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Assessing aspects of EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) in applications for professorial positions

The University of Lausanne has integrated into its charter the recognition of individuals, the personal development of all its members and respect for fundamental rights. In this way, it aims to provide a respectful, equitable and inclusive environment in which to study and work. Equality, diversity and inclusion are themes that feature prominently in UNIL's Statement of Intent.

As part of the measures for academic recruitment, the Rectorate invites the members of hiring committees to take into account equality, diversity and inclusion aspects when evaluating candidates for professorial positions and during interviews. It is, therefore, recommended to include this theme in interview questions.

This measure is not mandatory. Hiring committees retain their autonomy in organizing interviews. They may adopt the following proposals in line with the faculty's strategic objectives (see Annexe I to Directive 1.3 "sur la procédure d'engagement du corps professoral du 22 août 2023").

This document provides a list of suggested questions, elements for assessing answers, and various ways in which candidates can demonstrate a contribution to issues of equality, diversity and inclusion.

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A. Suggested interview questions

Questions about UNIL's EDI objectives

1. As a professor, how would you like to contribute to UNIL's objectives in terms of promoting equality between women and men?

Why ask this question ?

Professors play an important role in promoting equality at the university, in their capacity as teachers, colleagues and supervisors.

Elements for assessing the answer

The response should focus on how the candidate can use their position to encourage and develop initiatives to promote equality. The candidate demonstrates an awareness of the challenges faced by under-represented people in academia, and a commitment to creating an equitable and inclusive environment for all.

The candidate may mention the pursuit of gender parity in their team/department, demonstrating an awareness of the under-representation of women at senior levels, particularly in professorial positions, and referencing statistical evidence. They may highlight their role as a mentor and the way in which they encourage the next generation, particularly women. They may acknowledge the impact of family responsibilities on researchers, particularly women. They may position themselves as an ally when it comes to preventing discrimination or sexism in the workplace. Finally, they may share past experiences in which they have helped shape their unit's/department's/university's strategy for promoting equality.

2. UNIL is firmly committed to the promotion of equality, respect for diversity and inclusion. What challenges do you think an institution like ours might encounter in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion?

Why ask this question ?

Professors play an important role in the university's EDI strategy, as members of the teaching staff, commissions or decision-making bodies. It is important here to ascertain their level of awareness of the challenges.

Elements for assessing the answer

The candidate demonstrates knowledge, experience and interest in EDI issues, such as gender inequality and diversity with regard to ethnic and/or cultural characteristics, socio-economic background, affective and sexual orientation, or disability. This understanding may result from personal experience as well as knowledge of legal issues and statistical data.

The candidate mentions the under-representation of particular groups and its consequences for research and teaching, in the academic world and in their own discipline. They understand the challenges faced by under-represented people and the need for everyone (including themselves) to work towards an equitable and inclusive environment. They are comfortable discussing them, and approach diversity, equity and inclusion not only as a challenge or issue, but also as an opportunity for the organization. They formulate new ideas to advance equity and inclusion at UNIL and in their field, through their research, teaching and/or institutional commitments.

Questions about team management

- 3. As a UNIL professor (in our department), you'll be supervising early career researchers from a wide range of backgrounds, languages and origins. In your opinion, what are the challenges and opportunities presented by a diverse team?**
- 4. What strategies have you implemented in the past and would you implement at UNIL for good team management?**

Why ask this question ?

The aim here is to bring out the candidate's approach to problem-solving in the workplace, as well as to ascertain whether they are aware of the challenges that come with managing teams and diversity, and whether they have a plan for resolving these challenges.

Elements for assessing the answer

The candidate demonstrates awareness of the challenges of a diverse workplace, but avoids a list of complaints about previous experiences. They are aware of the importance of mentoring the next generation of scientists, while emphasizing the need for a respectful and safe working environment for junior colleagues.

The candidate demonstrates their ability to effectively manage disagreements and conflicts, all while showing respect for and appreciation of different opinions and approaches. They value consensus-building. They adapt their supervisory style to the degree of autonomy and knowledge of their team members. They hold teamwork in high regard and recognize individual contributions.

- 5. As a professor, you'll be recruiting people. How do you ensure equity when recruiting team members?**

Why ask this question ?

Swiss law prohibits discrimination in hiring, including on the basis of gender. As recruitment is highly decentralized at UNIL, it is imperative that professors are aware of this obligation and of the best practices for recruitment that respect equal opportunities.

Elements for assessing the answer

The candidate is aware that certain stereotypes and prejudices may disadvantage female applicants or individuals from minoritized groups, and that discrimination in hiring is prohibited.

They pay particular attention to the quality of the recruitment process, in particular to the wording of the advertisement and the consistency of the selection criteria. They prepare an evaluation grid and an interview outline so that each application is assessed against the same criteria. They refrain from asking prohibited questions and are mindful of biases in recruitment. They identify talent and attract applications from women and/or people from minoritized groups. They take atypical career paths into consideration and focus on a candidate's potential as much as on their past experience. They are attentive to the diversity of candidates invited for interview. For assessment and interviews, they collaborate with colleagues from different backgrounds and, if possible, with people of the opposite gender. They do not hesitate to seek advice from HR/EDI specialists.

6. Could you share with the committee a situation in which you adapted your work approach to consider aspects of EDI, with the aim of promoting collective success and the attainment of objectives?

Why ask this question ?

The type of example to be shared helps define what the candidate chooses or emphasizes in their experience and understanding of EDI issues.

Elements for assessing the answer

The candidate will draw on their experience to demonstrate their ability to integrate EDI issues.

They adapt their supervisory style to the degree of autonomy and knowledge of their team members. They value teamwork and recognize individual efforts.

Questions about teaching

7. Give us an example of a situation in which you have taken student diversity into account in your teaching. What do you do to promote inclusion in your courses?

Why ask this question ?

UNIL advocates for equality, respect for diversity, and inclusion. It takes into account the specific situations of students with disabilities, on the basis of a medical certificate, and makes accommodations for exams, depending on the situation.

Elements for assessing the answer

The candidate sets out the accessibility measures they have implemented (e.g. informing students that they are available to discuss specific situations, implementing the principles of universal design for learning, adapting powerpoint and course materials to take account of certain needs, particularly those related to dyslexia, offering various working methods, etc.) or refers to training courses taken in connection with these themes, for example.

8. Do you have experience in mentoring and/or teaching students from diverse backgrounds? What methods have proved effective and what have you learned from this experience?

Why ask this question ?

The UNIL student body is highly diverse. For example, a fifth of students (and a third of teaching staff) are of foreign origin. Even among nationals, many are not native speakers of French. The Canton of Vaud and UNIL also strive to include students with visible and invisible disabilities.

Elements for assessing the answer

The candidate is aware of the challenge of teaching in a multicultural, multilingual context, and with students from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, or those with disabilities. They are attentive to the participation of all students in the classroom. They are committed to teaching in a way that promotes success for all, and to creating an inclusive and respectful classroom environment.

They can demonstrate experience or reflection on teaching and assessment methods to achieve this. The candidate can describe the accessibility measures implemented (being available to discuss specific situations, implementing the principles of universal design for learning, adapting powerpoint and course materials to take account of certain needs, particularly those related to dyslexia, offering diverse working methods, etc.) or refer to training courses taken in connection with these themes, for example.

Questions about relations with colleagues

9. How would you react to racist, sexist, homophobic or other inappropriate comments among your colleagues or group members? How do you perceive your role?

Why ask this question ?

The aim here is to bring out the candidate's approach to conflict management and how seriously they take the obligation to promote a respectful, discrimination-free workplace.

Elements for assessing the answer

The answer must show that the candidate understands the role of a manager in situations of discrimination or harassment in the workplace.

They can share a real-life experience. They may mention the need to remind others of the need for a respectful environment, and that certain remarks can be hurtful. They are also aware of the institution's legal obligations as an employer and as a place of training. They show concern not only for the reputation of the university/department, but also for compliance with standards and regulations. They may mention the support bodies available and the obligation to report inappropriate behavior before it becomes serious. In all cases, they convey a constructive and benevolent attitude towards the person concerned.

10. As a professor at UNIL (in our department), you'll be working with colleagues from many different backgrounds and cultures, and with different roles and status. How do you ensure good collaboration?

Why ask this question ?

The aim here is to get an idea of the person's style of interaction and attitude towards colleagues. This provides an opportunity to assess their ability to adapt to the team.

Elements for assessing the answer

The answer should include the notions of listening, valuing other points of view and demonstrating an understanding of the benefits of diverse opinions, but also of the challenges of working in a diverse team.

The candidate can mention experiences in other settings and projects successfully completed with a multicultural/multidisciplinary/diverse team. They can demonstrate how they have mobilized internal processes to facilitate communication, interaction and teamwork. They demonstrate a commitment to the inclusion of all and to the quality of professional interactions.

B. Examples of actions taken or behaviours demonstrated by the candidate that indicate their awareness of EDI

In addition to the specific questions asked, the committee may, during the evaluation of applications, note elements that demonstrate the candidate's knowledge of and commitment to EDI. Some examples are given below.

It should be remembered that a candidate's commitment to EDI issues is not a formal recruitment criterion imposed by regulations and directives. It is up to faculties and committees to assess the need to integrate this theme into the recruitment process, in line with the faculty's strategic objectives.

Knowledge and understanding of the issues

- Knowledge, experience and interest in promoting equality and respect for the diversity that results from different characteristics, such as ethnic and/or cultural differences, socio-economic status, gender, affective and sexual orientation, and disability.

- Knowledge of the demographics of diversity in higher education.
- Understanding of the challenges faced by under-represented individuals and the need to identify and remove barriers to educational and/or career success.
- Understanding of the impact of ordinary sexism, microaggressions and harassment on women's careers.
- Understanding of the impact of family responsibilities on the careers of researchers, particularly women.

Teaching

- Strategies to create inclusive and welcoming teaching environments for students from minoritized groups (non-French speakers, disabled, LGBTIQ, etc.).
- Strategies to encourage critical thinking and respectful dialogue in the classroom.
- Use of new pedagogies and classroom strategies to advance equity and inclusion.
- Encouragement for women and people from minoritized groups to participate and speak out in the classroom.

Supervision

- Strategies to promote inclusive and respectful research environments.
- Mentoring and support for the advancement and professional development of students, PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers, particularly women and minoritized groups.
- Organization of their research group in such a way as to be inclusive and respectful.
- Knowledge of the authorities and resources available at the university in the event of harassment and discrimination.
- Knowledge of their role as a team leader or supervisor in resolving conflicts and personal attacks, as well as the support bodies and resources available.
- Understanding of their role as a representative of the employer in establishing working conditions that adhere to legal requirements (e.g. family leave, maternity/pregnancy protection, compliance with specifications, protection against attacks on personality, etc.).

Service activities/institutional commitment

- Participation in awareness-raising and/or training activities aimed at removing barriers and increasing the participation of women and people from minoritized groups.
- Support for student/professional organizations targeting women and minoritized groups.
- Participation in associations or on professional or scientific committees, with the aim of contributing to EDI objectives.

C. Other interview tips from the Equal Opportunities Office

- Allocate the same protocol and the same amount of time to each candidate, both for the sample lesson and for the interviews.
- In preparation for interviews by the hiring committee, establish a set of questions to be used in the same sequence with all candidates. Follow-up questions can, of course, be asked to clarify or expand on a candidate's answers.
- Limit questions to professional issues. Ensure that committee members are aware of any questions that can be considered as discriminatory and which cannot be asked at an interview. Do not ask candidates about their family situation or family organization (work-life balance).
- As far as possible, avoid bias in the assessment of a candidate's performance (e.g. due to physical appearance, dress, voice, speaking style, etc.).