source of revenue. As we prepare for a reduction in enrollment for both returning and incoming students, what would constitute a successful admission and retention programs (in your school/college), and what would your role be in seeing that XYZ University becomes more effective in enrollment management?
13. We hope for a dean who will help us build on our strengths and sharpen the distinctive profile by which school/college at XYZ University is recognized. In what areas and in what manner might you imagine raising the school/college's profile to great distinction and, in so doing, how might your voice impact higher education nationally and internationally?
14. If we visited your campus and talked to those with whom you have worked, what would we learn about you, and would we be surprised with anything we might hear?



## SEMI-FINALIST INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

*Listed below are a few guidelines for semi-finalist interviews – these are typically interviews with the search committee held at a confidential off-site location. Committees shortlist anywhere from 6 – 10 candidates to interview at this stage of the search process. The interviews generally run from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. In some instances, the search committee may opt to conduct interviews via video-conference. These guidelines are more applicable for face-to-face interviews.*

### **Dress**

- Err on the conservative side. Both men and women should wear suits. Remember that in this position you will be representing the institution both internally and externally and as such, most search committees typically will take note of your attire.
- Women – we recommend against peep toe shoes and bulky or distracting jewelry - avoid bracelets or bangles that are noisy when you move.
- Men – go with dark colored suits, long sleeve shirts, and keep jewelry to a minimum.
- If you are interviewing at an institution that is very tight financially, or going through major budget cuts, pay attention to the optics of what you wear in terms of designer clothes, shoes, bags, etc.

### **Learning about the institution/Doing your homework**

- Learn as much as you possibly can about the institution. Review the website, read the profile once again, talk with friends and acquaintances (confidentially) who are knowledgeable about the institution where you are interviewing. Remember, at least one of the shortlisted candidates will have done an outstanding job learning about the institution. If your understanding is limited, it will show.
- Be current on trends in the subject area. Understand the broader landscape of the subject area. Be knowledgeable about what other institutions in the vicinity are doing. If at all possible, have a sense of how like divisions at peer and aspirant institutions are structured.
- Understand how the current division at the institution is structured. Be familiar with the organizational chart –especially with regard to direct and indirect reports to the president.

- If the institution is religiously affiliated, understand the religious tenets of the institution, be familiar with the religious history of the institution, and think about how you would message these attributes in an interview as you will likely have to address one or more questions on this subject.

### **Meeting the Committee**

- You will be provided with a list of search committee members. Make sure that you are familiar with the committee members – trustees (length of term, current role on the board, background, location, etc); staff members (position, reporting structure, date of appointment, area of research/interest, etc); students (undergraduate/graduate/area of study).
- If the committee is large and you are advised by the search consultant not to walk around the room at the start of the interview, try to do so at the end of the interview. Before you leave the interview room, a firm handshake and a couple of words to each person would be appropriate. Watch out for clammy hands or if you have a tendency to offer a very firm or very weak handshake.
- Remember, first impressions are important, so think about how to comport yourself as you enter the interview room. Begin by thanking the committee for inviting you to the interview – or something along those lines.
- If you're nervous, keep your hands under the table. Don't play with your pen, drum on the table, cover your face when answering a question – nervous habits can work against you.
- Remember - the committee wants to see you succeed. They are looking for candidates who show poise, strength of character, confidence, personality, enthusiasm for the position. Demonstrate that you are all of this and a whole lot more during your time with them.
- At the conclusion of the interview, thank the committee for meeting with you and once again, express your interest in the position. Remember, the committee wants to hire somebody who is going to be enthusiastic and dedicated to strengthening the institution. We are not suggesting that you become overly effusive in expressing your enthusiasm (that can hurt you), but a well structured and thoughtful thank you to the committee at the end of the interview will be helpful.
- A thank you note (via email or handwritten) to committee members is appropriate after the interview. For semi-finalist interviews, our recommendation is to go with email thank you's simply because the committee typically selects finalist candidates shortly after the interviews. If the committee is large, you are not expected to write a personalized note to each committee member. But, if possible, try to write a note that connects specifically to the individuals on the committee.

## Questions

- Your interview with the committee can run anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes. Of this time, you will be allocated a few minutes at the conclusion of the interview to ask questions of the committee.
- The committee has a number of questions to cover during the interview. Refrain from spending a significant chunk of time on any one question. Allow yourself a maximum of 3 - 5 minutes to answer each question (again, this time allocation will depend on the length of the interview and the number of questions the committee plans to ask of you). Typically, the committee chair will let you know how many questions will be asked of you, and if this information is not shared, you may wish to ask. Remember, a committee member may want to ask a follow up question or may ask that you clarify or provide additional information.
- This may sound pedantic, but **PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTION!** We can't tell you how many candidates (many of whom are outstanding) crash and burn because they don't pay attention to the question. If you aren't sure that you've answered the question to the satisfaction of the committee, ask if they would like further detail.
- A typical first question is to ask why this College/University? Make sure you communicate the "why" factor – why this institution, this position, this opportunity, and why at this point in your career. You need to offer compelling reasons – it isn't enough to state that you want to be close to family, that you're an empty nester, or that you're on the job market, although these reasons certainly can be part of your narrative.
- Here is a sampling of other questions you are likely to receive: Provide at least one or more examples of a situation that you had to deal with that was complex, but that you resolved successfully. On the flip side, you will be asked you to provide at least one or more examples of a situation that was complex, that you were not able to resolve successfully, the outcome, and the lesson/s learned. Be prepared to answer questions about your understanding, work, involvement, participation, skill-set and success in all of these areas. They will also want to know what contacts you can bring to them – how will your current network be helpful to them. How will you be able to open doors in areas where they have not ventured or been successful?
- Another tip – when providing an example or sharing an anecdote – keep it simple. The committee doesn't need to know all the details. They simply want to know about your experience and the lessons learned as a result of that experience. We have sat through many an interview where the candidate went into so much detail explaining a situation that committee members went into snooze mode.
- If at all possible, answer a question by incorporating the following three aspects – your experience in the specific area, your philosophy on the issue (e.g. management style), and your understanding of this specific matter/issue at the College/University.

- You will be provided a few minutes at the end of the interview to ask questions of the committee. Prepare your questions in advance. We recommend that you prepare 4 – 6 questions that are insightful, show careful thought, and demonstrate that you've given care to framing the question. Some of your questions will be answered during the course of the interview, so ensure that you have a few extra questions in the event that this happens.
- At all costs, avoid saying anything negative about past or current employers. If you have to explain why you left a particular position, present a balanced viewpoint. Committee members will want to avoid hiring somebody who is bitter or has a chip on their shoulder.

We hope that my list of do's and don'ts are helpful to you as you prepare for the interview.

Good luck!

Your Academic Search Team

### **Advance Planning**

- Familiarize yourself with the equipment you will be using during your interview so you can troubleshoot any issues that may arise beforehand. You will want to be as comfortable as possible with the technology once the interview day arrives. Since many sites require a user/display name, make sure to create one that sounds professional.
- Set up your camera so it focuses on you. Position it at the same height as the top of your head, slightly above your hairline. This will help you maintain good posture while giving you the most attractive camera angle. If you can get a tight head and shoulders shot, this is best. If you cannot get a tight shot, try to keep other objects out of the shot and make sure the table or desk you are sitting at is clean and neat. You don't want to distract the interviewer or have anything within view that could be perceived as unprofessional. Try not to sit in front of a white wall.
- Make sure the space is lighted appropriately and no shadows are cast upon your face. Natural light from a nearby window can be flattering but beware of sitting directly in front of a window.
- Make sure the microphone is near you. Be aware that the microphone picks up all the noise in the room so remove anything that may be loud, like a ticking clock. Silence all distractions such as cell phone ringers and email alerts, take your landline off the hook, and keep pets and children in another room. Make sure all other applications and programs on your computer are closed so nothing can pop up on your screen or make noise.
- Take a trial run: ask a friend or family member to videoconference with you and provide feedback. Continue to test the sound and quality and see how you look on screen.

### **What to Wear**

- Dress professionally from head to toe, as you would for an in-person interview. Groom appropriately.
- Avoid heavy makeup or accessories that can be distracting, such as flashy or bulky jewelry, bracelets or bangles that are noisy when you move.
- Dress in lighter colors against a darker background and darker colors against a lighter background, but try to avoid white. It can often cause a glare effect.
- Wear solid colors. Be aware that small stripes and busy patterns do not show up well on video and can cause the equipment to work harder to reconcile these patterns when you move, causing a delay.

### **During the Video Interview**

- Make eye contact; pretend the webcam is the person interviewing you and look directly into it.
- Make sure your responses are audible to the interviewer. Speak loudly and clearly into the microphone.
- Don't wave your hands around; unnecessary movements distract.
- Watch your posture. Because the interview will likely be done in a place you are comfortable, it is easy to forget that it's a formal interaction.
- Use the picture-in-picture feature so you can see how you appear. If you are concerned about your body language, the picture-in-picture can help you monitor it.
- Try to be more conscious of what your expressions are saying to viewers.
- Remember to be mindful of the microphone and its ability to pick up all noise. Don't tap your pen or shuffle papers for instance.



## COMPENSATION NEGOTIATIONS

*Prepared by Maya Ranchod Kirkhope, Senior Consultant*

### **Should I negotiate my salary and benefits package?**

Yes, it is important and necessary to negotiate your compensation package. In most instances, each new position should ideally result in an improved compensation package. And, in some circumstances, even if your salary isn't improved, your benefits package may improve, and vice versa. Ideally, you want a minimum \$5,000 increase in your current salary as you consider a move to a new position. You can set your own minimum salary increase – if that amount is \$10,000 above what you are currently earning, then you make that determination if it's important to you. You may be fortunate to secure a larger jump in salary, but that would vary depending on the position, the institution, and other extenuating circumstances.

### **When in the search process is an appropriate time to ask about salary and benefits?**

Even though the compensation package may not be a primary driver for your interest in securing a new position, it is an important consideration. If there is a search consultant assigned to the search, you may wish to ask the consultant about the salary range fairly early in the search process. If the salary range is not sufficiently competitive, then you may decide against applying for the position. If there isn't a search consultant assigned to the search, the search chair may be able to provide this information to you. Ideally, you would need to know this information fairly early in the search process. If the salary or benefits package is significantly lower than anticipated, it could directly affect your decision to apply.

### **Where do I find compensation information online?**

We recognize that asking the search consultant or search chair about compensation early in the search process may be uncomfortable. One way of finding this information independently is by looking at the GuideStar or the institution's 990 form. Please note that if the incumbent has been in the position for a long period, you can't assume that you would qualify for that specific salary. There are many circumstances that drive salary, but investigating the salary for the position you are seeking as well as the salaries of others who are at similar levels within the institution, will help you gather the necessary intelligence on salary ranges at that institution. It would also be a good idea to find benchmark salary information for the position both regionally and nationally. Other factors that could affect salary would be institution type, enrollment, endowment and your specific discipline.

### **What if I have specific needs (i.e. spousal hire, housing support, tuition reimbursement, etc.)?**

If you have specific needs with regard to benefits/special accommodations, you need to ensure that you share this information with the search consultant or search chair relatively early in the search. If you and your partner are both academics and both need to be hired, you have to know upfront if spousal hiring is an option. At many institutions, for example, spousal hiring may be a challenge particularly if the institution has had to cut faculty positions or is going through significant fiscal challenges. You may require housing support if you are moving to a high cost area. And, if you have dependents who are in college or will be entering college, understanding the institution's policy for tuition support may be particularly important to you. If you are told that your specific need cannot be accommodated early on, you can make the determination as to whether to pursue the opportunity or look elsewhere. As a word of caution, if you are told that your specific need cannot be accommodated, we caution you against continuing in the search with the hope that you can negotiate this matter if you receive an offer.

### **I have been given a salary range for the position; how do I know where I fall within that range?**

This is a tricky matter. The high end of the range is typically for individuals who have significant experience, are moving laterally, come from a high cost region of the country, or have a combination of skills and experiences that are particularly outstanding. You cannot assume that you will be in the high end of the range, although that does not preclude you from negotiating for the higher end of the range. Be mindful that you may not receive an offer at the high end, particularly if you aren't a very seasoned administrator.

### **What if the offer letter includes a salary lower than originally promised?**

You can always continue to negotiate. Actually, you are expected to negotiate. It doesn't mean that you have to accept the offer that you receive. There is typically some wiggle room in the offer that is made to you. Try to understand the rationale behind the offer and explain that you were expecting an offer at a higher salary range. The offer will typically come from the hiring authority, so approach the discussions in a professional, diplomatic and courteous manner as you try to negotiate a better offer. If you are at an impasse, and you feel that your offer is unfair, then you have the option of withdrawing from the search.

### **What are the typical mistakes women make during salary/benefits negotiation?**

Women typically undervalue their worth; you need to do your homework and come armed with the confidence and fortitude to push for the salary and benefits package that you believe is fair. If



you are aware of the salaries of others in the leadership team and your offer is markedly lower, don't accept the offer but make a case for why you believe you need to be better compensated. Ask for a rationale for the salary offer you received, and perhaps you will receive an explanation that provides you with the necessary insight to determine the path forward. Remember, you don't need to accept the amount that is initially offered to you – in most instances, there is an expectation that you will negotiate.

### **How will COVID-19 affect my compensation negotiations?**

Unfortunately, the answer is that it will likely affect your salary and benefits negotiations. Many, if not all institutions are facing significant budget shortfalls, are in the process of staff furloughs, staff cuts, reducing the number of adjuncts, and so forth. Furthermore, an increasing number of institutions are asking full-time faculty and staff to take salary cuts, and some institutions are cutting benefits such as retirement contributions. It is hard to predict how the current situation and the economic fallout from COVID-19 will affect your compensation package, other than to let you know that it will likely have an effect on your ability to negotiate and to secure a highly competitive salary and benefits package as you might have pre-COVID. In the current environment, institutions may be less amenable to spousal hiring, and tuition benefits for dependents may also be at risk. We recommend that you not make assumptions about the components of the compensation package. And, we recommend that you ask the search consultant to keep you abreast of any changes in the salary and compensation package through the duration of the search. For example, during an early part of the search, retirement benefits may be intact, but toward the conclusion of the search, the institution may reduce or completely cut retirement benefits as part of their cost cutting measures. So, keep an open mind and recognize that some of the reductions in benefits and salaries are not necessarily long term or permanent but are institutional responses to dealing with an unprecedented situation.

Good luck!