Conducting a Hiring Fair Simulation for Teacher Education Candidates

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ALL PROFESSIONALS, at some point, interview for a potential position. In many cases, if the interview goes well, the candidate earns the position. However, if interviewees represent their capabilities in a poor fashion, they will most likely not be offered the job for which they have applied and will need to continue searching for another position. For this reason, teacher candidates should be introduced to the interview process. According to Senne (2002a), candidates need to acquire the following knowledge and skills: 1) teaching philosophy, 2) cover letter, 3) resume, 4) references, 5) application process, 6) teaching portfolio, 7) interview strategies, 8) job search techniques and 9) available resources. Although these items are critical, most program majors do not have the opportunity to speak to administrators until after graduation (Rikard & Senne, 1996). In turn, candidates often rely on their college or university professors to walk them through the interview process. Unfortunately, this process lacks authenticity and is often viewed by the students as an assignment they need to complete for graduation instead of a useful career-building tool. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide a basic review of a hiring simulation fair and to describe strategies for successfully implementing a similar organized event in a college/university teacher education program.

The goal of the hiring simulation fair is to give students an authentic interview experience before graduation. To do so, students are systematically brought through the interview process with guidance from university faculty, a team of practicing administrators and their peers. The guidance is given via verbal feedback, quantitative analytic rubrics based on Senne's (2002b) interview guidelines, peer evaluation and video reflection. University professors (from the specific program described in this article) have conducted this type of hiring simulation consistently since 2010. In doing so, the hiring simulation fair has been "fine-tuned" to include details to share with others and to replicate if desired. This article provides the specific steps, protocol, evaluations and logistics one should consider when conducting a hiring simulation fair with teacher education candidates. Specifically, the hiring fair simulation was organized within a physical education teacher education program and a secondary education program; however, generalizations to other teacher education programs can be made.

Process

The teacher education candidates, university faculty members and administrative team (school and district administrators enrolled in a graduate leadership program) have specific duties before, during and after a simulation. The following steps provide a timeline for replication purposes (see Table 1).

Step 1: Meet throughout the semester

The university faculty members participating in the hiring simulation fair should meet regularly throughout the semester in which the fair will be conducted. Meetings are necessary for locating the administrative teams, assigning due dates for candidates, securing the appropriate facilities and technology, and developing a hiring simulation fair agenda.

Step 2: Identify administrative teams

At least two or three administrators are needed for each administrative team, depending on the number of candidates participating in the hiring simulation fair. This administrative team will be responsible for the overall evaluation of several teacher education candidates. Faculty within a specific teacher education program may choose to collaborate with faculty members from other teacher education programs to develop the most ef-

fective hiring simulation fair across a college of education. For example, many institutions have students preparing to become school administrators (e.g., educational leadership programs). Collaboration between an undergraduate teacher education program and a graduate educational leadership program can provide tremendous benefits for the hiring simulation fair. While the undergraduate teacher education faculty can build assignments based on the completion of the interview process (i.e., teaching philosophy, cover letter, resume, etc.), the graduate educational leadership faculty can also build assignments for graduate students based on the evaluation of a candidate's teaching philosophy, cover letter and resume.

Step 3: Assign due dates

Assignments requiring due dates for undergraduate teacher education candidates in a hiring simulation fair project include a draft cover letter and resume/vita (reviewed by peers and one's professor); a finished cover letter distributed to the interview panel (i.e., administrative team) at least one week prior to the hiring fair simulation day; and a written self-reflection after viewing a video recording of one's simulated face-to-face interview with an administrative team. Due dates for the administrative team might include the development of a synopsis of the schools to which the candidates are applying; a list of potential interview questions and follow-up prompts (all reviewed by the administrative team before the interviews); and an evaluation of the teaching philosophy, cover letter and resume based on a guided rubric. Because of the time and energy needed from the administrative teams to make the hiring simulation fair a success, working with graduate programs in educational leadership cannot be understated. Not only is the process beneficial for the teacher education candidates, but the graduate students (i.e., aspiring and/or current administrators) also gain significant benefits for their future opportunities.

Step 4: Secure appropriate facilities and technology

The facilities to be used for the day of the fair should be secured as soon as possible. Faculty members will want to consider holidays, sporting events, graduation ceremonies, honor days, etc. before selecting and booking a date. The facility should have ample space (classrooms, etc.) for conducting multiple interviews simultaneously. In addition, using a large classroom or meeting space for an introductory meeting with all participants, a focus-group lunch (details to follow) and a closing ceremony is recommended. The closing ceremony includes a review of the day, follow-up suggestions based on teacher candidate performance, and a brief awards ceremony recognizing the teacher candidates who "earned the teaching positions."

In addition to the facilities, the use of video-based technology is extremely meaningful (and recommended) when conducting a hiring simulation fair. Capturing the interviewers' and interviewees' questions and responses provides multiple opportunities for reflection. Questions, answers, mannerisms, body language, appearance and other tangibles can be observed via technology after the hiring simulation fair. Self-reflection based on video observation is also recommended.

Table 1. Steps to Consider When Conducting a Hiring Simulation Fair

Step 1: Meet throughout the semester
Step 2: Identify administrative teams
Step 3: Assign due dates
Step 4: Secure appropriate facilities and technology
Step 5: Develop the agenda

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Developing and following an organized agenda for the hiring simulation fair is essential. With careful planning, the simulation fair will run smoothly and become a rewarding experience for all participants. The agenda should include time for introductions, focus-group lunches, a closing ceremony and a complete listing of the interview schedule (administrative teams and teacher education candidates).

Summary

In the five years (2010–2015) that a hiring simulation fair has been conducted at the University of West Georgia, more than 150 undergraduate health and physical education and secondary education candidates (e.g., English, science, math, history, etc.), as well as more than 150 graduate students in an educational leadership program, have participated. Consistent collaboration among faculty members from all three programs was the biggest factor for success. Based on documented surveys conducted after the hiring simulation fair each year, formal conversations with candidates and school administrators each semester, and follow-up conversations after candidates had secured full-time positions in local K–12 schools, the university faculty members who participated in the event are confident that it is a valuable investment of time, resources and energy. Some specific positive comments from participants in terms of what they found most valuable are included in Table 2.

While job interviews offer both teacher candidates and prospective employers an opportunity to showcase their best qualities, the process can be stressful. The hiring simulation fair is an effective strategy for helping teacher candidates build confidence and refine their interview skills before entering a competitive job market. Faculty collaboration and effective planning of the hiring simulation fair are important factors in helping teacher candidates to prepare for interview success.

References

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