

Auburn University

Department of Human Resources

SUPERVISORS' EMPLOYMENT TOOLKIT

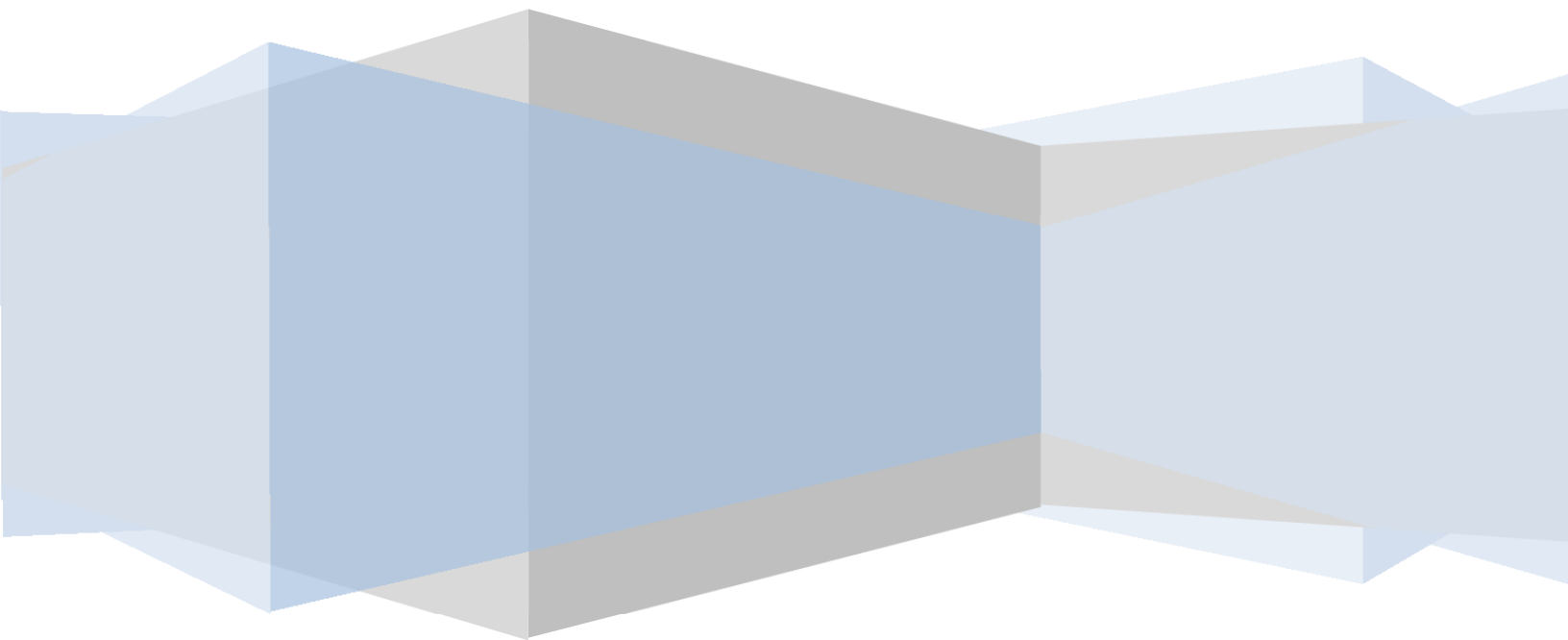


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Auburn University recognizes its ethical and legal obligation to provide a work environment in which employment opportunities are open to all qualified individuals without discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex (which includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression), age, religion, national origin, disability, protected veteran status, genetic information. The University affirms its commitment to this principle and to an affirmative action program which not only establishes the goal of achieving equal opportunity in employment, but which also detects and eliminates any elements of discrimination in employment which may be found to exist within the institution. The University also commits itself to maintaining on a nondiscriminatory basis the conditions for continuing employment and for individual advancement within the job structure of the University.

Auburn University is an EEO/Vet/Disability Employer

PRE-EMPLOYMENT SELECTION PROCESS

REVIEW THE JOB

1. Review the job description, which identifies the key elements of the job.
2. Identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that prospective applicants should possess to perform the job.
3. Establish selection criteria based upon the education and past experience necessary to perform in the job along with the required knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Also identify additional desired education, experience, and KSA's to enable you to screen your applicants and determine which ones you wish to call in for face-to-face interviews.

DEVELOP THE INTERVIEW PLAN

1. There are three basic tenets to consider when deciding what questions you need to ask during an interview. First, be certain you are only asking for information which can be tied back to the job duties and qualifications. Second, determine how you are going to compare, rate, or rank the information you gather from your interviews. Consider developing a matrix for evaluating your candidates in a consistent manner. And finally, make certain you do not ask for information that has no bearing on the applicant's ability to perform the job and/or might be perceived as being discriminatory based upon a protected class status.
2. Develop questions based on each major task and responsibility in the position description and on the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to do the job. Include scenario, best/worst questions that require more than a simple "yes/no" answer. All interviewees with similar backgrounds should be asked the same questions so that responses can be consistently assessed. Development of a script of questions will assist you in conducting a consistent process.
3. The selection process must treat all applicants fairly and be legally defensible. Interviewers asking inappropriate questions, making promises they have no authority to keep, and making off-the-cuff remarks which may be considered as improper reflect badly on the University and might result in legal liability for both the University and the interviewer. If multiple interviewers are involved, it is best to meet with the applicant as a group. That way all interviewers hear the same responses from each applicant, and the hiring official can have better control of the process and steer the questioning away from any inappropriate areas.
4. Determine how long the interviews should take, and if possible schedule the interviews morning/afternoon or on consecutive days to allow for better comparisons of applicants. Ensure that the interview will not be interrupted. Confirm the date, time,

and location with the applicants; and make arrangements for parking. Let them know how long they should expect to be on campus.

5. Thoroughly review each applicant's application and other supporting documents. Make notes to follow-up on any gaps in employment or any information that seems vague or needs clarification.

INTERVIEW THE CANDIDATES

1. The purposes of an interview are to gather job-related information, provide information to the applicant about the job and the University, treat all similarly qualified applicants consistently without regard to protected class status, present the University as a desirable place to work, and create adequate documentation to justify the selection decision.
2. Establish rapport by acting as a host to the applicant. Welcome the applicant and express appreciation for their interest in your position.
3. Let the applicant know what to expect in the interview - what the sequence will be, the names and roles of all interviewers, etc.
4. Ask questions about past performance/experience that should be predictive of future performance in your position. The applicant should do most of the talking. Ask job-related, open-ended questions. Ask follow-up questions as appropriate. Adopt a conversational style to avoid making the interview seem like an interrogation. Do not be afraid of gaps in the conversation if an applicant seems to have difficulty providing a response. Allow sufficient time for the applicant to provide an answer, or try rephrasing the question in a different way. Do not be distracted by your own note-taking. Jot down key words, and then return to your notes immediately following the interview to more completely record the information gathered. Be careful not to document information that may later be perceived as discriminatory.
5. Describe the job in more detail and how it fits into the mission of your department. Give the applicant the opportunity to ask questions. Common questions will be about the pay and the time frame for making the decision. Regarding pay, tell the applicant that you will work with Human Resources in determining starting salaries and that the salary will be somewhere within the salary range that was posted on the position announcement. If they have not provided on their application the minimum salary they would consider acceptable, you may ask them for this information during the interview. Regarding the time frame, let the applicant know if you have other interviews scheduled (or are finished with interviews) and that no official offer can be made until Human Resources gives its approval.
6. Inform the applicant that references will be checked. In preparation for this, it is recommended that you print each interviewed applicant's application from the online employment system and request the applicant to sign the Agreement at the end of the application in case it is required by past employers/others you may contact during the reference checking activity.

7. Conclude the interview by thanking the applicant for their time and letting them know when they can hear back from you. Generally it takes about 10 days/2 weeks from the time the department notifies HR of their Finalist candidate and all approvals being given to extend an offer, provided the department enters required information into the online employment system in a timely manner and the justifications provided are sound. The department and Human Resources will make a concerted effort to complete the process to avoid losing top candidates.

POST-INTERVIEW ACTIVITIES

1. Assess the information gathered in the interviews to determine which candidate best matches the selection criteria established for the screening process. Use only information that is job-related.

2. Check references. Reference checks can actually be conducted at any time during the screening process, and may be used to help determine who is invited for interview. However, at the very minimum reference checks are expected to be conducted on the Finalist candidate. Reference checks should verify the accuracy of the information provided by the applicant, determine the similarity between past work experiences and the job you are filling, and ascertain personal characteristics such as dependability, attendance, work ethic, etc. Be reminded that no information can be requested during a reference check that is inappropriate to request from the applicants themselves, such as family situations, medical history, etc. If such information is offered, you must ignore it. Human Resources will verify educational credentials and conduct a criminal history check on the Finalist candidate before providing a salary referral.

3. Human Resources will provide the salary referral and instruct you to work with your departmental hiring manager to enter information into the University's online employment system. This information will be subject to review, and additional information may be requested.

4. Once all approvals are given, you may extend the official offer of employment. Form offer letters are provided within this toolkit.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW PLAN

Establishing Rapport

1. Mention a current event of general interest.
2. Ask the candidate about a hobby or other interest listed on the resume or application.
3. Relate something humorous that happened to you in the last few days.
4. Extend a warm greeting when ushering the candidate in the room
5. Express appreciation to the candidate for his/her interest in working for your organization.

Setting the Agenda

1. Give an overview of the items to be discussed.

EXAMPLE: "The purpose of this interview today is to discuss your qualifications relative to the position we are filling and also to give you an opportunity to learn more about the job and our organization."

2. Let the candidate know that he/she will have an opportunity to ask questions.
3. Inform the candidate of any activities planned, such as a departmental tour.

Gathering Predictive Information

Education and Training:

1. In what ways did your education prepare you for this position?
2. What was your major field of study? Why did you select it?
3. What other training have you had that prepared you for this position?
4. What was your best subject in school? Worst? Your favorite and why?
5. Do you have plans to further your education?

Work History:

1. Would you describe your duties and responsibilities in your current (or most recent) job?
Other jobs?

2. How would you describe a typical work day?
3. What were some of your major accomplishments in the job?
4. What were some of the problems or setbacks you experienced in the job? How did you attempt to handle them?
5. What jobs have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
6. Why are you leaving your present employer?
7. In what ways is your previous work experience applicable to the job for which you are applying?

Background Information (working conditions, organizing skills, other related skills)

1. What is your attitude toward job-related travel? How much would you be willing to do if related to the job?
2. What were your most important goals and objectives for the past year? How successful were you in achieving them?
3. In what type of work environment are you most comfortable?
4. Describe for me those situations from your most recent work experience which produced the highest levels of stress for you. How did you cope with them? What was the final result?
5. What type of management style do you prefer from your supervisor?
6. Describe the most difficult person with whom you have ever worked. How did you handle him or her? What were the results?
7. What steps do you generally follow in making a decision?

Personal Characteristics (motivation, work ethic, character):

1. What factors in a job are most important to your job satisfaction?
2. Give some examples of actions that you have initiated which were of benefit to your previous employer. What were the results?
3. What are some examples of the types of things you have done on your job which made you proud?
4. What causes you to be disappointed in your own performance?
5. Discuss the most recent mistake you made on your job and how you handled it?

6. Why do you think the University should hire you?
7. What types of criticism are leveled at you most often?
8. How do you think your co-workers would describe you?
9. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our department?

Describe the Job and the Organization

1. Give examples of the work to be performed (a job description listing the essential functions may be given to the applicant), and ask the applicant if he/she can perform the duties.
2. Explain the personal characteristics necessary to perform the job.
3. Describe the working conditions (hours, travel, requirements, environmental conditions) under which the job must be performed and ask the applicant if he/she can meet these requirements.
4. Explain any physical requirements, such as lifting, necessary to perform the job and ask the applicant if these requirements can be met.
5. Discuss salary and benefits offered by the company.
6. Give information about organizational structure, opportunities for advancement, and training and development programs.

Clarifying Information

1. Answer Questions
2. Allow applicant to expand on any areas he/she feels necessary.
3. Fill in any gaps in information obtained.

Concluding the Interview

1. Thank the applicant for taking the time to interview.
2. Make sure the applicant knows what to expect next and how the selection process will progress.

TOPICS TO AVOID

- Arrest Records
- Lawsuits or legal complaints
- Proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing English (unless job related)
- Less-than honorable military discharge
- Ownership of home or rental status
- Length of residence
- Ownership of car
- Form of transportation to work
- Prior illnesses or accidents
- Maiden name
- Loans
- Hospitalizations
- Number of children
- Wage assignments or garnishments
- Current or prior medication or treatment
- Ages of children
- Number of preschool children
- Bankruptcy
- Disabilities or handicaps
- Gender and marital status
- Workers Compensation Claims
- Insurance claims
- Credit cards
- Family plans
- Judgments
- Spouse's Income
- Age
- Weight
- Date of high school graduation
- Place of birth
- National Origin
- Mother's maiden name
- Child Care arrangements
- Other Languages spoken (unless job related)
- Social organizations
- Citizenship
- Church affiliation

SOURCE: *Interview Guide for Supervisors*, 5th Edition, CUPA, page 26.

REFERENCE CHECKS VS. BACKGROUND CHECKS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The media has recently given a lot of attention to the issue of employer-conducted "background checks" and some of the unfortunate circumstances that have occurred when these are not conducted prior to bringing someone into the work place. Frequently these articles will use the terms "background checks" and "reference checks" interchangeably.

Here at Auburn University these two terms have distinctly different definitions. When we use the term "background check" we are referring to the routine checks that Human Resources requests from a consumer reporting agency prior to giving approval to proceed with the selection process. These checks generally include:

- Social Security Trace Report
- Federal Criminal History
- Driving Record (as required)
- County-by-County Criminal History
- Academic Verifications
- Professional License (as required)

In addition, we also utilize the FBI Sex Offender site which provides links to state sex offender registries.

These standard background checks do not replace the necessity for reference checks to be conducted at the departmental level on candidates prior to extending an offer of employment. This is a critically important part of the selection process, and no hiring decision should be made until the hiring authority or the search committee conducts such checks.

The following are some useful tips or best practices for conducting reference checks:

- Candidates should be informed that references will be thoroughly checked and this may include contacting references other than those specifically listed. Interviewers may wish to ask if there is anyone the candidate does not want contacted. If so, respect that - but follow up with the question, "If I did call them, what do you think they would say?"
- Remember that it is unlikely that the candidate is going to provide the name of a reference that is going to say anything unfavorable. References checked should include all past supervisors, department heads, colleagues, or anyone still available who can speak to the candidate's job performance, professional reputation, and interpersonal relationship skills.
- United Educators, the University's liability insurer, recommends sending a standard written request for a written reference (enclosing a position description for which the candidate has applied). Absent a written request, **United Educators suggests that at the very least a standard checklist of questions should be used to solicit telephone references.**

- United Educators also recommends that the same person do the reference checks on the candidates for any given position. This will help insure consistency not only in the types of questions being asked, but also in the interpretation of the answers given. The person doing the reference checking needs to be someone who is very familiar with the type of position that is being filled as well as the environment in which the work will be conducted. However, it is acceptable assign reference duties to committee members as appropriate.
- Be mindful that you cannot ask any questions during a reference check that you legally cannot ask of the candidate. Questions concerning family status, age, religion, medical conditions, etc., are strictly off-limits. Questions should focus on the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for being successful in the position.
- References should always be asked if they would rehire this person or want to work with them again in the future. If the references refuse to answer, be sure to ask them if their refusal is because of a policy restriction, state statute, or they would simply prefer not to respond.

Do not be surprised if you are only able to obtain basic information from past employers, such as position held and dates of employment. Even if this is all the information you can get, record that you made the contact and the information gathered. Doing so could protect you from any future allegations of negligent hiring. We must do our due diligence in obtaining references to assist us in avoiding negligent hiring decisions.

For more detailed and specific guidance on checking references or any of the other issues associated with hiring, we recommend that supervisors and search committee members attend the Human Resources Development courses for effective hiring practices and how to interview processes and procedures. Your Human Resources Liaison may also provide pertinent information. During this session, participants are provided reference materials developed by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR). In addition to information regarding background and reference checks, checklists, and sample forms, other topics covered in the session include best practices in the selection process, screening and interviewing applicants, and legal issues associated with hiring.

EXAMPLE REFERENCE CHECK FORMS

Reference checks may be requested in writing or over the phone. Many employers will not provide any information without a signed release from the applicant, so make sure you get that from your applicant at the conclusion of the interview.

Here are two examples of reference-checking guidelines. The first is formatted to be used to request information in writing and may be more suitable for Administrative/Professional jobs. This form may be faxed or mailed along with a cover letter and copy of the applicant's signed Agreement from the application. The second is formatted to be used to request information over the phone and may be more suited for University Staff positions. You will also want to ask more specific position-related skills questions (for example, experience with Excel; customer relations; specific experience questions, etc.) Feel free to pick and choose from either of the inquiries to gather the information you believe is necessary to make a sound selection decision.

REFERENCE REQUEST

Applicant's Name:

Reference's Name:

Date:

Mr/Ms. ----- is a candidate for the position of ----- at Auburn University and has authorized us to check references. All information received will be handled confidentially.

- 1) In what capacity have you known the applicant? And for how long?
- 2) How would you describe Mr/Ms. -----'s work ethic?
- 3) How would you describe Mr/Ms. -----'s style of relating to people?
- 4) What are Mr/Ms. -----'s strongest job skills?
- 5) What would you consider to be their greatest weakness in their work performance?
- 6) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about Mr/Ms. -----'s work performance or behavior?

Thank you very much for your prompt response. I appreciate your time and candor.

TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECK FORM

Applicant: _____

Position: _____

Reference: _____

Contacted by: _____

Relationship to Applicant: ____ Supervisor ____ Peer ____ Other (explain)

Date: _____

Script: "(Applicant) has applied for the position of (position title) in the (Department) of Auburn University. They have given us permission to check their references. I am calling to inquire about your knowledge of this person's past work experience. All information received will be handled confidentially."

What position(s) did the applicant hold, and what were their dates of employment? What were their primary responsibilities?

Was the work performed in a satisfactory manner? Would you consider their overall job performance to be below satisfactory or above satisfactory?

What would you consider to be their strong points?

What would you consider to be their weak points?

How do they respond to supervision?

Would you please comment on this person's:

Attendance

Dependability

Willingness to assume responsibility

Ability to follow instructions

Quality of work

Quantity of work

If given the opportunity, would you rehire this individual?

Is there any other job-related information you can provide?

SAMPLE OFFER LETTERS

**Note that additional wording must be included in the offer letter for hiring of foreign nationals related to work authorization*

CONTINUING TERM APPOINTMENTS

DATE

[Employee name]

[Employee address]

Dear :

I am pleased to extend you an offer for the [POSITION/TITLE NAME] in the Department of [DEPARTMENT NAME]. This offer includes an [ANNUALIZED SALARY] paid on a [PAY SCHEDULE TYPE] of [INDICATE MONTHLY OR BI-WEEKLY RATE]. Upon acceptance, your date of employment will begin on [HIRE DATE]. Please report to our office located at [ENTER THE OFFICE LOCATION] on the scheduled date.

This offer of employment is contingent upon verification of the appropriate identity and employment eligibility documentation on the Form I-9, as required by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Upon acceptance, you will be provided additional information about the I-9 form, other required new hire documents, and a New Employee Orientation session. During this session, you will be provided information regarding Auburn University Policies and Procedures and Benefits. Prior to the new employee orientation session, you may visit http://www.auburn.edu/administration/business_office/payroll/benefits.html for detailed information regarding benefits and eligibility.

This is an administrative professional/staff position and your first three months are considered probationary and you will be reviewed at that time. Your probationary period may be extended up to an additional three months. Your supervisor will provide information to you regarding your expectations.

In closing, I would like to personally welcome you to our institution, and I am looking forward to your contributions to the department and university.

Sincerely,

Department Head/Chair

By signing below, I understand that this appointment is subject to Auburn University's Policies and Procedures. This offer does not constitute an expressed or implied contract of employment. Any provision contained herein may be modified and/or revoked without reason, in accordance with AU Policies and Procedures. Auburn University is an at-will employer; this document does not constitute a guarantee of continuing employment for any term.

Name

Date

Attachment: AU Workplace Policies

**Note that additional wording must be included in the offer letter for hiring of foreign nationals related to work authorization*

LIMITED TERM APPOINTMENTS

[DATE]

[Employee name]

[Employee address]

Dear :

I am pleased to extend you an offer for the [POSITION/TITLE NAME] in the Department of [DEPARTMENT NAME]. This offer includes an [ANNUALIZED SALARY] paid on a [PAY SCHEDULE TYPE] of [INDICATE MONTHLY OR BI-WEEKLY RATE]. Upon acceptance, your date of employment will begin on [HIRE DATE]. Please report to our office located at [ENTER THE OFFICE LOCATION] on the scheduled date. As discussed during your interview, this is a limited-term appointment. Continuation of the appointment will depend on the department's assessment of the continued need for the position and continuation of funding. Currently, funding is expected to be available for the position through [DATE]. You will be provided a minimum of two weeks written notice should a decision is made to eliminate your position.

This offer of employment is contingent upon verification of the appropriate identity and employment eligibility documentation on the Form I-9, as required by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Upon acceptance, you will be provided additional information about the I-9 form, other required new hire documents, and a New Employee Orientation session. During this session, you will be provided information regarding Auburn University Policies and Procedures and Benefits. Prior to the new employee orientation session, you may visit http://www.auburn.edu/administration/business_office/payroll/benefits.html for detailed information regarding benefits and eligibility.

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Sincerely,

Department Head/Chair

By signing below, I understand that this appointment is subject to Auburn University's Policies and Procedures and accept the conditions of the offer as stated. This offer does not constitute an expressed or implied contract of employment. Any provision contained herein may be modified and/or revoked without reason, in accordance with AU Policies and Procedures. Auburn University is an at-will employer; this document does not constitute a guarantee of continuing employment for any term.

Name

Date

Attachment: AU Workplace Policies

ADDENDUM TO OFFER LETTERS FOR HIRING OF FOREIGN NATIONAL CANDIDATES

**Please seek guidance from Office of International Programs for assistance with hiring processes to ensure compliance and timely process*

Dear :

As your offer of employment is conditional on proof of your eligibility for employment in the United States we hereby request that you provide the AU Office of International Programs with the required documentation so that AU may sponsor the appropriate work authorization petitions for employment at Auburn University. You will need to contact Ms. Mary McConner, H-1B & Permanent Residence Processing Coordinator, mjm0054@auburn.edu. For additional processing information please review the following web page:

http://www.auburn.edu/academic/international/iss/nonimmigrant_employment/h1b_emp.php

If you are currently in the United States and working on an H-1b or any other form of temporary work permission issued by the US DHS Immigration and Customs Enforcement Service please *DO NOT terminate or otherwise modify your relationship with your current employer until all the appropriate documentation has been arranged for your transfer* to Auburn University. If you cease employment or otherwise modify your employment terms with your current employer you may be ineligible for employment at Auburn University.

If you are currently outside of the United States or planning on departing the US to secure the appropriate work visa status please contact the AU Office of International Programs prior to ceasing any current employment or terminating your current status so that OIP may assist in securing the appropriate temporary worker immigration documentation.

Please be aware that AU requires that all H-1b, LPR and other employment based petitions be processed through the AU Legal Counsel for immigration compliance. AU uses outside counsel that charges legal fees for said services. If you decide to secure your own legal counsel for a green card be aware that the AU legal counsel still must review, for a fee, all petitions for compliance with both AU and US DHS policies.

The following is understood regarding the payment of legal fees associated with the H-1B petition process:

Your hiring unit will be responsible for all fees associated with the processing of your H-1b visa with the **exception of those for your family members and your consular visa fee if you are abroad**. If premium processing becomes necessary and it is your choice and not ours to do this, then the cost of this will have to be paid by you as well unless otherwise negotiated with your department.

Use of the US DHS H-1b Premium processing service is considered to be optional and not required therefore payment of this fee is based on the decision of the hiring unit.

LPR petitions authorizations are considered to be at the discretion of the departments and all arrangements relevant to payment of legal fees is based on the PW/Actual wage determination. The labor portion of all LPR cases must be paid by the hiring department.

All agreements pertaining to the payment of legal fees, salary offers, etc. must be made in writing, in advance as part of the conditional offer for employment and transmitted in a timely manner to the AU Office of International Programs.

Please describe below the agreed to conditions associated with the payment of legal fees associated with
--

this offer of employment:
At this time, it is understood that:

Please indicate your acceptance of the terms of these conditions by signing, and returning a copy of this letter to me by no later than -----. Assuming approval by the vice president and provost and verification from the Office of International Programs that this offer complies with US DHS and DOL policies, your acceptance will enable the initiation of the process through which the appropriate AU sponsored immigration petition can be submitted.

I look forward to our future association in the University community.

Sincerely,

I accept and understand the conditions contained in this letter and so recognize by signing below.

Signature: _____ Date: _____
PRINTED NAME: _____
COUNTRY OF ISSUANCE AND PASSPORT NUMBER: _____

Cc: Provost Office/Human Resources/Office of International Programs

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Pre-employment Selection Process was adapted from *Interview Guide for Supervisors*, 5th Edition, published by College and University Personnel Association; Washington, DC; Copyright 1998.

The “Topics to Avoid” information can be found on page 26 of this publication.