



Searching for Excellence & Diversity: Resources for Search Committees

Position Vacancy Listings (PVLs) as a recruiting tool: Advice and examples

A carefully crafted PVL or job description not only informs candidates about the requirements for the position and the duties they will be expected to perform, but can also help you attract and fairly evaluate a diverse array of applicants. Furthermore, the requirements and expectations listed in the PVL provide guidance to search committees as they evaluate applications and develop interview questions for finalists.

Consequently, we recommend spending sufficient time and attention crafting a PVL specific to your position. This document provides advice for writing PVLs that will serve as an effective recruiting tool and includes examples from actual PVLs used at UW-Madison.

Take a look at some listings on the UW-Madison's website, "Jobs at UW" (jobs.wisc.edu), to see how your job listing will appear to prospective applicants. The advice and examples provided here are organized according to the order of the fields that appear in on the "Jobs at UW" webpage. We recommend organizing your job listing around the fields listed below and including them as headings in your posting to help ensure that the listing matches your intent.

- I. [Working title](#)
- II. [Position summary](#)
- III. [Principal duties](#)
- IV. [Degree and area of specialization](#)
- V. [Minimum years and type of relevant work experience](#)
- VI. [License/Certification](#)
- VII. [Additional information](#)
- VIII. [Instructions to applicants](#)
- IX. [Advertising summary](#)

In writing your PVL, please remember that using your own language based on the particular position you are seeking to fill and on the nature and culture of your department will be more effective than simply copying the examples provided here.

General Advice

Define the desired scholarship, experience, disciplinary background, and expertise required for the position as broadly as possible. Broad requirements increase the chances that members of underrepresented groups will be in the potential applicant pool. Narrowly defined searches may not only exclude women and applicants from underrepresented minority groups because of pipeline issues, but may also limit your ability to consider individuals with different profiles who, nonetheless, qualify for your position.

Think carefully and be very clear about what is actually "required" and what is "preferred." If appropriate use "preferred" instead of "required," and "should" instead of "must" when describing qualifications and developing criteria.

Remember that whatever is stated in the PVL is binding. If a qualified applicant does not have the exact type of degree or experience you specify, you will not be able to hire them.

I. Working title

The working title is probably the first item potential applicants will see when they find your position – indeed it is printed in red capitalized font on the “Jobs at UW” webpage. Think carefully about what you want to display. In addition to specifying the rank/s (Assistant, Associate, and/or Full), consider whether or not you want to include the name of the department, field, or subspecialty of the position you are seeking to fill. Some examples are listed below.

Basic examples from UW-Madison PVLs	Detailed examples from UW-Madison PVLs
Assistant Professor	Assistant Professor in Political Science
Assistant or Associate Professor	Assistant or Associate Professor of Law – Precision Medicine Cluster Hire
Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor	Associate or Assistant Professor of Public Management
Professor	Professor – Chemical & Biological Engineering

II. Position summary

Provide a comprehensive narrative description of your position here. This description should focus on summarizing what the newly hired faculty member will do in the position – **not on the** qualifications for the position. The qualifications should be outlined in the sections below on required degrees, specialization/field of study and work experience. In describing or summarizing the position, please refer to the advice provided below for:

- developing broad rather than narrow expectations
- using gender neutral adjectives and descriptors
- avoiding over reliance on superlative adjectives

III. Principal duties

List the principal duties associated with the position. For a faculty position these should include expectations about duties related to teaching, research, and service.

In order to attract and evaluate candidates on their preparation and ability to foster the department, school/college, and university’s missions related to diversity and inclusion, include relevant job related duties in these areas.

Examples of diversity related job duties from UW-Madison PVLs:
<i>“Proactively support the expansion of diversity among all components of the department, and ensure an inclusive, fair, and equitable environment that fosters engagement.”</i>
<i>“Extend scholarship to underrepresented groups.”</i>

Note: if the candidate you want to hire needs visa or Permanent Residency sponsorship, the US Department of Labor will look for some form of the word “teach” within the principal duties.

IV. Degree and area of specialization

A. Degree requirements:

Carefully consider the degree requirements for your position. Is a PhD required? Or will some other terminal degree such as an EdD, an MD, or an MFA be acceptable? For clinical schools/colleges, is an MD, DVM, PharmD, or other professional degree required—or will a different medical degree (e.g., a DO) or a PhD in a relevant field provide the necessary qualifications for the position?

Examples from UW-Madison PVLs (efforts to broaden highlighted in bold text):

Emergency Medicine Physician: MD or DO; Board prepared/board certified in Emergency Medicine

Asst. Prof, Pharmaceutical Sciences: PhD or other health sciences doctorate

B. Areas of specialization:

Some departments strive to broaden their pool of potential applicants by keeping the area of specialization completely open. This allows them to attract and consider applicants who may be doing exciting and innovative research in areas they had not anticipated. The caveat to this advice is that if the department actually does have a preference or a need for a particular area of expertise, it is better to state this explicitly. If a specific area of specialization is necessary for the teaching, research, or clinical needs of the department, think creatively about how to attract a broad pool of applicants within that area of specialization. Another caveat pertains in cases where you may attract and seek to hire an international applicant who is not a US citizen or permanent resident. If the likelihood of attracting highly qualified international applicants for your position is high, be aware that due to US Department of Labor regulations, the process of successfully obtaining a visa or permanent residency status is more likely when the area of specialization is more narrowly defined. Ironically, a narrowly defined position will necessarily attract a narrower pool of applicants – including a narrower pool of international applicants.

Examples from UW-Madison PVLs (efforts to broaden highlighted in bold text):

Asst. Prof, PhD, and a strong background relevant to Chemical and Biological Engineering or a related field.

Asst. Prof, Dept. of Bacteriology: PhD in microbiology, biochemistry, genetics, cell and molecular biology, or related field.

Asst. Prof/Assoc. Prof/Professor of Chemistry: PhD in Chemistry or related field ... Area of specialization within Chemistry is open.

Asst. Prof of History specializing in the history of US political economy from the Civil War to the Present: We welcome candidates whose work focuses on United States politics, markets, and institutions and who seek to integrate the insights of such fields as (for instance) business history, economic history, environmental history, labor history, legal history, and the history of the state.

V. Minimum years and type of relevant work experience

Provide a brief list of the job relevant qualities and experiences needed for this position. These include requirements, preferences, and/or expectations related to research, publications, funding, teaching, and service.

In order to achieve departmental goals related to diversity and inclusion, consider including experiences or preparation related to fostering diverse, welcoming, and inclusive learning and work environments. Consider the following advice when describing your requirements:

A. Pay attention to the language you use:

- **Use gender neutral adjectives or descriptors**

When describing the position and your required/preferred qualifications, avoid using gendered adjectives or descriptors that convey masculine stereotypes. Research indicates that women may be less interested in applying for positions described with predominantly male attributes (e.g., competitive, aggressive, strong, vigorous).¹ Relying on stereotypically masculine adjectives can also unintentionally bias evaluators in favor of male candidates. Strive to use more gender-neutral descriptors (e.g., accomplished, successful, committed, creative).

- **Avoid over reliance on superlative adjectives**

We all want to attract and hire excellent candidates, but too much emphasis on superlatives (e.g., excellent, stellar, top notch, internationally recognized, etc.) can discourage highly qualified candidates from applying.

Examples of descriptors that might deter applicants and/or influence evaluation	Examples of Alternatives
<i>"We seek applicants with a vigorous research program"</i>	<i>"Candidates must demonstrate an established state-of-the-art research program"</i>
<i>"... a dynamic and innovative leader ..."</i>	<i>"A dynamic and innovative leader ... with demonstrated scholarship and collaborative skills"</i>
<i>"Well qualified candidates will demonstrate high quality research with publications in top journals"</i>	<i>"Evidence of established scholarship including a strong record of publishing in peer-reviewed journals."</i>

B. Be specific about the qualities you seek

Evaluation criteria that are too vague increase the possibility for unintentional bias to play a role when you evaluate a candidate (e.g., demonstrate excellence in research). Try to describe your criteria with greater specificity (e.g., a record of publication in well-respected, peer-reviewed journals).

Examples of vague requirements/criteria	Examples of specific requirement/criteria
<i>"Candidates for Associate or Full Professor must possess academic credentials to qualify for a tenured faculty appointment at UW-Madison."</i>	<i>"For a tenured position, candidate should have at least 6 years in a university faculty position or government or industrial research position and a demonstrated track record of national leadership in [field], with academic accomplishments as a scholar and teacher that meet the standards for a tenured appointment in [department name]."</i>
<i>"Development of an internationally recognized scholarly research program ... required."</i>	<i>"Develop a grant supported (e.g., USDA, NSF, DOE) research program and publish in reputable journals."</i>
<i>"Must demonstrate potential for excellence in teaching ..."</i>	<i>"Minimum of three years outstanding teaching experience at the college/university level." "...demonstrate innovative, student-centered teaching."</i>

¹ Gaucher D, Friesen J, Kay AC. (2011). "Evidence that gendered wording in job advertisements exists and sustains gender inequality." *J. Personality and Social Psychology* 101(1): 109-128.

C. Distinguish between required and preferred qualities and experiences

Pay careful attention to what is truly required for a position; you will be bound by these requirements when you hire the final candidate. Wherever possible, chose 'preferred' for a quality or experience that could be optional for excellent candidates who possess the essential qualifications and experience needed for the position.

Examples from UW-Madison PVLs
<i>"An ability to teach in all program levels (i.e., undergraduate, master's doctoral is required. Prior teaching experience is preferred."</i>
<i>"Post-doctoral research experience and teaching experience preferred but not required."</i>

D. Include criteria or qualifications related to fostering diverse and inclusive workplace and teaching environments

Including criteria or job duties related to diversity and fostering an inclusive and respectful environment will help you attract and hire applicants who can support your department's mission and goals in these areas. The criteria or job duties you include should concern an applicant's preparation, experiences, and abilities—not their identity. If you do include such criteria or job duties, be prepared to evaluate all candidates' abilities to meet the criteria and/or perform the required job duties.

Examples from UW-Madison PVLs include:
<i>"The School of ... is committed to advancing diversity in all areas, including scholarship, instruction, and engagement at all levels. Candidates should address at least one of these areas in their cover letter and indicate their experience, current interests or activities, and/or future goals to promote a climate that values diversity and inclusion."</i>
<i>"Candidates with particular interests in African American, Afro-Latinx, and black diasporic Anglophone literatures are encouraged to apply." (For clinical searches – could include research interests in addressing health disparities – if appropriate to the discipline and the search.)</i>
<i>"Other desirable attributes include strong research methods, oral and written communication skills and the ability to interact with an interdisciplinary and collaborative intellectual community."</i>
<i>"The candidate should have strong interpersonal skills and the ability to work cooperatively with ..."</i>

VI. License/Certification

If relevant, indicate the full title of any specific license or certificate required or preferred for the position. Think carefully about how this might unnecessarily narrow your potential applicant pool and whether the license/certificate is actually required or whether the requirement could be that the candidate *is eligible* for a WI license? Must candidate be board certified—or is board *eligible* sufficient?

If not relevant, leave this section blank.

VII. Additional information

A. Describe your department:

While the rest of the PVL tells applicants what you want or require, this section provides you the opportunity to let prospective applicants know what they might gain by joining your department. Use it to provide additional information about your department, the position, and/or how the position fits with the department's goals, mission, or focus.

Examples from UW-Madison PVLs:

“The successful candidate will join a world-class academic institution that encourages, values, and supports interdisciplinary basic and clinical research, and attracts scholars and students from around the world.”

“The department has 20 regular faculty members and more than 165 graduate students. Many faculty have joint appointments in other departments. The department is well known for ... It offers a stimulating research environment as well as opportunities for collaborative research in other departments.”

B. Describe the university and the city of Madison

You may also use this section to provide information about the university more generally and about Madison. Note that it is preferable to rely on official or published information rather than on your own perspectives or descriptions.

Examples from UW-Madison PVLs:

“Madison is the state’s capital city with a population of 252,000, and offers an ideal combination of natural beauty, simulating cultural offerings, and outdoor recreation (Forbes, 2016)”

“Located at the nexus of four beautiful lakes, Madison, the state capital, consistently ranks among the top American cities for its quality of life.”

C. Notes on diversity statements:

- Some search committees, departments, schools, or colleges use this section to express a commitment to diversity and inclusion and/or a goal of hiring faculty and staff who will support and foster diversity and inclusion. Before creating your own statement of a commitment to diversity, first check to see whether or not your school or college already automatically includes such a statement. Also, be aware that UW-Madison’s institutional diversity statement is automatically included in the job listing right after the section on “Principal Duties.” To see this statement take a look at any job listing or view it here: <https://diversity.wisc.edu>
- If you do choose to express a departmental commitment to diversity, research suggests that an aspirational statement (e.g., “we strive to increase equity, diversity, and inclusion” or “we are committed to work on increasing diversity and inclusion”) is more effective than a declarative statement (e.g., “we do not discriminate,” or “we are strongly committed to diversity and inclusion.”) Declarative statements may unintentionally imply that the institution is more fair, equitable, and diverse than it actually is and can have counterproductive results.²
- It is preferable to include expectations about applicants’ abilities and experiences with regard to fostering diversity and inclusion in the “relevant work experience” and/or “principle duties” sections because they outline the criteria that will be used to evaluate applicants, rather than in this “additional information” section.

D. Caution about statements on confidentiality, equal opportunity, and criminal background checks

Some search committees include UW-Madison statements regarding confidentiality, equal opportunity, and/or requirements regarding criminal background checks in this section. Please note, however, that these statements are automatically included in every listing and/or addressed when applicants register

² Carnes M, Fine E, Sheridan J. (2019). “Promises and Pitfalls of Diversity Statements: Proceed with Caution.” *Academic Medicine* 94(1):20-24.

to apply on the UW-Madison Jobs website. These statements will appear twice if you choose to include them here.

VIII. Instructions to applicants

A. Help applicants navigate to your posting on “Jobs at UW”

Use this section to provide information to applicants about how to apply for the position. Because many people may see the job posting somewhere other than the “Jobs at UW” website, this information should include

- A link to the job application site (<http://jobs.wisc.edu/>)
- The position number and instructions to search for the position number
- Directions to click on the “Apply Now” button.

B. List the documents applicants should include with the application

Cover letters, CVs, research and teaching statements, and letters of recommendation are examples of the other documents you may wish candidates to provide at the time of application. If desired, you can specify topics that should be addressed in these various documents. Before requiring letters of recommendation with the initial application, consider whether you want such letters for final candidates only.

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IX. Advertising summary

Your administrator or HR representative will draw upon information in the PVL to create a one- to two-sentence “advertising summary” for your position. This advertising summary should include relevant information that will attract qualified applicants to your position. Consult with your administrator or HR representative about the content of the advertising summary.