

Title: The Impact of Search Committees on Hiring Practices for College Applied Woodwind Positions

Author(s): Carla S. Wasson

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It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

The Impact Of Search Committees On Hiring Practices For College Applied Woodwind Positions

By Carla S. Wasson

Columbia University

Obtaining a teaching position is the first rung on the ladder of professional advancement for college faculty, and normally search committees involved in screening and interviewing applicants for teaching positions in higher education have great impact on hiring decisions. It is surprising that little research has examined how search committees go about selecting persons to fill academic vacancies, because information concerning the priorities and methods of search committees in making hiring decisions can be valuable to several audiences: (a) persons interested in improving the quality and effectiveness of teaching at the college level; (b) college faculty who advise graduate students; and (c) those who are seeking college teaching positions.

Recently, as part of an ongoing investigation of college applied woodwind vacancies, the author examined the impact of search committees on hiring practices for college applied woodwind positions. The purpose of this study was to determine the relative importance

that search committees place on applicants' attributes in making hiring decisions and what sources of information regarding these attributes are used. Thus, a survey of the chairs of search committees involved in hiring college applied

woodwind faculty for the 1989-90 and 1990-91 academic years was undertaken to ascertain what factors influenced the committees' decisions to hire the candidates who were chosen.

Method

The first phase of this study involved identifying college woodwind vacancies which were announced from September 1988 through August 1990. The sources of this information were the Music Faculty Vacancy List of the College Music Society (CMS) and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

A list of announcements of vacancies for college applied woodwind positions

for the 2-year period was compiled. To avoid duplication, the listings from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* were compared with the listings from the CMS Music Faculty Vacancy List, and the listings from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that were not included in the CMS Music Faculty Vacancy List were added to the comprehensive list of applied woodwind positions.

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Carla S. Wasson is a doctoral candidate in Music Education in College Teaching of an Applied Subject at Columbia University, where she teaches clarinet and saxophone.

For 1990, 47 vacancy announcements for college applied woodwind positions were collected, and for 1989, 64 were collected. Of the 111 vacancies for this period, 10 of the positions which were announced vacant in 1989 were reannounced the following year. Also, three positions which were advertised during this period were eliminated, three positions were filled by part-time or temporary part-time instructors, and one position was filled by an individual whose only involvement with applied music is in an administrative capacity. The remaining 94 job descriptions were used in the study.

After the list of college applied woodwind vacancies for the 1988-89 and 1989-1990 academic years was completed, a survey of the chairs of the search committees involved in hiring faculty for these vacancies was undertaken. In most cases the chairs of the search committees were named in the vacancy announcements, and the questionnaire and a cover letter briefly describing the project were sent directly to these persons. When no chair was specified, the questionnaire was sent to the music department/school chair, and the cover letter specified that the questionnaire was to be completed by the person who chaired the woodwind search committee specified on the questionnaire. The College Music Society's *Directory of Music Facul-*

ties in Colleges and Universities, U.S. and Canada 1990-92 (1990) provided current information on music department chairs. Fifty-seven responses were received, a return rate of 61 percent.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. First, search committee chairs were asked to rank, in the order of their importance in influencing the committees' choice, the following attributes of the teacher who was hired: performance ability, general musical knowledge, rapport with students and faculty, and instructional ability. Second, search committee chairs were provided with a checklist of sources of information about applied woodwind job candidates that they may have used in making their decisions and were asked to indicate which of these sources they used.

Results

In the first part of this survey, the chairs of woodwind search committees were provided with four desirable attributes of woodwind job candidates and were asked to rank these attributes in the order of their importance in influencing the committees' decisions in selecting the individuals who were hired. Five of the respondents declined to distinguish among these attributes, indicating that they are all equally important. Their responses were included in the total responses.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Search Committee Respondents' Rank Ordering of Desired Woodwind Faculty Attributes.

Variable	Order of Importance				
	1 Most Important	2	3	4 Least Important	----- Refused to Distinguish
Performance Ability	70	16	7	5	2
Instructional Ability	40	44	11	3	2
Rapport	14	19	47	18	2
General Musical Knowledge	12	7	21	56	4

Table 2. Total Number and Percentage of Sources of Information Used by Woodwind Search Committees During the Search Process

Variable	Number	Percentage
Resume	56	98
Meeting with Search Committee	56	98
Live Performance	54	95
Teaching in Quasi-masterclass	53	93
Letters of Recommendation from Teachers	48	84
Audiotape of Performance	46	81
Transcripts	43	75
Letters of Recommendation from Colleagues	43	75
Telephone Calls to Colleagues	43	75
to Teachers	42	74
Concert Programs	38	67
Meetings with Administrators	35	61
Meetings with Non-committee Colleagues	29	51
Concert Reviews	23	40
Other	14	25
Videotape of Teaching	1	2

An investigation of the average importance that search committee chairs placed on the four attributes that are desired in woodwind job candidates indicated that both performance ability and instructional ability were most important. The mean importance of these attributes was 3.8 out of a possible four points. However, Table 1, which provides a percentage distribution of the rank ordering of attributes by the respondents, indicates that when asked to specify which of these attributes was most important, the respondents indicated that performance ability (70 percent) was substantially more important than instructional ability (40 percent). Rapport (14 percent) was ranked third in importance, and general musical knowledge (12 percent) was ranked fourth.

On the second part of the survey, the search committee chairs were asked to indicate what means of gathering information

about applied woodwind job candidates were used during the screening and interview processes. Table 2 shows the total number and percentage for each source of information. Resumes and meetings with search committees were indicated most frequently at 98 percent (56) each, followed by live performance at 95 percent (54) and teaching in a quasi-master class at 93 percent (53). The last item on the checklist provided an opportunity for search committee chairs to mention additional sources of information. Three respondents mentioned candidates' meetings with students at the school during the interview process, and another three mentioned observing candidates' teaching of music courses or mock-classes other than applied music. Candidates' reputations were cited twice. Other sources of information included a rehearsal with the faculty woodwind quintet, a cover letter, input from a stu-

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dent regarding a private lesson with a candidate, telephone calls to persons other than references, the search committee's personal knowledge of the candidate, and personal interviews.

The results of the first part of the survey, which concerns the relative importance of applicants' attributes on search committees' hiring decisions, support the following assertions:

- (a) excellence in musical performance is considered the most important attribute of college applied music faculty;
- (b) teaching ability is of less interest than performance ability; and
- (c) general musical knowledge tends to be considered the least important factor in teaching applied music.

It is important to emphasize that these findings are based on the responses of 57 chairs of search committees and may or may not apply to college applied faculty positions in general.

The results of the survey concerning the sources of information which were used during the selection process also tend to confirm this assessment of the priorities of college music faculty. Live performances (95 percent) and audiotapes of performances (81 percent) were frequently mentioned sources of information. This suggests that firsthand knowledge of performance ability is considered important by search committees during the screening of applicants as well as during the interviewing of finalists.

Although teaching in a quasi-master class setting was frequently mentioned (93 percent) as a source of information about candidates, a videotape of applicant's teaching (2 percent) was mentioned only once. Evidently, search committees generally rely on indirect knowledge (e.g., experience cited on resumes and recommendations of teachers and colleagues) of applicants' instructional ability until finalists have been selected for on-campus interviews.

If search committees select finalists for applied music positions primarily based on performance criteria, then superior teachers with slightly less impressive performance tapes may be eliminated from consideration. On the other hand, some applicants who submit superlative performance tapes may be chosen as finalists although their teaching ability does not approach that of the applicants who were rejected on the basis of performance alone.

Recommendations

Three recent reports concerning higher education (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Bennett, 1984; U.S. Department of Education, 1984) have stated that the quality and effectiveness of teaching in higher education desperately need improvement. Each of these reports has specified the following problems:

- (a) respect for general knowledge has declined;
- (b) a high degree of academic specialization has adversely affected the quality of teaching in higher education;
- (c) doctoral programs or doing little or nothing to prepare graduates for the teaching profession, and
- (d) the academic reward system does not reward good teaching.


The teaching of music in colleges and universities has also been criticized. The tendencies of graduate music programs to over-emphasize specialization and to neglect pedagogical preparation are two problems which have been addressed (National Association of Schools of Music, 1985; Rubin, 1986).

Rhodes (1985) considered the problem of specialization in graduate music programs from a different perspective. He suggested that degree programs may not be as much to blame for the low esteem for general musical knowledge as the tendency of the faculty reward system to consider accomplishments requiring specialization as most important.

Given the concern for effective teaching in higher education, it would seem that video equipment offers search committees a means of evaluating applicants' abilities to teach and to relate to students which could be used during the screening phase of the search process. Moreover, research suggests that videotapes offer an effective means of evaluating music teaching (Holt, 1978; Moore, 1976; and Yarbrough, Wapnick & Kelly, 1979). One way to improve teaching in higher education is to use the most reliable means of evaluating the abilities and potentialities of applicants for faculty vacancies. Yet, of the 57 respondents, only one search committee chair reports the use of videotapes of teaching as a means of screening applicants.

Research concerning the use of search committees to fill teaching positions is in its incipient stages; however, future examination of the search process could provide more detailed information concerning faculty selection, which would be valuable to graduate faculty advisers and to persons seeking employment in the academic job market. It could also provide suggestions regarding new and more refined methods of evaluating applicants, which would be valuable to search committee members and to all persons interested in improving the caliber of faculty teaching in colleges and universities.

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