

How to FILL A JOB *in* Adventist Education

An e-mail address was posted at the end of the advertisement, so I presumed that _____ Adventist University had an urgent need to quickly fill the position listed. A few months later, I received word that the job I applied for was filled, but would I consider another one? (Yes, I would.) Then, after eight months of waiting for the job descriptions that I requested (which never arrived), I received a letter from the president saying, “Thanks, but no thanks. We have filled the second position.”

A month later, I received a phone call from the same university president, full of apologies. The search for the first position had fallen through. He was going to head up the search process this time, and would I be willing to let my name be considered again? It took yet another six months before I began to work for that school, where I eventually held both positions.

Horror stories abound of flubbed recruitment efforts, some describing searches that were conducted unprofessionally. Perhaps the Adventist perception of “The Call” is one reason why so many searches get stalled: School administrators can’t find the right people to call or are suspicious of those who express interest in a position. Potential candidates protest that a call suddenly comes after they have made commitments to another employer or that they get no response to their queries.

Because of the sheer number of job openings every year in Adventist schools, there are inevitably either people left standing or empty chairs when the music stops. As of the end of 2007, nearly 75,000 teachers worked in Adventist schools (about 40,220 elementary teachers, 26,000 secondary teachers, 550 training school teachers, and 8,000 college and university professors). God *does* call people into the ministry of education, but the global network has gotten so big that reliance on one’s personal contacts alone is insufficient. The use of business-like recruiting practices to fill positions in no way diminishes God’s call.

There are several types of searches, including a full, open search where candidates may apply, and one that is limited by region or time frame. It is generally preferable to conduct an unhurried full search. Such a process, conducted ethically and transparently within the constraints of professional confidentiality, increases the likelihood of hiring the best employees for your school.

But sometimes you already

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BY LISA M. BEARDSLEY

know who you want to hire—perhaps a suitable internal candidate is ready for advancement, or a vacancy occurred on short notice and must be quickly filled. In such cases, obtain approval from administration to conduct a limited search (by posting only on campus if an internal candidate is preferred). Expedited searches should be the exception and not the rule, however, and conducted with awareness of the abuses inherent in this approach.

This article is written for school administrators at all levels and chairs of search committees as well as those seeking employment in Adventist schools. It outlines a process to use in conducting an academic search. Following the steps described will ensure that “everything is done in a fitting and orderly way” to recruit and hire qualified and committed candidates for jobs in Adventist education and to ensure that people seeking employment are treated with dignity and respect.

Job Description and Search Committee

1. Typically, the person to whom the employee will report should chair the search committee and provide overall leadership for filling the position. Before the committee’s first meeting, the supervisor/principal/dean should update the job description. Then, the search committee must discuss, further refine, and approve the job description and advertising copy (including deciding what documents are needed to evaluate the candidate, such as CV [*curriculum vitae*], references, background check,¹ proof of eligibility to work in the country, and academic transcripts). Some schools may require the personnel

committee or human resources office to review and post advertising copy. In addition to a CV, the search committee should request an essay in which candidates describe their spiritual journey and philosophy of education.

The committee itself ought to be a diverse, representative group of key stakeholders—including an alumnus and a current student. When filling top leadership positions in higher education, the search committee is usually a subcommittee of the board.

The chair must orient the search committee to its assignment, including the need for confidentiality, the sacred nature of their work, and the manner in which the final decision will be made (e.g., the search committee will recommend one or more names from which the board or administration makes the final selection). The search process for Adventist education is both an academic and a spiritual task—finding qualified people who understand and support the mission of the school. Prayer is essential throughout the search process—from reflecting on school mission, revising the job description, and generating prospects to evaluating candidates.

Any conflicts of interest should be discussed and agreement sought about how to manage them. This might require recusal from certain discussions or votes by a member of the search committee. If later in the process a conflict of interest becomes apparent—perhaps the desired candidate is related to the supervisor or a close friend of a board member—the committee may recommend changes in the search process or the job description itself to manage the conflict in an ethical manner. The



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search committee must always behave in a manner that minimizes the appearance of impropriety.

Establishing Deadlines and Schedules

2. Establish a deadline for the submission of applications and a schedule for meetings of the search committee. The deadline should be no less than two months after the job is posted.

The search committee's first task is to create a large and diverse pool of candidates. One meeting of the search committee could be devoted to screening candidates if this has not been done by the chair (or by the principal in the case of secondary-level institutions). Members of the search committee can be asked to probe the various candidates' interest in the position without making any commitments.

3. Post the job description on the Adventist Professionals' Network (APN),² local church bulletins, union papers, and Websites.³ Also, mail or e-mail it to alumni, friends of the school, Adventist professional associations, and the deans of Adventist colleges or universities in your region.

Organizing the Paperwork

4. Create a folder for each applicant. Immediately acknowledge receipt of the candidate's application, provide him or her with a copy of the detailed job description, and indicate whether the search committee needs additional information. It may be helpful to designate one person (a member of the search committee, the assistant to the chair, etc.) to handle and process the paperwork, notifications, etc. Place a tracking sheet

inside each folder where you can note key actions and record the date when items are received (letter of acknowledgement, references, spiritual journey or philosophy of education statement, completed file, final communication, etc.). Inform the candidates that when the files are complete, the search committee will review all applications. Provide a date by which they can expect to hear from you again.

5. Contact the references provided by the candidate. This task may be assigned to members of the search committee. Call if possible to obtain in-depth information that will help you match the candidate to the position. It may be useful to follow up on references *not* identified by the candidate such as a retired former supervisor or home church pastor.

It is often a challenge to obtain candid responses. Some references will want to limit the information they provide to the legal minimum (position and dates of employment) because they are afraid of the legal consequences of giving an honest recommendation or worry that what they say will get back to the person. To elicit pertinent information, describe key attributes of the position or provide a copy of the job description and ask questions about specific requirements such as ability to work with others. Make notes for the candidate's file.

Certain jobs (such as K-12 positions) will also require a background check (verifying that the person does not have a criminal record).⁴ The candidates should be informed of this.

Verify applicants' academic degrees by contacting the records office of the awarding institution(s).⁵ Make note of and investigate degrees from unknown institutions, and ask about any



The search committee must balance the interview with the candidate's portfolio.

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gaps or irregularities in the CV or references.

If someone on the "short list" has not provided the current supervisor or employer as a reference, request permission from the candidate before contacting the employer. If the applicant is not selected, the employer may question his or her commitment or loyalty, so be sensitive when checking current references.

Evaluating the Candidate

6. At every meeting, provide search committee members with an updated file for each candidate. Number the files and require their return at the end of the meeting. Search committee members should be reminded to treat all information as confidential.

7. Ensure that the search committee has ample opportunity to discuss the suitability of each candidate. Blind balloting, especially where there are a few vocal and influential members, provides a way to ensure everyone's input. Consider giving each member a limited number of votes (e.g., three blank pieces of paper on which to write the preferred candidate's name, even if the same name is written on each ballot). Record the number of votes for each candidate on a chalkboard or whiteboard, and discuss the distribution of votes. This process can be repeated with the top vote-getters to produce a manageable number of names or to determine the level of support for the various candidates.

8. Promptly telephone each person who has been eliminated from consideration. Follow up with a written communication. While not chosen for the current position, he or she might be suitable for another job in the future, so it is important to be cordial. Express gratitude for the person's interest in the school and desire to serve Adventist education.

9. Invite the candidates on the "short list" (usually no more

than three people) to visit the school. Provide them with the schedule of events during their visit, a list of interviewers' names and titles, and a description of other expectations such as giving a presentation.

10. Decide who will interview the candidates besides the search committee in session. Agree in advance about what issues to explore, and develop a common set of questions to ask each candidate, such as how he or she has handled specific situations (integrating faith with learning, dealing with plagiarism, etc.). If various stakeholders will also interview the candidate, provide them with the job description, the candidate's CV, and an evaluation sheet to use (see sample in the sidebar on page 37).

Advise those conducting interviews to explore how the candidate's Adventist faith relates to the job. Interviewers must, however, be cautious with respect to questions about race, color, national origin, age, marital status, number of children, disability, or status as a veteran. In the U.S. and a number of other countries, it is illegal to discriminate in employment decisions on the basis of these protected categories. Even where no such protections are specified by law, the search committee must be careful to conduct an impartial, ethical evaluation of all candidates so as to give preference to attributes that enhance diversity in the workplace.

Collect the completed forms within two days of the candidate's visit. Collate results for review and discussion by the search committee.

The Candidate Evaluates You

11. Allow the candidate ample time to evaluate housing options in the community, employment for his or her spouse, etc. Scheduling the visit near the weekend and inviting the spouse



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North American Division (NAD) K-12 Process

In the NAD, the search process for teachers and administrators is conducted by the local conference board of education. The conference office of education takes the names of three candidates to the local board for interviews, which forwards their recommendation to the superintendent. The hiring is actually done by the conference K-12 board, *not* the local school board.

For academy principalship positions, the school should appoint a personnel committee, made up of board members and the superintendent, to do the screening and interviewing. Then one or two names will be taken to the board, which will make a recommendation to the conference K-12 board of education. Details are outlined in the *NAD Superintendent's Handbook* or the *Principal's Handbook* at <http://www.nadeducation.org>.

enables the family to worship with the local congregation. If the spouse comes along, assign a host/hostess for the couple during the visit, especially if they do not know anyone in the area.

12. Following the interviews, the search committee should convene, keeping in mind that there are many elements to consider in selecting a candidate. Some people interview well but are weak in teamwork or job performance, while others who

don't interview as well may become stars in the position. The search committee should balance the candidate's performance in the interview with the other elements in the process.

13. After the preferred candidate is selected, contact him or her orally, and follow up with two copies of the written contract, signed by whoever is authorized to make the job offer, outlining salary, benefits, timeline for arrival, etc. Have the candidate sign and send back one copy as confirmation that

Evaluation of Applicant

Administrative Position

Name of Applicant: _____

Date of Visit: _____ Name of Interviewer: _____

	RANK N/O = Not Observed 1 = Unsatisfactory 5 = Outstanding						COMMENTS/ SUMMARY STATEMENT
LEADERSHIP QUALITIES							
1. Quality Interpersonal Relationships	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Communication Skills	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Goal Orientation							
• Ability to set and meet goals	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Ability to motivate others	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Style of Leadership							
<input type="checkbox"/> Autocratic <input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Awareness of Financial Affairs	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Skilled in Friend Building	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Skilled in Fund Raising	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
INSTITUTIONAL PHILOSOPHICAL COMPATIBILITY							
1. Understanding of Institution Mission/Philosophy	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Avowed Support of Institution	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Unequivocally a Committed Christian	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Has Serious and Unquestioned Commitment to Christian Education	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
GOALS							
1. Goals for {area/position}	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Goals for Local and Global Outreach	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Goals for Faculty Development & Student Recruitment, Including Ethnic & Gender Diversity	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Goals for Fund Raising	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Vision for {area/position}	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
ATTITUDES							
1. Values Integrity and Ethical Conduct	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Demonstrates Respect and Loyalty	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Respects Confidentiality	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Demonstrates Diversity Sensitivity	N/O	1	2	3	4	5	

Used with permission from Loma Linda University.

THE SEARCH COMMITTEE . . . OUGHT TO BE A DIVERSE, REPRESENTATIVE GROUP OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS—INCLUDING AN ALUMNUS AND A CURRENT STUDENT.

both parties agree on the terms. Once the candidate has accepted, contact runners-up promptly by phone so they don't hear about the decision through the Adventist grapevine. You might ask whether they would still be willing to be considered if the finalist withdraws.

Follow school procedures regarding a formal recording and approval of the hire. Some schools have a department of human resources or another office that assists with this process. In large schools, the board usually delegates the responsibility for

Applying for a Position

When you learn about a job opening, prayerfully reflect on and consult with others about whether this is what God is calling you to do, based on your qualifications, aptitude, and experience. Prepare an up-to-date, error-free CV, a cover letter, and a list of references, including their telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. If you are currently employed, the search committee will understand if you don't want your immediate supervisor contacted unless you are on the "short list" for the job. Even if the application form does not ask for it, provide a cover letter (or an attachment to the CV) describing your teaching and research interests, spiritual commitment to Adventist education, and philosophy of education. Your cover letter should demonstrate an understanding of the school's needs and show why you are a good match for the position.

Check with references before providing their names. Supply them with a copy of the job description, and describe the correlation between your experience and the requirements of the position.

Before your interview visit, educate yourself about the institution, community, local church, etc. Prepare questions ahead of time to ask the search committee and other interviewers. You may want to ask the search committee to schedule time when you can talk with colleagues in your discipline to evaluate the work climate.

Being offered the job not the ultimate goal. Remember, you are also "interviewing" the institution to evaluate whether the school and position are a good match for you. Politely withdraw from a search if you determine that they are not. If there are some obstacles to an otherwise suitable fit, discuss and explore terms of employment to find a mutually agreeable solution.

hiring to administration and simply votes the list of new hires, sometimes months later.

Wrapping Up the Search

14. Destroy duplicate files, retaining only a master list of candidates. Don't forget to remove job postings from Websites and other locations.

15. The administration (or board for executive-level positions) should be given a summary report of the number of candidates considered and interviewed, the percentage of males and females, ethnic mix (if known), and final outcome of the process. Search committees must maintain confidentiality while still providing sufficient information to show that the search process was conducted ethically.

Adventist schools in the U.S. have the legal right to discriminate—i.e., to preferentially hire—on the basis of religion. But they may not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, national origin, age, disability, or status as a disabled or Vietnam era veteran.⁶ Indeed, the search committee *must* give preference to Adventist candidates because failing to do so in the



The candidate should be encouraged to bring his or her spouse for a campus visit, to evaluate the fit of the new job for the family.



Using an evaluation form, the search committee should explore the candidate's faith and understanding of the school's mission.

U.S. jeopardizes the future exercise of that right. The search committee should be made aware of any legal constraints—and beyond that, of the ethical duty of fairness. The final report to administration (or the board) will reveal whether a diverse pool was created and considered.

When the recommendation is brought to administration or the board, members of the search committee can be invited to explain their choice. If pertinent, they should report on how any conflicts of interest were managed, or how extra steps were taken when hiring relatives of existing employees to minimize allegations of nepotism. It should be clear that the best interests of the school were served rather than those of any individual or group.

The search process for an elementary teacher in a small school or for support staff is likely to be more streamlined while that for an administrator of a large university will be

more detailed and may require, for example, reprints of recent publications and a formal presentation on current research. The key to a successful search, however, is good communication at all levels throughout the process. Setting up a carefully designed search process provides an opportunity for the school to evaluate and communicate its needs and dreams for the future. Who gets hired reflects the mission and values of the school—and moreover, helps to shape its future direction.

Be sure to evaluate the commitment of every candidate to the mission of the school—including support staff, whose tenure may be even longer than that of administrators or teachers. The success of Adventist education depends on teamwork by teachers, administrators, and support staff, each one of whom ministers to students and seeks their eternal welfare. This is the reward of a search well done. ☺

Unsolicited Inquiries

Unsolicited job requests will arrive from time to time. Acknowledge them promptly, and if there are no current vacancies, say so. Advise applicants of any anticipated openings, and suggest that if they haven't already done so, they should register with APN. Be sure to thank them for their interest in your school and its mission. File the letter and CV for future reference. Use the opportunity to affirm the applicants' desire to support Adventist education and to build goodwill.



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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Background checks draw on public records or contacts with law enforcement to verify personal history, credibility, and potential risk to an organization. Areas verified may include past employment history or credit reports. Criminal background checks would likely involve a search of county, state, or national records (or a formal request submitted to law enforcement authorities) to determine whether the candidate has been convicted of a serious crime. Some organizations and candidates prefer to use services such as <http://www.MyBackgroundCheck.com> to expedite background checks.

2. The Adventist Professionals' Network is a database that is used to facilitate job searches, consultancies, and communication among professionals. Adventist professional associations are also listed there. See <http://apn.adventist.org>.

3. E.g., the NAD employment site for K-12 higher education is <http://www.nadeducation.org>.

4. See D. F. Vinik, "Why Background Checks Matter in Academe," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 51:38 (May 27, 2005), p. B13. http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/colleges/dv/pdfs/Chronicle_052705.pdf.

5. Many U.S. universities have authorized the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) to provide enrollment and degree verification information on their behalf. Their contact information is: National Student Clearinghouse, <http://www.studentclearinghouse.org>; Phone: (703) 742-4200.

6. In compliance with Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended, an Adventist school in the United States reserves Constitutional and statutory rights as a religious institution and employer to give preference to Seventh-day Adventists in employment, including but not limited to 42 U.S.C. Secs. 2000e-1, 2000e-2, Sec. 6-15 of Federal Executive Order 11246; 41 CFR Sec. 60-1.5(5); 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1681(a)(3); 34 CFR Secs. 106.12(a)(b), 106.21, 106.31, 106.69, 104.40, 106.51 and 106.57; and the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. See also Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (34 CFR 106 et seq.), Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Discrimination in Employment Act of 1974, and Section 402 of the Vietnam Era Veterans Adjustment Act of 1974.



The search committee should invite candidates on the short list to visit the campus.