



Minimum and Preferred or Desirable Qualifications

Minimum Qualifications:

Minimum qualifications are the minimum amounts of education or experience and the minimum level of knowledge, skills, abilities, licensures, certifications and other job-related requirements that must be met for a candidate to be considered for a position. The University cannot hire a candidate who does not meet all of the minimum qualifications. No exceptions.

Listing reasonable levels of minimum qualifications, in part to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and to allow us create a reasonably large and diverse pool of applicants meets many business and compliance-related needs of the University. It should not affect negatively the classification level of a position.

We must be careful about creating minimum qualifications that are not directly related to the essential functions of the job. The risk of minimum qualifications that are too high potentially creates a disparate impact on underrepresented and protected group or groups.

For example – by stating that a Master’s degree is required, the University is essentially stating that even if someone had 15+ years of directly related experience, we would not consider them without a master’s degree.

Requiring a Master’s degree for a financial technician or administrative specialist would probably be not defensible. But, there are times when requiring higher levels of education or specific experience and skills is acceptable.

There are many positions that by their nature legitimately require different educational levels. The Law School’s Career Advisor should have J.D. to demonstrate their familiarity with the value of law degrees and the connection to the legal employment market. They key is tying the minimum qualification to an essential function – to the reason the job exists in the first place.

Although qualifications will vary by position, it is good to have approximately the same number of years and same level of educational requirements for positions within the same pay grade. The type of experience or education can and will vary.

Don’t despair – any qualification not included in minimum qualifications may be included or expanded in the preferred qualifications section and be taken into serious consideration.

Using Equivalencies - An equivalency is a minimum qualification that allows for experience to substitute for some education or education to substitute for some experience. For example: Five years’ experience is required or a combination of experience and education totaling five years. Here is the dilemma. How much does education count? What type of education? Does a Master’s degree substitute for all the experience? Are we saying that it’s OK if the candidate has no experience whatsoever? Is it OK if the candidate has experience and just a high school diploma? It is just not clear.

The problem with equivalencies is that they ultimately don't define what the minimum qualification is and therefore, a person screening for minimum qualifications is left to guess what the equivalency means. This can create challenges for the University when asked to defend the screening out of a candidate based on something in the equivalency.

The advantage to equivalencies is they create flexibility and broaden the applicant pool. We can still do this by listing clear and reasonable minimum qualifications and then adding desirable experience or education into the preferred qualifications.

Willamette University wants to move towards clearer, defensible and well-communicated minimum qualifications while preserving the right of hiring managers to select for interviews and hire who they wish (as long as applicants meet the minimum qualifications). In job postings going forward, your HR Business Partner will work with you to develop minimum qualifications that truly communicate the minimums and meet the requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act and our equal opportunity principles and practices.

Preferred or Desirable Qualifications:

Preferred or desirable qualifications are a great tool to use in searching for the right candidate.

One myth we would like to dispel is that a candidate must meet all the preferred qualifications to be considered or hired. This is just not true. Hopefully they meet some or most, but there is **no requirement to meet all of them**. Preferred qualifications should never be used to screen candidates out. They should be used to screen candidates in and to help narrow down the selection process. HR strongly recommends not using them the same way we use minimum qualifications – as a hard and fast disqualifier. Doing so would limit our flexibility and risk compliance-related problems.

Listing experience, education, skills, abilities, licenses etc. under preferred qualifications has many benefits:

- It communicates the qualifications that are important to the University for an employee's long-term success
- It allows for flexibility in hiring because many times, the "perfect" candidate has many but not all of the preferred qualifications
- Having fewer minimum qualifications and more qualifications in the preferred qualifications broadens the applicant pool and makes it easier for candidates from underrepresented groups to qualify and be considered
- It provides guidance (not hard requirements) to a hiring manager or search panel on the types of qualifications to watch for and evaluate in the hiring process