

Stanford Law School

Conducting a Non-Discriminatory Interview At Stanford Law School

Stanford law students have diverse backgrounds and experiences. For instance, 35 percent of Stanford Law School students have graduate degrees; over half have worked between graduation from college and entrance into law school; approximately 50 percent are women; 35 percent are the members of racial and ethnic minority groups; and a significant number are gay men or lesbian women. All the students you interview have passed rigorous admission standards and have invested considerable time and energy in their legal education. Stanford Law School asks each employer to evaluate each student according to job-relevant criteria.

A successful interview must provide valuable information both to employers and students. As all of us are aware from the media-- if not our own experiences-- the possibilities for misunderstanding about issues of race, gender, and the like, are manifold.

On the one hand, many students are interested in such policies as the hiring and promotion of candidates who are women, people of color, disabled, or openly gay or lesbian; parental leave and child care benefits; non-traditional working hours (flex-time, part time and job sharing); and access to offices by disabled employees and clients. Interviewers should be prepared to discuss these subjects.

On the other hand, it is important to avoid stereotypes or unwarranted assumptions about a candidate's personal characteristics. For example, assuming that the student is heterosexual or homosexual, that a student's physical disability will prevent him or her from performing adequately on the job, or that a foreign accent implies a lack of proficiency in English. Jokes about race, sex, sexual orientation, and the like that might be acceptable among friends obviously have no place in the interview setting.

Needless to say, it is discriminatory to ask questions selectively of the members of one group but not another. For example, it is illegal to inquire into the undergraduate grades or LSAT scores of minority students but not of other candidates, or to ask women but not men about their family plans or their spouses' occupation. Because these questions so readily lend themselves to being asked or used in a discriminatory manner, some students may perceive them as offensive under any circumstance. We suggest that you consider whether the value of the information gained outweighs the perceptions of bias to which such questions may give rise.