

Helpful Guidance for an Effective Search Process, September 17, 2015

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Judy Singer. I'm the senior Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity. And I want to thank you all for joining us this afternoon for this event on the faculty search process.

I think we have a very interesting panel of experienced search committee members and chairs. We have a lot of people in the room who, themselves, have been on many search committees, are department chairs, deans, a lot of people in positions of responsibility. And I just want to start out with my first introduction to the importance of faculty searches.

So in the mid '80s, I met Derek Bok for the first time. I was a junior faculty member, I was an assistant professor. And I think I might have been half an inch taller than I am now, but for those of you who remember Derek Bok, in his heyday he was like 6'6". And there was easily a foot and a half between us, as well as other power differentials.

And I met him at a cocktail party, and where-- and I'm not even sure what the purpose of the party was. I was just totally tongue tied. Here I am with the president of Harvard University, and my research collaborator, John Willett, was with me. And he came up with a question to ask Derek Bok. He said, Mr. President-- which is what you would call Derek Bok-- is it true that you review every tenure case at Harvard University?

And he looked down-- John wasn't much taller than I am-- looked down the two of us, and he said-- I can't imitate his voice-- in a very low base, well yes. That's the most important thing I do. I determine the Harvard faculty of the future. And I thought that was such an interesting view from the perspective of the president, that in making decisions about tenure, in determining who the Harvard faculty are, that he was really setting the course for Harvard well beyond his own tenure as president.

And I think for everybody in this room who's participating in a faculty search, you are carrying that mantle. Part of why you're here is a commitment to doing searches well, and also thinking a little bit differently than might have been thought about in the days of Derek Bok's presidency. The Harvard of the future we want to be as excellent, or more excellent, than the Harvard of the past. We also want the Harvard of the future to be more diverse than the Harvard of the past. And one way to get that excellence is to look at that diversity.

Just to cite a statistic, in 1970 there were no tenured women in the faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, zero, in 1970. That's right-- I was in high school at the time. Some people have been in college-- no women were considered acceptable members of the faculty of Arts and Sciences in 1970. I'm very pleased to say that that has really changed, and I think the commitment of people in this room to putting energy into searches, to thinking a little bit outside the box.

To not always say, well, we've always done it this way, which is too often a Harvard refrain. So I just want to thank you all for being here. And thank you for your efforts in being on a search.

How many of you are actually on a committee this year? Yeah, a lot of people. Being on a search is an enormous amount of work, and I just want to thank you for that effort and that time.

I'm going to conclude my remarks by introducing the moderator for today, Mahzarin Banaji our colleagues here in the psychology department. She's the Clark professor of social ethics in the Department of Psychology, and the senior advisor to the dean of the faculty of Arts and Sciences on faculty development. She is also one of the world's leading experts on concepts of implicit bias and implicit association. And when I give talks around the country, around the world, on faculty development and diversity, I often say-- I'm going to embarrass Mahzarin-- that I have an unfair advantage by having Mahzarin as a colleague and somebody who I can count on to help work with me and with all of you on faculty searches, and changing the way we do things.

I'm also going to shamelessly promote her book. So this is a book that came out last year. It's called Blind Spot. It's a great read, and she'd be happy to autograph it for you.

And it gives you some sense about the implicit biases, and what she calls mind bugs and blind spots, that we all carry with us. And one of the important lessons is, I've got them, too. Mahzarin's got them.

It's human nature. And I think, trying to think about how we wrestle those demons, and make good decisions in the face of inputs that might send us in different directions, is part of what we're here to do today. So with that, let me introduce Mahzarin Banaji. Thank you.

Thank you, Judy. The only thing I'll add about the book is that its price is falling precipitously on Amazon, even as we speak. So it'll be worth pennies if you wait two weeks before you buy it. Absolutely, among the most exciting and important things we do is to select people who will become a part of this community and will eventually replace those of us who are in this room.

For me, one of the great surprises of my professional life was that I made a discovery, maybe 30 years ago now, that was an unexpected effect in an experiment that became so startling to me that I decided to drop everything else I was doing and focus on it. And it has been the work I've done these last 30 years. But of even greater surprise to me is the fact that anybody outside of my 10 academic colleagues would care about it.

But such is the state of this knowledge, that people are using it. Hopefully they will use it wisely. But everywhere you go, people want to ask the question, how can I make better decisions about the people I select? And until very recently, there was no science of this.

We assumed that, as people who have technical expertise in a particular field or work in-- that that's the expertise that will drive the decisions that we will make. I have a certain set of arguments to make for why is the right candidate. And then of course, the science comes along, and over a 50 year period it has produced many, many results that make us really rethink the rationality of those choices. We won't go into the research results today.

What we want to hear from is almost the other side of it, real anecdotes, things that people have experienced in the trenches that we can learn from. And as Judy and I were chatting before this

session, I said to her that even as a scientist, I'm often surprised at how much the data don't matter to me. And how much those anecdotes do. It's a shameful thing to say, but these stories about what people actually encounter in the trenches remain with us. And they motivate us to try to do better.

Let me give you a quick little example of something I experienced in my own department as one of those anecdotes and what we did about it with Judy's and Nina's assistance. So we ran a search-- I think it was about a couple of years ago now-- in which the field, the base rate in the field is that 50% of the applications, the junior search, 50% of the applications came from men and 50% from women. And by the way, gender is not by any means the only thing to be worrying about here. This is a very broad landscape, where we ought to think about every aspect of a person's category that might in some way lead us to think that they were either the perfect fit for Harvard or do not fit at Harvard.

So 50/50 is the base rate. The committee does due diligence, and they come up with the five best people that they want to interview. And they come to me because they've discovered that, after their due diligence, what they have are five outstanding male candidates. And they wanted to know what they could do to understand if this was, indeed, a decision that may have incorporated some bias.

I look at the application pool myself, I come up with exactly the same five people they would have. There was nothing I could see wrong in the process, and that's what it was. If that were one year, we would say, anybody who understands the law of small numbers knows that that can easily happen. But we looked back at our own searches, and we discovered that that had been happening in pretty much every one of the last six searches that we've had.

And so we had to pause. And I'm going to urge you that when you come upon data like that, don't just plod forward. Ask why that might happen, even if there is no obvious reason as to why that might be happening.

So we did something, the chair of the search. And I'm going to actually sort of give a shout out to people who've been recently tenured at Harvard, because I think that the baton has been passed to you, and it is extremely important that you play a role in raising issues that your predecessors may not have, because you are younger. And as a result, you know this evidence better. It was taught to you, perhaps, in the class, which is not true for people my age.

So the person who chaired the search and who knew about this research came to me and said, I can't go forward, he said, given what we're seeing as the base rates and then our selections. So he did something very interesting. He wrote an email to junior people in the field, including in our own department, and said, we're doing a search in X field. Who are the candidates that come to your mind who you think ought to be people we should think about?

Six names came to us repeatedly as the best people in the field, and they all happened to be names of women. Not one of those six women was in our pool. So why would that happen? Why would a junior person, who clearly belongs in the top 5% of our pool, not be in the pool?

At that point, we talked to Nina, to Judy, and asked for permission to call these women and ask them, why did you not apply to the job at Harvard? And to a T, the answer was, I didn't think I belonged at Harvard. Your advertisement read, seeking exceptional candidates in blah, blah, blah field, and I don't think of myself as exceptional. Mind you, this from a person who had applied to a similar position at Princeton and at Stanford.

So I'm here to tell you that there are many ways for us to think about, not just selection, but even recruitment. I give you the example of this kid, the 16-year-old Mongolian kid, that MIT brought from Mongolia. This is a kid who lives in a semi-nomadic group, manages to find access to the internet for a few hours a day, and ended up scoring so high in a MOOC that MIT teaches, anchoring sort of the high end of the 150,000 people who take this course, that eventually they sort of sent an administrator or dean to Mongolia, they packed up his bags, and they brought him to MIT.

I would say, that's recruiting. And I would like us to do something similar. Just yesterday, we were having a discussion when it struck us that somebody had been discussed at Harvard, but we didn't really follow through. And now it turns out that she is the leader in a field that we, maybe, should have thought about. These are no longer little offenses a mistakes. This is tragic, if we can't bring the very best people here.

So today the job is to think only about one area, selection, even though there are many parts to this problem. And for us to begin with three people, all of whom have shown amazing commitment, in my opinion, to improving the integrity of the process that we employ. I'll begin by introducing our first panelist, Iris Bohnet. Iris is a professor of public policy at the Kennedy School of Government. She's also the director of the women in public policy program, and she serves as as Kennedy school's academic dean.

Iris' training is that of a behavioral economist, which means that she doesn't just have models of how humans might behave. She actually does some experiments and shows us how economic theories may be right or wrong. She studies mostly things like trust in decision making, but using gender as one of her variables, and has been interested in this method that has been labeled, "nudges". The idea is to-- so psychologists like myself, we think about individual minds and how can we change a mind to go from incorrect decision making to correct decision making?

But Iris doesn't worry about individuals. She thinks they're a lost cause. And she, instead, thinks about shifting the gear outside of the person. That is through institutional changes, through policies, and so on. And what she has done is written a book that she turned in only--

Tuesday,

Tuesday, titled "What Works: Gender by Design". Lovely title. Please come up and tell us about it. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Mahzarin for that kind introduction, and Judy for putting this together. So I might be violating some rules. I'll mainly tell you anecdotes, but I'm also going to share some

data. So also I should correct, I actually stepped out of the academic deanship. So I'm on sabbatical right now. [INAUDIBLE] Start by reflecting on my time as academic dean.

So one time I came to the office and had a group of students camp out in front of my office door, saying that they needed to see me immediately. And so we met. And they said, what I interpreted as saying, that they were concerned about the lack of women on our faculty. And so I talked about faculty hiring, and at the Kennedy School we only hire about five people every year. And I did the math and told them that takes about 108 years till we have quality, and things of that sort.

But that's actually that's not the main point of the story, because in my discussions, I realized that they actually could care less about the faculty. They cared about-- I don't know whether that's equally important for every department-- but they cared about people who they see in the room. And there's lots of fellows at the Kennedy School. There's post-doctoral fellows, there's doctoral students, there's guests, there's celebrities. There's leaders from around the world who speak in our seminars, in the forum, and other places.

And they were really concerned about the fact that they don't see enough women. And that opened the question for me that I don't think anyone at the Kennedy School has ever paid attention to. And that is--

We're recording.

Thank you. And that opened a question at the Kennedy School to me that I think nobody had ever looked at. And that is, who is coming through school. I mean, what is the gender diversity or generally diversity? But in this particular instance, they were considered about gender diversity?

Who speaks at our school? So you have 12 different research centers. They all have their own seminar series. Nobody had ever counted.

So some of the advantages being academic dean is that I could ask the research center directors to report every January to me what the breakdown is of all the fellows, and the speakers, and any speaking engagement that they have at their research institutes. And what we learned and they learned was really eye opening.

So you might imagine, some of our centers had a breakdown of 90% male speakers, 10% female speakers. The women in public policy program that I direct had the opposite problem. So our breakdown, typically, is 80% women speakers, 20% male speakers. But it is true, overall, we had about 68% male speakers.

I tell you the story, because I do think that's an important insight. That counting, measuring what's going on is really important. And I thought it was shameful for me-- not only what I kind of latently working on the book that Mahzarin mentioned, but I work with data a lot, but it had never occurred to me to think about that question until the students came to me.

So just lots of learning involved, I think, this whole space, for us collectively. When I reflect on the selection process at the Kennedy School for faculty selection, this is now not a scientific segment at all, but I do think one of our most important innovations that precedes me as academic dean was to have an appointments committee. And I presume most of you have that as well, but what they do is to safeguard the rules.

So first of all, they had to design the rules. And then they fine tune them all the time, kind of reviewing our job ads, reviewing how we do things, how many interviews has this person had. How long is the job talk? Who is the person meeting with?

How we evaluated the person. What we reached out to. So now lots of things that faculty have to submit. Faculty committees have to submit where they advertised, who they reached out to, what the applicant pool was, how the final selection list compares to the applicant pool, lots of this. And I think it actually is very helpful, because what it helps us to do is also calibrate across searches.

None of us is an expert in this field. Neither am I, but it does help to look at various searches comparatively. Look at the kind of standards that we apply, where we look, how many people we invite, how many letters of recommendations we ask for. So I do think that was very, very helpful, and really guided by Judy's office, kind of regularized some of the process.

Now thirdly, I'm going to talk a little bit maybe also about my research, but one study that you probably are familiar with that affected me and my [INAUDIBLE] the fact that I turned from studying trust to studying gender, was Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse's work with orchestras, with the short summary that if you auditioned behind a curtain as a woman, the likelihood that it will advance to the next round is increased by about 50%. So blind auditions was kind of my ideal when I became academic dean, but that's, of course, not how we normally do things. So I have three slides, just kind of to make three points here, maybe really more two.

The first one is a slide on interviews. And I'm sure my colleagues will talk about many other things, but all of you probably have job talks and interviews. And I'm going to suggest that almost everything on this slide is wrong. So the first thing that is wrong is, we shouldn't do panel interviews. I think they're relatively rare in academia, so I won't spend a lot of time on that, but there's lots of evidence suggesting that group think is just going to emerge when we have panels interviewing people.

The other myth that surprised me as I was collecting data for the book is that diversity on selection committees doesn't solve the problem. And that is because Mahzarin and others have shown us, in much work, that seeing is believing. If we don't see male kindergarten teachers or female mathematicians, we don't naturally associate those jobs with men and women, respectively. And we often find relatively small differences in the eyes of the observer.

In fact, there's really nice randomized control trials, experiments in Spain, where faculty selection committees are created randomly, picked out of a hat from across the faculties in Spain. And so what researchers could do was literally analyze, what difference does diversity make on that selection committee? And they found some surprising results.

So for example, what they did find was an out group bias for committees evaluating people to promotion to associate professor. What does that mean? Women didn't want to promote other women. It was particularly pronounced for women.

Why is that? Because women had some theory that there are-- there's gender specific competition. That I'm competing with other women for the 10 slots in Spain, and therefore, I don't necessarily want to have more like me in my department, or even-- because this is Spain-wide in my discipline. It turned to an in-group bias, so that means the more women on the committee, the better for the evaluated women for promotion to senior professors, so to full professors. At that point, women were looking for friends. Now they're looking for people like themselves.

So there's actually this really interesting and complicated stuff going on, in terms of kind of diversity of committees. Now, don't take that as me saying, diversity on committees is not important. I think it's important for other reasons, because we have different networks and reach out to different people, but I have no evidence to say that it is important in the evaluation process.

The third thing I'll say about this is-- and I'm characterizing, obviously, here a bit too much. What I mentioned before, calibration across candidates is really, really important. Obviously, they won't only look at one candidate, I'm sure, but that's something that turned out to be very important for me when I became academic dean. And since then, I mean now as a faculty member interviewing job candidates, I'm really trying to adhere to that principle that I compare candidates with one another. And I'll show you in a moment how I do that, and in a very, very disciplined way.

Fortunately, that's my last point I'm going to use. They might be using what is called an unstructured interview. And I presume most of you use an unstructured interview. I have always used unstructured interviews. I have to tell you, these are probably the worst predictors of future performance that you could imagine.

Now to-- let me actually very quickly give you one study, because it's so important and so relevant for us. So Texas had a-- did run a very interesting experiment, because the government of Texas realized in May they didn't have enough physicians. That was after all the medical schools had chosen their students.

So it turned into a natural experiment because then the government of Texas said, you all have to admit 50 more students. So now they have to go back to the pool, go deep into the pool, and select people who nobody else wanted. And it turns out-- and then what's beautiful, then they could follow those applicants over time and see, did the people who we initially ranked number five, and who we admitted, do they do better than the people who we initially rank number 1,000 and had to admit, just because Texas state made us to do so? It turns out, as you might guess, zero correlation. It doesn't matter. And the beautiful thing is, if you take out the interview score then the correlation gets a bit more precise. So don't overestimate the interview. OK, but not that you have to pay attention to this now, but so I did actually spend some time to think about the

research on interviews and how we could structure interviews better, because I don't think we'll give it up.

That is kind of an interesting human bias that many social psychologists have actually been trying to work against for 50 years and we haven't been successful in convincing people that the interview is useless. So I don't think it's going to go away, so I do think we have to just make it better. And there is evidence suggesting that structured interviews do a much better job than an unstructured one.

And some key components of a structured interview are, you ask the same five questions, every candidate, in the same order. And ideally, afterwards, you force yourself-- and that's exactly what I did-- to blind yourself as you possibly can to your notes-- I mean, to the name of the person. And you compare, question by question, across the five candidates, because what you're trying to do is you're trying to protect yourself from what is called the halo effect.

You don't want to be influenced by whether you like the person, or whether the person wore your favorite color, or whether the person even answered the first question really well. You want to be objective across all the different questions. So the very last thing I'm going to say is this, and that's become a bit of a passion of mine. And that is, very small details that you might not putting of can really matter in this process, including what's on your walls.

So I'd invite all of you to go back to your departments and have a look at who's on your walls. So the Kennedy School, we noticed 10 years ago, that we had about 60 portraits of leaders, typically public sector, private sector. Leaders, all of them male. All men. We had 50% female students, we had zero role models for women on our walls.

Now we've changed that. We've commissioned portraits of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, other-- Edith Stokey, founding mother of the Kennedy School, so we're trying to change that. But go back to your seminar rooms. I've been to some of your seminar rooms.

I've been to my seminar room. Some of our seminar rooms have male portraits, exclusively. Imagine what it feels like for a person applying for a job and getting a job interview in such an environment. Thank you.

So our next speaker, when I said the baton has been passed to a new generation, I mean Rowan Flad and the other young people who've been tenured within the institution recently. Rowan is John Hudson professor of archeology in the faculty of Arts and Sciences. He is in the, I would think, the stones and bones part of anthropology. Is that how you think of it? OK, all right.

Rowan's work focuses on the development of complex society during the Neolithic period and the Bronze Age in China. And what that does is it gives him a great perch from which to look at whether the decision making at Harvard University in the 21st century looks a little bit like the Bronze Age in China. And then when he notices that, he tells us about it, and we scurry around trying to fix it.

So one of the things that he's looked at are introduction of animals in early Chinese society, their use and sacrifice. He has looked at social change more generally. And there are, I think, comments he's about to make, that I find especially compelling, in the way in which we identify how our search ought to even be named. So with that, Rowan.

Thank you very much, Mahzarin and Judy for inviting me today. I feel a little out of place, because I think I have much shallower and more limited experience than the other people in the panel, and probably most of the people in the room. But I have been, I guess, passionate enough about this issue to get Judy to invite me here today in my limited time in the tenured faculty here, partly because I think that the process by which we go about selecting new faculty, particularly junior faculty, is very important for the entire pipeline into our senior faculty. And it is the way in which we make this institution stronger.

Partly, my interest has come from an egregious lack of diversity in our own department, particularly relative to a field that is a very diverse field, both in terms of gender and other categories. And so, that makes me take pause when we're doing searches. And I was fortunate enough to lead a search a couple of years ago, fortunate or unfortunate enough, to lead a search a couple years ago during which we thought a lot about this issue. And I'm going to mention a few details related to that as I go on.

But another reason why I've been interested in this issue actually has to do with issues related to implicit bias, in particular because of work with my wife has been involved in on motherhood bias in hiring practices, and being exposed to a lot of literature on implicit biases, and so forth, through that kind of personal connection. So this is something that I've been sensitive to and have wanted to bring that sensitivity, to some extent, to the search processes going on in our department. And so I'm going to have three points, three main points.

I don't have any slides, but I have three main points that I wanted to make today, one of which probably deserved a little bit of-- maybe a slide. And they're somewhat narrow, in terms of their focus, probably because I don't have the command of the type of data that have been talked about so far. Nor do I feel like I have the depth of experience to speak to it in a much bigger institutional sense. But perhaps some of the-- perhaps some of these points will be relevant to other searches that are going to be going on.

So the first point relates to the kind of general idea of insuring the rich talent pool for searches that go on. And I think one of the most important components of this is the definition of the job itself, including the job ad, as it's produced. But more, perhaps even more fundamentally to that, thinking about what it is that we should be searching for in our departments when we are able to move forward with a new search, or even when we're requesting that. Because I think a tendency-- and certainly is the tendency in our department, and I think in many-- is that when we have somebody who retires, we want to replace that person. And we think that, first of all, that's a means by-- a reason that the deanery is going to permit us to do a search.

And secondly, that if somebody in our department has been a major player in the field as a whole, through the lens of the work that they do, and has impacted the field, that perhaps that suggests that that element of the field is particularly important. So the search I was responsible

for chairing a couple of years ago was an example of this, where we had probably the most eminent member-- or at least certainly one of the most eminent members-- of our department retiring. He is somebody who had been influential in the field in many ways and had also sat in a position that had a long legacy behind it of almost 100 years of people within that field changing the way in which we think about the origins of humanity.

So clearly this is an element of the field of archaeological anthropology that has fundamental importance to the way we think about our past and the way we understand the development of humans. And it's very easy, I think, to think of just replacing that type of person, whether it be at a junior or senior level. Unfortunately, the field in which that person sat is the most non-diverse, or one of the most non-diverse, sub fields within our discipline. And so this presents, I think, a challenge that is not unique, by any means, to anthropology or archeology.

And there are two ways, I think, that we should be thinking about at least evaluating that situation when we are looking to replace people or move our departments and our disciplines in new directions. One of which is whether or not there has been change in our discipline, such that the fields that were most important in the past are no longer the most important, or at least can be folded within a broader set of fields. And the second is the way the job ad is written and structured, in such a way-- and I think that we should be thinking about making, casting the net as broadly as possible, and not having keywords and phrases within our job descriptions that implicitly narrow the fields that we're searching in.

So in the case that I was involved in, this was a job that was focused on the paleolithic and in the old world. So basically outside of the Americas. And although the job itself was structured in such a way that it really did narrow to some extent the diversity of candidates from which we'd applied, we were very conscious of trying to both conduct outreach, and also consider nontraditional applicants in terms of that position.

So for example, something that we did was do some outreach to individuals in the field that people knew from one way or another, or who might have ways to get the word out about the job, that we're not just posting the same places. But in fact, I don't think we did a good enough job of that. Something that was brought to my attention too late, or actually even after this was finished, was one thing that we probably should have done and that might be relevant to many of you, is thinking about posting job ads in places that are explicitly targeted towards underrepresented groups. So whereas in an anthropology one might post a job for the American Anthropological Association or the Society of American Archeology and other kind of major venues, there are also small focus groups that cater to underrepresented populations within these societies. And I think that we don't often do enough, at least we didn't, in terms of specifically targeting such groups for the advertisement of these sort of jobs. And that's something that one might want to think about.

Secondly, charging individual faculty within the department with, not just those on the search committee, but everybody in the department with actively reaching out to people that they know, with an intention of not just spreading the word, but specifically spreading the word to populations and individuals who may have interesting path [INAUDIBLE], cutting edge work that doesn't obviously fit into the job description, but nevertheless can be thought of within that

way, within the confines of the job. So that's kind of one major set of points, has to do with the-- kind of ensuring a rich talent pool. The second set of points I wanted to make had to do with evaluation of candidates.

And this actually, the second and third kind of go together to some extent. But I want to make a couple of points here, some of which we adopted in the search that I was involved in and some of which I kind of reflected on later. I think that-- and perhaps some of these points are obvious, but I think they're worth making explicit.

I think it's very important that searches do not rely on the individual committee members reading files on their own, ranking candidates, and culling the field down with numerical rankings without any conversations about the applicants to lead things off. And in fact, I think that type of process allows for all sorts of implicit biases and other factors to come into play that are never explicitly made clear, and that have the real potential for losing interesting candidates who don't obviously fit into the narrow way in which a job was initially conceptualized. And so one thing we did, and I think is good practice generally, is to, at the very beginning, even though most of the committee members had done some degree of ranking of candidates on their own and thought about what made certain candidates strong or not, we went quickly in the first meeting through every single person and talked about whether or not they-- what their strengths and weaknesses were.

This takes more time than it would if you just simply cut down the candidate pool numerically. And in some fields, I mean ours is not one where we have hundreds of applicants, and so I would like to hear from those who are in fields that have so many that it would make it really impractical to do this. Nevertheless, I think that this plays an important role in trying to diversify, in terms of research interests, the pool of people who look to be the most strong.

Secondly, when ranking is done as part of a process, I think it's important to have explicit conversations about the various aspects of a candidate's portfolio that can be ranked differently, and also talk as a committee and as a department about which of those are more valued in a particular search. So for example, we broke down in this particular search-- although not, I must admit, until the period when we were doing the shortlist-- the ranking of individuals into a number of different aspects. The breadth of their work, the depth of their work, the performance that they had in the interview process, their research promise, their teaching, and their fit were the six categories that we had. And then within those there were subcategories that I asked people to think about, and particularly, to think about how they ranked those subcategories in relation to one another.

So for example, in terms of research promise, this kind of general category, I kind of suggested a number of the sub components, promise as a researcher, potential impact, demonstrated impact, scope if vision, significance of research, trajectory, relevance, and tenurability at Harvard, which I think is actually a really important category that we think about when we're doing hiring, because we know that the process of tenure at Harvard has its own quirks and characteristics. And we really need to be thinking about how it is we should be hiring people who can be mentored in such a way that they're going to be promotable here. And so forth, and I can give

you similar things for the teaching component, which we had many sub aspects of, and fit as well, if you're interested in hearing that.

This is where I might have used a slide, but I don't have one. Having these kind of subcategories focused our discussion about what it was that was really important to us as a committee and as the department, such that I don't think it's really possible when you get a number of good candidates for a job to simply say that this person is better than that person. And it almost never is the case that that's true in every regard. In fact, when we ranked our six top candidates, all of whom we brought in for interviews, there was no one of them that ranked top in all of those categories, as I think is predictable and it would be expected in almost any case.

So another thing that I wanted to mention in this respect, in terms of evaluation of candidates, had to do with sensitivity to the fact that when we have particularly tenure track jobs, we're going we have a wide range of experience, in terms of the applicant pool. We have those who are just finished, those who are a few years out, those who are many years out. Oftentimes, people who are 10, or 15, or even 20 years out who are applying for junior positions for whatever reason. And it's I think quite a challenge to distinguish what makes a strong candidate for a tenure track position here of somebody who's been out in the teaching world for 15 years, relative to somebody who's just finishing and maybe has one article, or something, out.

And so what we did in this case-- and I'm not sure this is naturally the best practice-- I'd actually be interested hear. I shouldn't say we. What I did is I separated out these groups of applicants into these age grades, if you will, and then thought ab-- for myself, ranked them individually, and then thought separately about whether or not, what the strengths and weaknesses were of somebody who had been in the system for a long time, versus somebody who was just finishing up.

And finally in this respect, in this-- kind of concerning fair evaluation-- I'd mention the challenge of international applicants, particularly for junior and tenure track positions, for all the number of reasons, both the-- and this isn't true with international applicants from every context. But there is a challenge of when we ask for letters of recommendation, the nature of those letters being written by scholars who address that type of request in a very different way than what is expected of scholars in North America. And also the expectations that we have in terms of both teaching experience and communication effectiveness, particularly in the interview process where we're dealing with people and thinking about how effective teachers they may be. And sometimes superficial aspects of communication can outweigh other things.

And finally, the last set of points I wanted to make actually relates a bit to what Iris was talking about concerning the process by which we evaluate candidates. And ensuring-- the main point here is that I think that it's important to ensure that it's a deliberative process. In fact, I was very interested to hear about the fact of committee meetings and panel interviews being a bad idea, which I think is a really interesting take on a point for myself.

I have, as an applicant a long time ago, been sort of simultaneously subjected to the American system and then the British system, where you do get a panel interview in academic context. And I wasn't actually sure which is more effective. And in many ways, I think that-- at least from kind

of an outsider's standpoint as an applicant-- I appreciated the fact that I was asked a question once, and I could give an answer, and then everybody kind of heard the same thing. But on the other side of things, the groupthink component of it, I think, is very important to think about.

And the last thing I'll say about this concerns those who we ask to take part in our committees. And this relates to the point about diversity on committees. And I think that actually it's quite important to ensure that those who are involved in at least the deliberation process about our applicant pools are not limited to a small group of individuals from the same part a department, with more less the same perspective on what the job, on what a good applicant is.

And I think that ways that we should go about ensuring that doesn't happen is by having at least one member from an allied field who's involved and invested in our searches, even at the junior level. This always happens at the senior level. But also involving graduate students, in some fashion, in the evaluation process. And I know that that opinion is not shared by everybody, at least in my department. And it may not be shared by everybody in this room.

But in fact, in the search that I was a chair for, the reflections by the graduate students were extremely valuable. They were very effective. They made very effective points that contributed to our overall decision making process.

And in fact, the order of candidates that they as a group came up with ended up being the order that was decided upon at the end of the process, including the person who we ended up hiring. So those are kind of a number of scattered thought of thoughts about this whole set of questions, and I hope some of that is useful. Thanks. [APPLAUSE]

So Rowan's comments lead me to just mention that there are two kinds of conversations we routinely have that you might want to be mindful of. One is the kind of conversation that happens at dinner with the candidate, right? There are no rules here. You could talk about anything you want to with the candidate.

There is a preference amongst us at Harvard to read The New Yorker the day it arrives in our mailboxes. It doesn't mean that all candidates read The New Yorker, and that that is the most important thing for us to be discussing with them. It is important to remember that we're not selecting a friend, that we're selecting a colleague who's great for Harvard and for the department. And those are explicitly to be set aside, because left to our own selves, we will veer towards conversations that, you know, speak about the single malt scotch that gets 98 or 99 out of 100, or The New Yorker. And if you do that, just remember that there is no chance that it can't influence your decision. So we've thought for a long time that we can then set those things aside. And what we're discovering is that the conscious mind is limited in that capability. And that it may not be able to set that aside.

So think a little bit before you have your dinner conversations. What do we want to focus on? What kind of work do we want to open up, broadly speaking, with the candidate, so that we can hear her or his comments on those kinds of things. And so don't just wander into them.

The second conversation that we have, I think, is more deadly. And that is, as soon as you drop the candidate off at their hotel, or whatever, the rest of the committee in the car will usually say, so what did you think, right? And that's just something that we do.

And I discovered that there are often two junior people in the back and two senior people in the front, and that the two junior people are listening very intently to, what did you think? The next day when you have to vote, surprise, surprise, we all agree on who we should hire. Isn't that wonderful?

So I kind of try to stop my department from doing some of this chit chatting about the candidate outside of the for-- And to my great surprise, in one of the searches where we did this, we discovered that we actually asked people to write down their impressions of the candidate, take notes after every meeting, et cetera, and then send them on to the assistant to the chair. When those are printed out and brought to the faculty, so you see for the first time what your colleagues think about that candidate, all of a sudden, there's very little consensus. But at least-- but that's the truth of what we are each thinking. So these are little ways, again, for us to bypass the very biases that we might have.

The last speaker on this panel is somebody I admire greatly, Avi Loeb, who is Frank Baird junior professor of science in the Department of Astronomy. He's the chair of the department. He's director of the Institute for theory and computation within the Center for Astrophysics, physics, and he studies little things like the cosmic dawn, the first stars and the galaxies that emerged, when those first stars and black holes formed, and what effects they have on our young universe.

But what I love about Avi is that he doesn't shirk from thinking hard about the diversity of his field in every way. He writes email and pesters us about, think about this or that. He writes books that make astronomy appealing to the general public. And I have a secret desire to do a study with him, in which I want to bring people in to think about the cosmic dawn and then show that, after having done that thinking for even five minutes, that they will be less prejudiced when they think about inter-ethnic issues. But that's a study I'd like to do with him.

First, I would like to say a few words about my background, because it's not very typical. I grew up in a farm, and I use to collect eggs as a kid. And often when I'm frustrated in my current work, I think it might have been more relaxing to go back to those days.

Avi, I think it's on.

Is it on?

Yeah.

And since I started with very unusual initial conditions, and I got to where I am right now, it offers me perspective about what is the right approach to selecting people. And my personal history, which I regard as quite an unusual path from interest in philosophy at a young age to being a scientist right now, and astronomer, teaches me independence in the selection of my research topics, but also diversity in the selection of colleagues.

And that's what I'd like to discuss today, how to collect matches this will catch fire. So you can think about a matchbox, and it's very difficult to tell in advance whether, if you pick a match and rub it against the walls of the box, whether it would light up. And that's a difficult decision in any selection process.

And so I would like to advocate diversity for a different reason than commonly argued for, and that is that it leads to diversity of ideas and to innovation, because different types of people with different backgrounds, different genders, think differently about problems and approach them differently in ways that could allow breakthroughs and innovation. And once there is diversity in the community of people thinking about a problem, there is more likelihood that not all the matches will be duds.

We are all familiar with the phenomenon of seeing young people, that, let's say 20 years ago, were regarded very highly, that were thought of as geniuses in the field that they work in. And I will not mention names. I can think of very specific examples in my field that 20 years later, really did not produce much, and did not fulfill the expectations, and became sort of dead wood, in a way. And the question is, how come other people that went to lesser institutions succeeded so much in advancing the same field? And what was wrong with the selection process?

Now of course, there is a random aspect to it, that it's very difficult to forecast the success of individuals. But there are also some systematic trends. And often, people try to reproduce themselves. They look at the mirror and they like what they see, most of the time. And they, therefore, like to see themselves replicated in other people. And there is a sense of longevity of the line of research that they promoted for many years, if they find a person that looks like them doing the same thing.

The problem is that that blocks innovation. And there are many examples in the history of astronomy where the entire astronomical community fought about known truths that cannot be refuted that must be right. For example, the sun must be made of the same material as the Earth, because the Earth after all was made of the debris left over from the sun. So you would think that the sun is made of the same stuff as the earth. That was very natural to assume.

But Cecilia Payne-Gasparovich, when she did her Ph.D.-- almost 90 years ago-- she realized that, by examining the spectrum of the sun, that it's made-- at least the surface of the sun-- is made mostly of hydrogen. And she wrote that in her thesis. And she was discouraged to include that in the thesis by Henry Norris Russell, the director of the Princeton University Observatory who told her that we all know that the composition of the Earth and sun are the same.

And she was so frightened by this single person telling her what the right thing is that she took it out of her thesis. And a few years down the line, he realized that she was right and admitted that. Eventually, she became the department chair here at Harvard, of the astronomy department. She had done the first Ph.D. in astronomy at Harvard Radcliffe. But that's just a good example to show that the mainstream view is not necessarily the correct one.

And diversity helps us innovate. It also reduces the trends that I mentioned before, about self-replication of both research and policy. So if we have a diverse group of colleagues, we're less

likely to repeat the mistakes of the past, irrespective if whether these mistakes are in terms of the research we're doing, the truths, the scientific ideas that we believe in, or policy matters. So I think it's very much to our advantage to promote diversity for these reasons.

The mistake that is often made, and I've seen it quite a bit among my colleagues, is that when they see a young person, they immediately develop an opinion about this person after hearing, let's say, a talk, or speaking with that person. And they maintain a static image of that person. So if, at a very young age, they thought the person is not very promising, when this person grows and becomes much more prominent, they still maintain their view. They have a static view of that person.

And that is convenient, because you don't need a lot of information. You just need to develop the initial image and keep it. The problem with that is that the initial image that you have of a person is often shaped by circumstances. If that person went to school in a place that is not, doesn't have distinguished scholars, then that person will not get the same education, will not be brought up to the same standards as the rest of the people.

And what one should pay attention to, instead, is to the growth of the person. So looking at the initial conditions, where this person came from, and looking at the derivative of how fast that person is progressing and developing. That's much more important, but it's more time consuming, because it requires you to monitor how a person develops with time. You can't just assign labels that are static to a person.

And so, one lesson that I've learned is that even if you had a modest impression of a student or a post doc, you need to keep monitoring what they're doing. And later on in their career, when they are applying to faculty positions, it's your duty to update your image accordingly. Many people prefer to maintain the image, even when presented with new facts, because they feel embarrassed admitting that they were wrong. That's a very common tendency of people serving on committees, even grant allocation committees. They would prefer to give the funds to those people that they believed in early on in their career, and block those people that they thought are not very promising, even if the evidence shows otherwise, just so that they would not have to admit that those other people are successful.

So it's very important to allow images of people to evolve with time and reward growth, rather than academic ancestry. And by ancestry, I mean initial conditions. Who this person worked with for their Ph.D. We pay a lot of attention to the letter writers, and often, Ph.D. Advisors that are well recognized get much more attention in terms of recommendations.

More on the day-to-day side. My experiences as department chair and as director of the Institute for Theory and Computation is that it's very important to stay practical, to try and find the practical solutions, rather than being confrontational with people that don't share your set of ideas, because by again getting into fights over particular issues, by getting confrontational, a lot of energy gets wasted. And very often, those people are blocking other moves towards the right direction.

And so, what I found to be a strategy that's works very well is trying to bring other people, to explain to them why it makes sense to promote diversity. And to my surprise, I found the honest, straightforward, non-political approach to be very effective. And I haven't encountered any resistance from faculty members in my department when I adopted this.

It may well be that they are afraid, they don't want to express their voice loudly. But I don't care what the reason is in practice. They did cooperate, and I didn't encounter much resistance. And the results are that among our students-- and I should thank also Dave Charbonneau, he's sitting here from my department, who served on many committees that helped promote that-- among our graduate students, 46% are women right now. And from the incoming class this year, 30%, about 1/3, are minorities.

Underrepresented minorities.

Underrepresented minorities. At the Institute for Theory and Computation, about 40% of the post-docs are women. And five out of six of my graduate students are women. I didn't do anything special to encourage that, it just happened. So let me move from this slide, which is more general, more philosophical, to some specific rules which I think are helpful in promoting diversity. And these are my personal rules, guiding principles.

The most important guiding principle is that one should maintain a high quality, high level, in the hires. And there are many reasons for that. Obviously, we all want Harvard to be the most prestigious institution, most successful. But it's also important to realize that if you compromise, that leads to reinforcement of prejudice.

So if one tries to just improve the statistics, without maintaining a high level, a high threshold, in terms of the quality of the candidates that are recruited, then it goes against the goal, because it says that on the books, perhaps, the numbers are promising. The statistics look good. But obviously, that candidate will encounter difficulties later on. So that's not a good idea.

And the other reason to maintain high quality threshold is to generate role models for other searches. So obviously, there are faculty members that are from a diverse background. That helps in inspiring young people to enter that field and follow in their footsteps.

The other thing that-- the other mistake that is often made is to think that organically, things will get organized in the right way. And that doesn't seem to be what happens. Leadership does matter.

And in that sense, it's very important to select the search committee to include members that do appreciate the value of diversity. It's important to, as was discussed before me, to encourage promising women and minority candidates to apply, obviously. And to search for target of opportunity hires. Very often, once you establish a strong reputation for the department or for the group that you're working with, there are potential hires that are lurking out there that might be interested in coming.

And most important, it is to create a constructive atmosphere within the department that is supportive of this process. Of course, the candidates that apply do so based on the impression they get from the community at large as to how comfortable it is to be within the department at Harvard. And as we heard before from Iris, some candidates don't apply because they feel that they're not good enough, or perhaps their environment is not nurturing enough.

And so in that sense, it's very important to follow up on hires by nurturing academic growth, addressing problems when they are still small, and nominating, for example, junior faculty, or post-docs, or students to prizes and fellowships. It's very important to show that we care about the less senior people around us. And that includes also attention to personal needs, which are particularly important.

Every individual has her or his needs, and one should pay attention to their special needs. That includes creating a family friendly environment that supports families, and avoiding overburdening women colleagues or minorities with too many committees. And another important element of all of this is to create a broader impact than just here at Harvard. And in the astronomy department in particular, I'm very proud, again to acknowledge work done by John Johnson and Dave Charbonneau.

For example, we do have a summer internship program this is promoting diversity. There is a post doc program, thanks to Judy that was established to promote diversity. There are mentorship opportunities for either post docs or faculty to promote diversity. And one can organize workshops.

And all of this is important because it creates an image of Harvard as a place that accepts people from different backgrounds. A lot of the problems have to do with the fact that people don't expect themselves to be accepted to Harvard, simply because Harvard has an image which is very selective and very specific. And finally, the ultimate goal of everything I do is to increase diversity beyond a certain threshold, such that the environment that I'm embedded in makes decisions in a stable, self-sustained manner.

So wouldn't matter who the department chair is, and who is pushing in one direction or another. There would be a large enough number of people, colleagues, that care about it, such that the process will be self-sustained. And I think, that's the healthy, stable, state that we all aspire to be in so that the issues that we bring up and discuss today will not have to be discussed in a special forum.

It will become self obvious that this is the reality. That's the way things are. And that's my dream for the future.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you very much, Avi. So I think the rest of our time is to be spent in discussion with the panel. But also, Nina Zipser is here from Mike Schmidt's office, the FAS, and Judy's, here and I'm here. So we can consider all six of us as able to answer different questions that you might have for us. Please mention any struggle that you confront. We have this possible situation, what

might we do? Or other thoughts that you have about what is not making sense about what it is that we're saying. Any and all of these, we're open to receiving from you. So let's just get started. I see a hand slowly rising. Yes, please.

I just wanted to know whether one of you could say a little more about the problems with panel interviews. I [INAUDIBLE] a major revision of the procedure in philosophy to get rid of those, but.

Is that what you do right now in philosophy? That's what you say?

Well, if I'm understanding what a panel interview is, that is to say several members of the faculty--

Yes

Interview the candidate, that's one of the things that we do, yes.

I see, OK. I wasn't aware that, but OK. Iris can say something.

I'm happy to answer that question. So the evidence suggests that if you have several people interviewing one candidate at the same time, it's very difficult for the three or five panelists to form an independent opinion. So that's the crux of groupthink is that sometimes groups are worse than if I collected people's ratings individually and then just averaged the five different ratings, for example.

So that's the reason why group interviews generally are discouraged.

I might add one more thing. If you want to pick a baseball player, would you throw a ball to him once, or would you throw it 10 times to get a sampling of how good a baseball player that person is, a batter? I think panels don't allow multiple shots, so that you can. So even though I think that there is one very positive thing about panel interviews, and that is that we've all heard the same answer. And now, if we disagree about the quality of the answer, we can actually tussle about it. We can say, I think what she meant was x, and you think what she meant was y. So there is a small benefit. But I think the disadvantages outweigh the merits. Yes. And then.

I was just wondering, in each of your faculty meetings, how many of you have been in a meeting where there was an explicit discussion about implicit bias? OK. Because for us, that was revolutionary, because before then, whenever we talked about diversity, I think our faculty naturally viewed it as, we're going to compromise on quality for a socially desirable good.

And what the research, and what that powerful stuff about implicit bias does, it just breaks that narrative and makes us realize, oh, we're not hiring the very best people. So if there's someone who's exci-- if you excited, I would encourage you to get that discussion going in your faculty. It gives you a completely different way to talk about this goal.

Can I just add to that that it just makes me cringe when any question about quality ever emerges when I show the research I do, because that is so far from what we're actually trying to say, that all I'll say is it makes me cringe. The reason I want to just add one more thing is, you don't have to know everything about implicit bias, but you have to know one overwhelming fact, that there are now, not 50, not 500, but 5,000 studies that in one way or another take exactly the same resume, the same product of work, and just change the name to vary in ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, gender, dominant language, whatever, social class, all of these.

And what we know, over and over, and over again, is that the same product, the same the work, is not viewed the same way because of that name. That, to me, is the single thing that we need to know, because we think that we are indeed doing what our job is. And that is, to attend to competence. To attend to the merit of the work.

And what this research is teaching us is that we're not able to do that. We need to find other ways to be able to find out why we're not able to do it. And it all boils down, it turns out, to the decision about competence. So the most relevant study to us might be a study done by a biologist at Yale who published in PNAS, maybe a couple of years ago, in which she actually selected people like us, people who are in the life sciences, who run research labs.

And she had people be selected for the job of lab manager. As you all know, lab manager positions are very important. It places the person in that role to getting to a much better graduate program than they might have if they'd gone straight from college. And what she finds in that study, amongst people like ourselves, is that for exactly the same resume, we, both men and women, over select men compared to women.

We do it because we actually see competence in the male candidate over the female one. And again, I don't mean to harp on gender. It's just the one that's been studied.

But this could be something like looking at two people, one of whom has a military background, and the other who doesn't. And we may have some stereotypes about what people from the military might do to our environment. Those are the kinds of things that we can't allow getting in the way. \$4,000 more in starting salary given to the same equally qualified male over female. And to me, this is even more stunning, reporting on spending three times as many hours mentoring the candidate if that person is male over female.

So once we know this, then the question becomes exactly the one that David is raising. And it's all about, how do we get to the most accurate sense of merit? Yes.

I had one follow up question and then one separate one. The follow up was with the panel interviews. Does the research suggest that the panel interview itself is problematic, or just that, in comparison with five other individual interviews, it's worse? If the panel interview's accompanied with the five other individual interviews, is that problematic? What is the extent of the actual empirical research on this?

It's a very good question. I don't have any answers. I only have an answer to your first.

So the typical study has been done with five different separate interviews compared to the five people on a panel. I don't know about sequencing, whether sequencing would be a good thing. So for example-- I mean, this is just a hunch-- I could imagine that having the five separate interviews first, which often actually happens. And then for the five panelists in some way coming together and maybe reinterviewing. I don't know whether that's going to add value or not. I really know, I don't know any evidence.

Yeah. The problem-- when you ask, is a panel interview decent but just not as good as the individual, the problem is that interviews suck. That is the problem. So almost any-- so I don't know about doubling up on them to kind of see if we can do more. In a sense, the talk is the panel interview.

There is a person presenting the heart of what we want to learn about, and we all listen to exactly the same thing. We don't come away with the same things, and we don't all listen equally, and so on. But at least there is that moment, where the most important piece, the work, is being viewed by all of us jointly. So I still, based on what I've read-- and I don't believe that we have the time to do both the individual interviews and then gather again as a group to do a panel interview.

So, so far, individual interviews-- and if you can get your faculty-- I mean, look, it's like herding squirrels, not just cats. But to get faculty to do anything systematically is not going to be plausible, really. To say, could you ask the following questions? Could you stick to the work?

One of my graduate students just had this happen. She is a concert level pianist. She went off to graduate school, got a Ph.D. Unfortunately, she had had a little line on her CV that talked about her music competence, and everywhere that she went, faculty asked her, how do I get my kid into Juilliard like you did. Explain to me what happens. And so the entire hour was spent talking about how.

And at the end of the interview, people felt they didn't know anything about her work, which was true. But that was the selection of the questions you ask. Hugely important.

Just to add to that, that's why you have to have a list of the five questions you want to ask. Or 10 questions, how many questions you want to ask. And stick to those.

I mean, I couldn't just agree more with what Mahzarin said. It's so easy to go out on a hunch and kind of talk about wherever they went on vacation. The other thing I thought was interesting is Google actually experimented with the optimal number of interviewers. That's another thing that we're encouraging.

Companies or even departments actually measure what you're doing yourself and kind of see what works. Now, many of our samples aren't big enough, but Google had the advantage of having a very big sample. It turns out for them, four different interviewers is the optimal number.

There's nothing magic in the number four, it might be different for different organizations. But what is magic is that you can use data, and you can look at which point are the scores starting to

converge. And then you can save the company lots of money, and you can increase your accuracy at the same time.

I had one other independent question, which was one of the points that came up was that it's best to make searches as broad as possible, rather than sort of specialized narrow specification of the candidate. In my own department, epidemiology, every search, as far back as I can remember, has been targeted to a particular sub discipline within epidemiology, often to meet what are perceived as the needs of the department. Do you have any further comments on trying to balance the desire for a broad search to obtain the best possible faculty member across all the areas of a discipline with meeting, say, the departmental teaching needs, or the need for having diverse representation across the sub disciplines within a department?

I should say that in our department, we have a tradition of having open searches, not even defining the area, not to speak about defining a narrow area. And it has worked extremely well, because, for example, I was hired in a search that was conceived as a search for an observer. And I'm a theorist.

And vice versa, we have observers that were hired when the department really need a theorist. The advantage of having it more open is that-- well, first of all, obviously you are open to a more diverse pool of candidates. But also, the level of excellence that you can recruit is far better, because it's not at all guaranteed that in a given year, the applicants will be of the top quality in the particular narrow area. So we're not just talking about the number of people working in that area, but also in this particular area, whether there is an exceptional candidate. And so I think it serves a department well to be as open as possible to candidates in a wide range of fields, such that the quality threshold would be very high.

Rowan, do you have something to say about that?

I couldn't agree more with what Avi just said, but this is based on my generalized perception of the way that broad fields are improved. I think that if you-- I mean, if the real need in a narrow field eventually trumps everything else, most likely you're going to get the best applicants in that field anyway, if the broader definition incorporates that that narrow one. But you will also have the opportunity to look at creative applicants or unusual applicants that you never would have seen, had it not been for a broader deposition.

So our view of great men and great women is so strong that when one of them leaves, we're willing to give up searches in our own area to fill that position with somebody like them. The more admired they are, the more that is likely to happen. And I think Rowan gave a great example of that.

So I do like the idea of saying, this is the kind of person we think we need. Now, let's go to one level above that, to a slightly more prototypic level, rather than the subordinate level of that field, and to specify. Yes, it's a little more work, because you will get more applications.

But the biggest reason to do it is because our minds about our own fields changes slower than the actuality of those fields changing. And so what you get is an infusion of something you never

even imagined, or that you did not know about. And so I like going into a search not being prepared for what I'm going to see, and leaving explicitly some open space for being able to shift gears.

And this is where the chair of research can play a very important role. And there's no reason to say, we're looking for x, or we must hire x, if y ends up being somebody who was non canonical, but ends up being perhaps the kind of person who could change the future. And because we're a school that has much smaller departments than many other schools do, for us every one of those people being able to do more than one thing tends to be appreciated.

Can I add one other thing? I think that there's been an interesting procedural change here, as I understand it, in the last year, such that now there's an extra step in terms of the approval of search committees. And as I understand it, then job descriptions are being asked for before a committee is actually formed, which means that this conversation, if that's true-- if I'm understanding this accurately-- then that means that this conversation about the nature of a job request needs to happen before the job definition takes place, but rather when a request to the deans is being made.

So I think that we should all take that to heart, that when we're in the academic plans, and so forth, and when we're requesting job searches for the [? coming ?] academic year, I think we should be thinking about how to define what it is that we're requesting as broadly as possible, to incorporate the perceived needs and yet permit this kind of broader definition to be used in the job advert.

Yes?

Just yesterday, we had a spirited discussion between the heads of two different search committees, one in molecular and cellular biology, and one in FAS systems biology, over the utility of using Skype panel interviews. So the panel part we've talked about. But the Skype aspect is, you get to a point where you have 25 people on your long list, and you're trying to get down to six or eight people on your interview list.

And whether or not to use a brief Skype interview, about 30 minutes, with three people to try to narrow that list down and get a little bit more information. And the two points of view were basically, on the one side when we bring people in for a two-day interview, people feel that they often know within the first hour whether this person is going to be a good match. And so why waste the two days?

And the other point of view, which is probably obvious in this room, is that a short Skype interview seems to be rife for problematic judgments about somebody's photogenicness more than the substance of their work. And maybe just from the way I said that, you'll know what side I was on. But I'm interested in people's views on this, because we do have a problem. MCB, for example, is one of these areas where we get 200 or more applications, and we have to winnow those down to a manageable number to interview.

And whether or not to use these brief Skype-like things to winnow it down. There must be data from phone interviews, maybe not from Skype interviews. And I'd like to know if that data's out there.

So yes, there is some data. And one of the books that I recommend you read, which I think is the best book that has ever been written in human resource management, is written by not a human resource manager, by Mr. Bok, who is chairing HR department in Google. And again, they've experimented, measured everything.

And sadly, it comes down to what Mahzarin has said before, but generally the added value of any interview is very, very small. So for them, whether it was Skype or in person, actually didn't matter. Whether it's 10 minutes or half an hour, it didn't matter.

Structured interviews added validity. But I think the really important message is we're just generally bad in judging people. And we should replace the value that we attribute to whether a Skype interview or personal interview with as objective measurements of performance as we possibly can.

Now, I'd like to add just a footnote here. And I'm sure you have been in those situations too. Sometimes interviews don't even serve the purpose to predict future performance, but actually to sell Harvard.

And I think that's a very different perspective. That sometimes you can be also part of the discussion that I often have. So I have my structured interview, and the last 10 minutes are for me to talk about the Kennedy School. And I think that's an opportunity for us to kind of also sell our place. So interviews do have a place, maybe in particular I think, in that realm.

So interviews do give us unique information that is not in the CV, no question about that. They even give us very useful information. But they also give us a lot of crud.

The question is how to-- and that's why, overall, they are less good than only making decisions from CVs-- as many meta analyses have now shown-- because it's that other stuff. So if we can figure out better ways to interview. So to answer your question about Skype, I would say that human beings will use any shred of evidence that they can find to make a decision.

So in the old days, we used to have people attach photographs with their applications. But then things would happen, like at Yale in the '40s, where somebody said, reason for rejecting the candidate, he has a Mediterranean nose. That was sufficient to indicate to a colleague that this application should go into a different pile than the good pile, or whatever.

We got rid of photographs, and now of course because of Facebook, and Skype, and all of that, they're back. And if we had time, I could show you, independent of gender, race, anything, it turns out that we have fundamentally wrong views about what certain facial features tell us about the psychology of the person, about their competence. It turns out if somebody has eyes that are a little closer to each other than average, you will think they're dumber than they actually are, or

certainly compared to the other person where the eyes are a little bit wide-set. So I'd be very skeptical of facial data, which is something that makes interviews go wrong.

And so what's the solution? In my mind, we can't get rid of them. So my solution is a little bit of harder work on our part.

And that is, read, read, read the work before you bring the candidate in. We're having discussion in psychology. Many of my colleagues would like us to bring a whole series of people through and our brown bags, and just think about their work.

And I'm arguing to Max who chairs that committee, no, let's just read the work. And when we know how we feel about the work, let's, for the first time, see the person. And then maybe our conscious minds will be able to actually do some good work. To say no, OK, that person is obese, but that doesn't mean that we don't want them here. That's the kind of work we can do, if left to us.

A few more questions, yes? Other thoughts? Yes?

So this I think picks up a little bit on a previous question, and trying to understand any of the particular risk that arrives when you're conducting open [INAUDIBLE] searches. Because from one perspective, that's a great way of maximizing the potential diversity of the candidate pool. But it introduces some obvious challenges, especially if you think that, say, gender diversity or racial diversity in the candidate pool has improved over time.

And so you might have a relatively racially diverse tenure track pool, but the tenured people you're comparing them to are not so diverse. But they're also, by definition, more accomplished. And so how do you work through and mitigate some of the biases that might influence the way you approach something like that.

Nina and Judy, can you guys say something about how [INAUDIBLE].

So we tracked often, as you know, people ask us to authorize open searches. And we budget them as senior, because they almost always come back as senior searches. So we just have become careful to do that so that our budget doesn't kind of go out of whack.

So my suggestion is actually to have them run a tenure track search, and then really canvas the field. And if that's not working for a while, or if there is someone that-- if then in canvassing the field they find there is a diverse pool of senior candidates and they're very strong, then you might consider it. But I find open-- like we just chuckle when we put open down, and we say, OK, we're authorizing it in open search because we know it's going to come back senior. So that's really the answer, according to the data.

But look, we are supposedly now a university that will be tenuring from within. If that is the case, then I think it's very important for us not to think a default search can ever be a senior search, but that instead our job is to conduct a junior search. Now, this obviously doesn't mean

that if there's some demigoddess out there, that we shouldn't go and get her, even though she's senior. That's not what we're saying.

But I think that if we really want to make the kinds of changes we do, and to really have the greatest opportunity to promote from within, that I just don't see us making a case for senior searches very easily. Other questions? Other thoughts? Judy, anything you'd like to say about? You want to close? Or you want to--

I'll close.

OK.

Why don't I just close this out by thanking our panelists, thanking Mahzarin, and most importantly, actually thanking all of you for being here. I think that your presence here signals a lot about the potential future of Harvard. Some of the questions that are coming up about panel interviews, about Skype interviews, about reading the work. That's actually one of my favorite questions to ask at an ad hoc tenure review, have you read the work? And I'm amazed at the number of people who actually admit that they have not read the work.

So I think that that kind of message is an important one to get out. The other is that this is not the last time. We have lots of resources that can help you. If you're in the faculty of Arts and Sciences, Nina Zipser, who's sitting here in the gray jacket, and Mahzarin Banaji are more than happy to talk with you.

If you're in the faculty of Arts and Sciences, or anywhere else at the University, I and my colleague Elizabeth Ancarana, in the back of the room there, are more than happy to talk to you. We held this event early in September, even though we know this is an incredibly busy time, because we'd rather talk to you before you get underway, than-- we're happy to talk to you along the way as well. So please feel free to shoot an email or make a phone call, but we're happy to brainstorm with you.

What you're hearing here is, in some areas there's a lot of research we can point to. And in some cases, it's a lot of craft knowledge. And the craft knowledge can often be as important as the research, in terms of experiences in difficult situations. So I hope you all feel free to reach out to any of us, I daresay our panelists.

But I think talking to colleagues who are in the same positions as you can be very valuable, which is why we asked Iris, Rowan, and Avi to be the panelists here. So we're running a little bit over, so let me just say thank you, all. And I hope, honestly, to hear from each and every one of you, because I think that would be the best outcome of this event. So I wish you all best of luck on your committees, and with the rest of the academic year. Thanks a lot.