



Reference Check Guidelines and Sample Questions

Employment decisions are vital to the successes of a department and the university. Everyone involved in the hiring process is responsible for ensuring that we are conscientious in our processes for hiring new employees. Thorough references checks are required on all candidates prior to an offer of employment being extended. Reference checks provide valuable information on a candidate's past work history that assist the manager in making a hiring decision.

External Candidates

All candidates are required to provide names and contact information of professional references from past employers. Personal references should not be considered for the reference check process. If a candidate did not provide such information as part of their application, it is the responsibility of the hiring manager to obtain it. It is not unusual for a candidate to request that you not contact his/her current employer. Such requests should be respected, but you should not neglect to make contact with a prior supervisor. When obtaining references from candidates, ensure that you have at least one prior supervisor. A minimum of three references should be contacted.

Former Employees

In addition to conducting reference checks with a candidate's employers outside of Clark, Hiring Managers should contact the supervisor (if available) in the department in which the candidate formerly worked to obtain a reference. Hiring Managers can also utilize the review of past performance evaluations as outlined below.

Internal Candidates

References are required on all internal candidates being considered for positions. References from the candidate's current and/or former departments should be contacted. Keep in mind that the candidate may request that you not contact their current department as the department may not be aware of their search for employment. Hiring Managers have the option to and are encouraged to review the candidates past performance evaluations in the Office of Human Resources. Performance evaluations have to be reviewed onsite in the Office of Human Resources. Electronic copies cannot be distributed. Please contact the Office of Human Resources at HR@clarku.edu or 508-793-7294 to schedule time for a review.

Sample Reference Check Questions

The below questions are examples of questions that can be asked during a reference check. It is not expected that all of the below questions would be asked as most references prefer to keep the conversation brief, but this will guide you as certain questions will only be applicable for candidates applying to certain positions. You will want to ask questions based on what you are looking for in the position and the candidate. Take your time to engage with the reference to look out for red flags, such as, references not providing specifics and being vague, inconsistencies from the information the candidate has provided, or references that decline to comment. It is highly suggested that the questions with the asterisk (*) be asked for references on all candidates.

IMPORTANT: Let the reference know that this call is confidential and the information discussed will only be shared with members of the search committee (if applicable). Ask the reference to refrain from discussing the candidate's applicant status with others since we might not have formally announced the finalists for the position. Briefly describe the position to the reference if not familiar.

ALWAYS: At the end of the call, ask the reference if there is anything else, they would like to add? This question will allow them to speak freely and many times you will obtain information that would might not have otherwise received that could be a red flag or a shining star.

- What was your working relationship with the candidate? *
- How long have you worked with the candidate? *
- Can you verify the job candidate's employment, job title, pay, and responsibilities? *
- Why did they leave that job? *
- Are they eligible for rehire? *
- Explain job. What makes the candidate a good fit for this job? *
- If you had the opportunity, would you re-hire this job candidate? Why?
- What are the candidate's biggest strengths and weaknesses?
- Did the candidate get along with their co-workers and management?
- How would you rate candidate's ability to work with others collaboratively and facilitate collaboration between others, i.e. direct staff, academic departments, administrative units, and student services offices?
- Tell me what it's like to work with the job candidate.
- Please provide some insight into candidate's interpersonal skills. How would you describe his/her relationships with colleagues, subordinates and with superiors?
- What advice can you give me to successfully manage the job candidate?
- How would you describe the candidate's reliability and dependability?
- What was one of the candidate's most memorable accomplishments while working with you?
- What type of work environment do you think the candidate will most likely thrive in and why?
- What skills would you have liked to see the candidate develop to reach their full potential?
- For supervisory positions- If I spoke to the candidate's subordinates, how do you think they would describe the candidate's leadership style?
- How would you describe the candidate's skills with (functional area of job- i.e. writing, programming, teaching, etc.)?
- How would you describe the candidate's communication skills?