



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN  
WITH SUPPORT FROM THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION AND THE SID W. RICHARDSON FOUNDATION

## Selecting A Chief Instructional Officer: The Palomar College Experience

Academic search committees are much like the little girl with the curl: when they are good they are very very good, but when they are bad they are horrid. A bad search is a frustrating and expensive waste of time if a successful candidate cannot be selected; selection of a candidate by a sloppy, rushed, or rigged process may devastate an institution. A good search is composed of two diverse but complementary components: process and philosophy. Each is critical to the eventual success of the search and each requires proper care and planning for appropriate implementation.

During 1987 and 1988 the Palomar Community College District undertook a nationwide search for an Assistant Superintendent/Vice President for Instruction with a target date for employment of July 1, 1988. Appointment of the search committee occurred in the spring of 1987 with the active part of the search scheduled to begin the following September. Each area of the college, including faculty, classified staff, executive administration, middle managers, and students, independently selected representatives. College President George Boggs charged the committee to recruit, interview, and recommend the best candidates available for his final consideration and recommendation to the Governing Board. Upon nomination by the committee he appointed me chair, while agreeing that the committee would be free to select a co-chair to preside in my absence, as necessary. At the organizational meeting the newly formed committee received information on recruitment, affirmative action, and legal requirements from the Director of Human Resource Services and Affirmative Action, an ex officio member. The committee agreed to meet again in September. At this time the President, having given us our charge and a deadline, stepped away from the process and allowed us to proceed with the assigned task. He received regular reports from the chair but allowed us the flexibility to operate independently for the remainder of the search.

The committee convened again in the fall to review timelines and establish ground rules. We determined a quorum (9 of 13 members) and decided to keep and ratify minutes of our meetings. The Chair and Director

of Human Resources proposed a timeline developed by working backwards from the target employment date. This schedule considered and allowed adequate time for advertising and recruiting, developing forms and questions, screening applications, selecting applicants to interview, checking references, and making site visits to finalists' home institutions.

A difficult problem for any search committee is scheduling regular meeting times around the individual calendars of a very busy group of classroom instructors, administrators, and staff. Each committee member submitted a complete schedule which I plotted in graph form. Miraculously, a free hour appeared each week. (If this is not the case, the graph will likely show some hours in which only one or two people are unavailable. In that case, I recommend selecting two alternate meeting times and staggering the meetings between these times. While one person may have to be absent from a meeting, it won't be the same person each time.) Scheduling the interview blocks as far in advance as possible is also critical so that everyone may clear calendars or obtain substitutes for the period covered. We agreed that regular business would be conducted at each meeting once a quorum was established but that we would not consistently backtrack due to the absence of any member. (It may be appropriate to establish a maximum number of absences before a member is replaced; however, this was not a problem with our group.)

Three subcommittees worked to develop an application form and screening documents from the applications and interview questions. We found it much easier to edit forms and questions prepared by the subcommittees than to create them as a group of 13. The assistance of the Human Resources staff proved invaluable. Competent support staff and excellent advice from the Director ensured smooth operation within legal and institutional requirements. Acknowledgment of this work when the process is over is both appropriate and appreciated.

Proper scheduling allowed for efficient use of time. For example, screening forms were developed during



the advertising period.

Prior to the formal screening, the committee did a "holistic" application screening where they were presented with three dummy applications and directed to screen as though these forms and the candidates they represented were real. We discussed our individual screening line-by-line to compare scores and ensure the screening device was adequate for the task. This process allowed us a better understanding of how we were screening individual qualifications and saved later debate over the qualifications of actual candidates. The Human Resources staff pre-screened applications for the minimum qualifications. I reviewed those screened out, as did anyone on the committee who chose to do so.

After application screening, each committee member submitted no more than 15 names as possible interview candidates. One candidate was endorsed by all 13 members, several others received two or fewer endorsements; many received from 1-12. Each member had the opportunity to defend any candidate chosen. Ultimately, we agreed to interview those candidates having eight or more endorsements. During the scheduling time, questions were finalized and a holistic interview held with the chief instructional officer of a neighboring campus. We used this as a check on our questions for quality of content and to eliminate any ambiguities not readily apparent in the process. We were also able to hear a set of answers from a person working successfully in a position comparable to the one we hoped to fill.

Each candidate received by mail a packet of material describing the college and the district. Prior to the interview each was given a tour of the campus and an opportunity to meet staff. A copy of the questions was provided for reference during the interview. Adequate time was allowed for complete answers and for follow-up questions from the committee. Following the oral interview each candidate was required to respond in writing to a final question within a designated time. These essays became part of the interview evaluation.

Extensive reference checking followed the interviews. We checked official references, and each committee member assumed the responsibility for talking with his or her counterpart at the current and previous places of employment. For example, our Business Manager talked to other chief financial officers while I spoke with library directors. In the case of our in-house candidate, we had the unique opportunity to interview ourselves! Seriously, critical facts, pro and con, emerged from these conversations which

were consistent from person to person and within affirmative action guidelines.

The committee then met to recommend finalists for the President's consideration. The finalists were invited back to campus to meet with the President, the Executive Administration, the Faculty Senate, and representatives of other campus groups; a site visit by the President and the search committee chair followed. At the site visit, we met with the College President, the Academic Senate President, academic deans, and other staff conversant with the candidate's qualifications. As chair, I made a recommendation to the President following the site visit. He then weighed the recommendations and his own impressions and decided on his recommendation to the board.

Trust, hard work, and confidentiality were the hallmarks of this process, as was the work of an outstanding support staff. We on the committee agreed to recommend no one with whom we could not live. When only two finalists were recommended, the President accepted our judgment. We in turn allowed him to make the final recommendation based on the factors previously listed.

Much has been written about the mechanics and philosophy of academic searches. Our search worked well, primarily because the members of this committee operated as a team and kept institutional needs ahead of departmental considerations. Discussions were frequently spirited and, at times, emotional. A high level of candor evolved and with it an equally high level of trust. Over time the group stopped operating as a collection of individuals and began to work as a team. In our deliberations, issues were brought out which, in previous searches, may only have been discussed by one or two members rather than by the entire committee. We were able to vent our concerns and frustrations to each other and resolve them as a group. Time invested in the planning and organizational stages saved an infinite amount of grumbling and second-guessing in the later stages of the process. Confidentiality was a by-word from the beginning, and institutionally the result has proved very successful.

Judy J. Cater, Media Services Librarian

For further information, contact the author at Palomar Community College District, 1140 West Mission Road, San Marcos, CA 92069-1487.

---

*Suanne D. Roueche, Editor*

September 22, 1989, Vol. XI, No. 20  
©The University of Texas at Austin, 1989  
Further duplication is permitted by MEMBER  
institutions for their own personnel.

INNOVATION ABSTRACTS is a publication of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), EDB 348, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712, (512) 471-7545. Subscriptions are available to nonconsortium members for \$40 per year. Funding in part by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Sid W. Richardson Foundation. Issued weekly when classes are in session during fall and spring terms and once during the summer. ISSN 0199-106X.