

## Behavioral Interview Questions

Many candidates have the qualifications, skills, and experience an employer has advertised for in a job opening. But how do you go beyond the application materials to identify candidates who will have the qualities that will enable them to be productive, collegial, and contributing members of your unit?

One technique is to incorporate interview questions that focus strategically on the behaviors and competencies that you feel are imperative to that position. Behavioral-based interviewing is highly effective because it examines the past behavior of a candidate, which is the most accurate indicator of future behavior.<sup>1</sup> Behavioral interviews utilize questions that encourage more detailed responses from candidates than traditional interview questions, which focus more on skills and qualifications. Good behavioral interview questions describe a situation that is typical for a faculty member in your area. They are open-ended and invite candidates to describe how they would act in a situation, giving examples from past experiences.

Committees should meet in advance of the interview to identify their top 3-4 competencies and behaviors for the position. This allows for discussion and agreement as to what the entire team's goals are in the candidate review and selection. Sample questions are available below to provide a starting point in identifying behavioral interview questions. There are no right and wrong answers to these questions; they simply provide context in seeking to understand how someone behaved in a past situation and if that behavior would be an attribute in the context of your organization.

Committees should keep in mind that many candidates are well versed in preparing for interviews. With that said, committees should not only take into account non-verbal communication but also listen to a candidate's answers to see if they address the following areas when answering your questions.

1. **Situation** - Make certain that the candidate includes specific information by addressing your question with an actual example. Listen for the Who, What, When, Where and How.
2. **Task** - What exactly did they complete/accomplish and what challenges did they overcome doing so?
3. **Approach** - What was their role in the activity? Did they use action verbs to describe it or were they not a key contributor?
4. **Results** – What was the outcome of the individual's activity/role? What consequences/gains/benefits did their behavior have on the outcome?

### **Remember to avoid the following interview committee blunders:**

1. Don't lead your interviewees by prefacing a question with detailed information. This tips off your candidates as to how you want them to respond.
2. Avoid interview questions that are generic. Probe deeper if the candidate doesn't provide background context, the action taken and the results.
3. Avoid hypothetical and/or theoretical questions. You want to know how that person has already handled that situation.
4. Don't accept answers that are not in the first person. Don't let people take credit for the action of others.
5. Avoid the temptation to fill the silence. Give the candidate time to recall the event. Refrain from filling the void for them by rephrasing the question or offering leading information.

# Sample Questions for Faculty Competency Areas

## Teaching

1. In your view, what are the top three elements a faculty member must incorporate in the classroom to be effective?
2. What indicators do you rely on to know if you are effective in in your teaching? What have your evaluations indicated both positive and negatively? How has that evaluation feedback changed your teaching style today?
3. With the constant change of technology, education, media and climate how do you incorporate these elements in your daily teaching responsibilities?
4. What innovations in your area of teaching are exciting to you and why?
5. How do you engage discussion in the classroom and manage sensitive topic areas?
6. What is your experience in teaching students of diverse backgrounds? What methods have proven to be effective and what have you learned from the experience?
7. Describe strategies you have used to create an inclusive learning environment for your students.
8. What is your experience with distance learning, online courses, and using technology in the classroom?
9. What students do you find most challenging to teach?
10. Tell us about a time when you successfully managed a difficult student and a time when you did not.

## Research

1. What aspects of research are most appealing to you?
2. What changes do you see in your specialization? What do you do to adapt to changing conditions?
3. What do you do to keep abreast of developments that impact your field? Or what pedagogical changes do you see on the horizon in your discipline?
4. Some faculty members tell us that they gain some of their most valuable insight regarding the advancement of their work from discussions with colleagues in different areas of specialization. Do you find this to be true of yourself? Why do you think that is (or is not) the case? Have you done anything in particular to promote such discussions?
5. Please tell us about your research interests and how you see them fitting in with the department's/School/University. With whom would you be interested in collaborating with in the department if selected for the position?
6. Please identify what you feel is your most significant work to date and explain why.
7. What grants have you received in the past and what plans do you have to fund your research in the future?

## Service

1. Where does institutional service fit in your role as a faculty member?
2. Describe what service activities mean to you as a faculty member.

## Motivation/Satisfaction

1. What elements of a career in academia are most appealing to you?
2. How do you think your success in this position should be defined and evaluated?
3. In your opinion, how should the workload of a faculty member be split and into what areas?

### **Student Focus**

1. At KU, we strive to be student-oriented in our work. Can you tell me about a time you made a special effort that benefitted a student? What role does student satisfaction play in your work performance?
2. Describe the experience you have had in mentoring. Describe an experience mentoring diverse students, faculty and/or staff.
3. Who have you coached or mentored to achieve success? Provide an example.
4. Diversity of students within our field is important. How do you see yourself contributing to the recruiting and retaining students from diverse and under-represented groups?

### **Professional Growth**

1. As a faculty member, what are your greatest strengths? What are your greatest personal limitations?
2. Tell me about a mistake that you made and how you learned from it?
3. Describe a situation in which you did all the right things, and the outcome was unsuccessful. What did you learn from the experience?
4. What practices do you implement during conflict situations? Are they successful?
5. Tell us about the professional memberships you hold and how you contribute to the organizations as well as what you gain from those associations.
6. What key factors have contributed most to your career progress so far?
7. What is the most difficult obstacle you have had to overcome in your career? How did you handle it?
8. What do you look for in your academic colleagues?

### **Communication/Collaboration**

1. How do you establish good relationships inside/outside the department/institution? Where might you have difficulties, and what ideas do you have for improvement?
2. In a group brainstorming session, would you be more likely to be one of the people quickly generating ideas and alternatives, or would you be inclined to listen, assess, and analyze the ideas of others?
3. How would people who work with you describe your approach to teaching and research?
4. Tell us about a time where you had to work with someone difficult and the outcome. From that experience, what positive things did you learn to use toward relationship building in the future?
5. What motivates you to do your best and what frustrates you that inhibits progress?
6. Within your specialty, have you ever been involved with any team problem solving situations? Please describe the situation and your role in it.
7. Have you ever had to press for support for your views in a work setting? What was the situation and what did you do?
8. What strategies do you employ to explain your research to non-experts?
9. Is speaking in front of groups or to classes something that comes naturally to you or have you had to work at it for a number of years?
10. If you had to convince a reluctant colleague to accept your approach to a particular project, what would you do? Or have you ever experienced a situation in which you had difficulties getting people to accept your ideas? What was your approach to handling these situations?
11. What are the techniques that you use to clarify the meaning of unclear messages?

## Planning/Goals

1. What are your professional goals as a faculty member?
2. Sometimes decisions have to be made, or situations must be resolved, and no one wants to act because a procedure does not exist or is unclear, or no precedent has been set. Have you ever been in such a situation? What happened?
3. As a faculty member, sometimes a difficult decision must be made. Can you provide an example about a difficult decision you were required to make and the outcome? What did you find as the most challenging in addressing the situation?
4. Think of a time when you had to respond quickly to new or changing circumstances. What were the changes and what was your response?
5. You already have a full schedule when another critical problem suddenly arises. How would you handle this problem?

Source Documents:

<sup>1</sup>Latham, Gary. (2009). *Becoming the Evidence-Based Manager*. Boston, MA: Davies-Black.

McClelland, D. C. (1998). Identifying competencies with behavioral-event interviews. *Psychological science*, 9(5), 331-339.

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Pulakos, E. D., & Schmitt, N. (1995). Experience-based and situational interview questions: Studies of validity. *Personnel Psychology*, 48(2), 289-308.

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