

Judge and Jury: A Committee Member's Perspective

In this paper, I will offer some insights from my experience evaluating the applications of graduate students, both as a member of the committee which reviews applications for travel awards and as a member of multiple job search committees at my home institution. One of the challenges for both grant committees and search committees is to weigh the record of diverse types of applicants (e.g., an ABD graduate student, a visiting college instructor who has held a PhD for three years, and a Master's-holding high school teacher) against expectations proper for that level of experience. Committee decisions can seem quite capricious, especially when the pool has multiple fully qualified applicants (almost invariably the case), and it is usually impossible to anticipate what criteria a particular group of people will employ as decisive factors. However, there are techniques that are useful across the board, such as carefully crafting professional appearance to the application and making explicit links (through a cover letter, personal statement, etc.) between one's experience and goals and the impact of the program/position. I will speak about the importance of such things for catching the eye of reviewers.