Reference Checking Guidelines

Reference checks are often the most important aspect of the employee selection process. References need to be checked before a hiring decision is made. In order to prepare for reference checking the following information has been prepared to assist you. Hiring departments are responsible for ensuring that thorough reference checks are conducted on final candidates.

Before you begin:

1) Determine appropriate references to check. Include those persons provided by the applicant and former employers as well as other persons who would have knowledge of the person’s work performance and ability. The most reliable information comes from former supervisors, who are in the best position to judge an employee’s work habits and performance. The objective of a reference check is to obtain information on the individual’s work performance and on personal characteristics that affect (positively or negatively) the individual’s suitability for the particular position sought. Be sure you have the applicant’s permission to check with his or her current supervisor so that you don’t jeopardize their current position. DON’T rely solely on one reference.

2) Make a checklist of questions you plan to ask. A sample APPLICANT REFERENCE CHECK sheet is available for your use. In addition to the questions listed on this sheet, you should develop questions related to the specific requirements of the position you are filling. For example, your position may include such requirements as supervisory ability, interpersonal skills, self-direction or flexibility. All questions must be relevant and job-related, referring only to those skills or qualifications required to perform the job you are hiring for. Be sure you are aware of what constitutes discriminatory or illegal inquiries. The University strictly prohibits these types of questions. Avoid discussing or referring or alluding to an individual’s age, physical or mental disabilities, earlier period of unemployment, discrimination complaints, marital status, and citizenship or national origin.

3) Be sure you have authorization from the individual to verify employment history information.

Follow the tips listed on the REFERENCE CHECK HELPFUL HINTS sheet and be sure to document the date that information was received or communicated and the name and title of the person with whom you spoke. This can be done with the APPLICANT REFERENCE CHECK sheet.