

Institutional Reference Checks for Academic Appointments Hired on Condition of Tenure: An Overview for Candidates

Through the Institutional Reference Check program, the UW–Madison Office of Human Resources (OHR) conducts Institutional Reference Checks on the final candidate in a given search for academic appointments hired on condition of tenure. The program enables UW–Madison to gather information about candidates’ conduct in their previous appointments that may be important to appointment decisions. Specifically, the purpose of the Institutional Reference Check is to ascertain whether the candidate has engaged in any misconduct, or whether the candidate left employment during an active investigation into allegations that the candidate engaged in misconduct, at their current or most recent employer.

In addition to the Institutional Reference Check, a criminal background check and sexual harassment/sexual violence reference check will be conducted on any final candidates, consistent with UW–Madison policy.

Definition of Misconduct

For the purposes of this program, “misconduct” is defined as any violation of employer policy addressing misconduct. Such policies may address, but are not limited to, discrimination, harassment, assault, bullying, inappropriate relationships with subordinates or students, violation of ethical duties, theft, financial mismanagement, research misconduct, insubordination, or absenteeism not protected by laws relating to medical leave or disability accommodations.

Candidate Authorization to Release Information

UW–Madison will include a statement in the job ad posting for all academic appointments hired on condition of tenure, providing notice to applicants that UW–Madison will conduct an Institutional Reference Check on the final candidate in a given search prior to hiring.

Applicants for academic appointments hired on condition of tenure are required to upload a signed “Authorization to Release Information” form as part of the online application process in the Jobs at UW website. If the candidate does not include the signed authorization as part of

their application, the application will be deemed incomplete and will not receive further consideration.

Initiating the Institutional Reference Check

When the decision of the final candidate has been made by the department and Dean, Division Human Resources will notify the candidate of the selection and inform the candidate that the Institutional Reference Check will be initiated. The candidate will be given an opportunity to self-disclose misconduct or withdraw their application. If the candidate chooses to withdraw, the candidate will be removed from consideration.

OHR will contact the academic personnel office (or equivalent) of the candidate's current or most recent employer. OHR will not contact the candidate's current or previous academic department unless there is no other office of record for faculty misconduct at the employer and only after notifying the UW–Madison department chair.

Assembling and Sharing the Institutional Reference Check Dossier

OHR will assemble an individualized Institutional Reference Check dossier of all information received. OHR will share the information with the candidate and allow the candidate the opportunity to respond to the material. Alternatively, the candidate may choose to withdraw their application, in which case the candidate will be removed from consideration.

The full Institutional Reference Check dossier, including any explanations offered by the candidate, will be forwarded to the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs. The VPFSA will consult with the Provost, Dean, department chair and others as appropriate, to determine whether the candidate is still eligible for consideration for the position.

If there is no positive finding, the department will assemble an appointment file for consideration by campus reviewers. The Institutional Reference Check dossier will not be added to the appointment file or shared with campus reviewers.

In the Event of a Positive Finding of Misconduct

If there is a positive finding, the department chair will notify the candidate. A second-choice candidate may be considered, subject to the Institutional Reference Check process. However, a positive finding does not necessarily make a candidate ineligible. If a department and Dean wish to pursue the hiring of a candidate with a positive finding, the department chair and Dean must discuss the candidate and the finding with the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs and the Provost, who will make the final determination if the hire can proceed.

Candidate Privacy

In order to protect a candidate's privacy, all information received in connection with the Institutional Reference Check process will be treated as confidential and retained in accordance with UW–Madison policy but may be subject to disclosure pursuant to applicable state and federal law. Should the candidate be offered and accept a position, any Institutional Reference Check information received will be securely maintained and held by OHR.

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