



Implementing INCLUDE: Using UDL Principles To Design An Inclusive Campus Visit

By: **Martha McCaughey** and **Lillian Nave**

Abstract

Many people interested in inclusive and equitable searches in higher ed have learned how to write the job ad, review the written applications, and avoid inadvisable interview questions. To account for candidates' neurodiversity, the search committee may also have a culture-add mentality to ask (and how to ask them) during the actual interviews. But in our experience in trainings, on search committees, and as job candidates, campus visit logistics often get left out of these efforts for inclusion. As the campus visit is an important and final screening and recruiting stage for the committee's top candidates, its logistics should be important to search committee members, any administrative assistants who help with the search, hiring authorities, and any search advocates or DEI liaisons. For too often, exclusionary biases creep into the process and sour the candidate on the campus or vice versa. Logistics can be made more inclusive to candidates with various physical abilities or other differences-be they visible, invisible, situational, religious, cultural, or medical-that are irrelevant to the job and should not determine how well they do in the interview.

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Many people interested in inclusive and equitable searches in higher ed have learned how to write the job ad, review the written applications, and avoid inadvisable interview questions. To account for candidates' neurodiversity, the search committee may also have a culture-add mentality (<https://starkloff.org/articles/inclusive-hiring-practices-for-neurodiverse-candidates/>) and know which questions (

recruiting-talent/how-to-plan-interviews-with-neurodiverse-candidates/) to ask (and how to ask them) during the actual interviews. But in our experience in trainings, on search committees, and as job candidates, campus visit logistics often get left out of these efforts for inclusion.

As the campus visit is an important and final screening and recruiting stage for the committee's top candidates, its logistics should be important to search committee members, any administrative assistants who help with the search, hiring authorities, and any search advocates or DEI liaisons. For too often, exclusionary biases creep into the process and sour the candidate on the campus or vice versa. Logistics can be made more inclusive to candidates with various physical abilities or other differences—be they visible, invisible, situational, religious, cultural, or medical—that are irrelevant to the job and should not determine how well they do in the interview.

In this essay, we apply insights from Universal Design for Learning (<http://udlguidelines.cast.org>) (UDL) to offer a set of best practices for inclusive campus visits. Just as the principles of Universal Design (<https://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/>) create accessible physical environments for people through designing physical space to be used in the most uncomplicated way, UDL principles move the accessibility from the physical to the cognitive realm, creating accessible social and educational spaces that leverage the variability of all people. But a gap remains where UDL principles could serve search committees' inclusivity goals in the logistics of campus visits. When search committees don't anticipate the accommodations someone might need—whether because of a religion, neurodivergence, or some other factor—the candidate doesn't get to show how their skills align with the job description. In such circumstances, we have even heard search committee members blame the candidate for being “difficult” or “high maintenance.”

The principles of UDL can help search committees organize campus visits conscientiously and intentionally. Designing campus visits using UDL principles anticipates that people are different and sets up a campus visit experience that works for a wide variety of candidates, enabling the search committee to judge them on their true alignment with the job description. For example, UDL principles for a campus search recognize and anticipate that some job candidates have dietary restrictions. A talented instructor might need breaks and physical space to pump breast milk, eat a snack, use the restroom, check on a family member, or pray. A brilliant researcher might need assistive technologies due to a hearing or visual impairment. An incredible lab manager might need to wear a cap on their head or specially tinted glasses due to a sensitivity to fluorescent lights. Inclusive logistics for candidate interviews can help all parties stay focused on the criteria relevant to the position.

Here, then, are some ways that search committees can create a campus visit experience suitable for a diverse set of job candidates, and ultimately a workplace suitable for a diverse set of employees. We list a set of tips under the acronym INCLUDE.

Itinerary

Scheduling the on-campus visit begins with the dates. Each candidate should have more than one option for the dates of their visit because search committees cannot always anticipate or avoid the various holy days and personal commitments (not to mention other job interviews) various candidates will have. Next, provide them with a detailed itinerary well in advance so the candidate knows what to expect, and invite them to ask questions or suggest any modifications. For instance, name the restaurants and provide hyperlinks to them so that candidates can check to see whether the kitchens can accommodate their dietary needs. Some candidates need to know how long a walk or car ride they should anticipate during an interview or when they will be eating. The itinerary should automatically build in breaks and opportunities for any candidate to be alone, enabling candidates to attend to personal needs or simply rest. After all, this is an interview, not an endurance trial. These details help the search committee members, too, as each person can opt in to specific portions of the itinerary that meet their own needs. UDL principles can help search committees build and communicate inclusive schedules, but not all needs can be anticipated in advance, so search committees should also offer day-of options, such as going from point A to point B on foot, via golf cart, or by car. All this reduces the likelihood of a candidate needing to make a special request.

Neutral language

In the design of the itinerary and throughout the on-campus interview, search committees should use neutral language. For example, when a candidate's schedule is finalized and shared, all breaks should be labeled neutrally (e.g., "20-minute break"). Make a point of knowing where the gender-neutral restrooms are and offering breaks near them. Schedule meals at a restaurant that caters to multiple diets. If for any reason you do learn about a particular need a candidate has, do not announce that need by saying, "Since the candidate is a vegan, we are going to eat at Restaurant X." This can make a candidate feel that you see them as different or difficult or encourage others in the search process to see the candidate as such. Further, search committee members should not discuss legally protected statuses with a candidate, such as pregnancy or religion, when it is not relevant to the job for which the candidate is being considered, even if a candidate is visibly pregnant or visibly has a religious tradition (e.g., wears a yarmulke).

Communication

Communication enables the committee and the candidate to be mutually responsive. In addition to the itinerary, other parts of the search process can be communicated with candidates as well. For instance, you could provide interview questions in advance unless the candidate's ability to answer unanticipated questions is part of what makes them qualified for the position. Provide a map of campus, a list of the search committee members, and the names of others with whom the candidate

will meet. In cases where the search committee plans to record any aspects of the job candidate's presentation or interviews, let the candidate know this in advance, giving the candidate an opportunity to make informed choices. Communicate both how long an interview will last and how many questions you will ask. We've seen search committees get upset and reject a candidate for "taking too long" to answer interview questions without realizing they had never informed the candidate how many total questions they'd be asked to answer in a given period of time. Preferring a candidate who happened to answer questions with the "right" level of detail means failing to use the job qualifications as the basis for judgment. Communication, then, provides choice and information so that the candidate can show the campus their relevant qualifications and the committee see and judge the candidate on those qualifications.

Limberness

Having built flexibility into the campus visit plan and communicated that more universally designed plan, search committees can still be limber in response to what a candidate communicates to them and during the campus visit. Committees must let go of rigid traditions to be able to imagine how a candidate could show their skills and expertise. For example, it is not common to ask for a video of a candidate's teaching, but this may be a much better way to judge their teaching than forcing them into an artificial scenario where they have to teach a mock class of faculty members who pretend to be students. As many companies (<https://www.khou.com/article/tech/workplace-autism-companies-linked-in-microsoft-ibm-employment/285-e97765cd-1263-4753-81f6-4a22bf491163>) have noted in hiring highly skilled workers, some of whom are neurodivergent, the interview process takes place incrementally and contains a series of problems for candidates to solve to demonstrate their thinking in authentic ways. Perhaps academia could follow their lead. Instead of one marathon interview day in which the candidate goes from building to building to meet potential colleagues and administrators who may or may not have a say in departmental hiring, search committees could ask potential candidates questions or give them authentic problems related to their potential job to see how they go about doing things. Just as search committees have learned that being limber is important in how they structure their job ads, being limber in structuring a campus visit gives all candidates the opportunity to show off what they would bring to the position.

Unification of goals and activities

Just as the qualifications you list on your initial job ad need to clearly align how you screen applicants, the events of the campus visit should align clearly with the committee's goals. Too often, we include an activity in the interview because it "was always done that way," not because it is truly useful. For example, what is the purpose of a setting up a lunch—for the candidate to be fed, meet with students, or interview with the provost because the provost had only lunchtime to meet? If the candidate interviews with an important decision-maker over lunch, could boxed lunches be brought

to the latter's office so that the focus is on the interview rather than the restaurant? Unifying activities with goals can improve not only the candidate's experience but also the quality and relevance of the feedback the committee receives from various stakeholders.

Designated person

Designate one person to serve as the party responsible for inclusive search logistics. It might be the search committee chair, the unit's DEI rep or liaison, a search advocate, the hiring authority, or a staff member who reports to the hiring authority. All members of the search committee should know who this person is.

Equity, not sameness

Equity demands not that we treat all job candidates equally—that is, the same—but that we enable an equally fair consideration for each candidate during their campus visit. UDL for search logistics can help a search committee design a campus visit that provides the flexibility and focus to align with the search criteria, ultimately providing each candidate with a fair shot at being evaluated properly. Setting up a grueling 12-hour interview gauntlet with only one break and expecting all job candidates to endure it might cause stakeholders to prefer the candidate who happens to do well talking to strangers for 12 hours straight. But a campus visit designed to be flexible enough to include candidates with atypical needs would help the committee identify the candidate who is most qualified for the position and therefore better meet equity and inclusivity goals.

Search committees work hard to get a diverse candidate pool and have often been trained to write job ads and screen applicants in ways that are legal and inclusive. INCLUDE can help search committees design and carry out inclusive campus visits too.



Martha McCaughey is a recently retired professor of sociology at Appalachian State University. Her research covers gender, technology, and privacy. Having served as the faculty director of both the First Year Seminar and the Common Reading Programs, she has also written about the organization of such programs.

Lillian Nave is the UDL coordinator and VITAL faculty coordinator in the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Student Success at Appalachian State University. She is also a senior lecturer in First Year Seminar and hosts the Think UDL (<https://thinkudl.org/>) podcast.

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