



# UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL *of the* ARTS

## Interviewer Biases

Without formal training interviewers may inadvertently make inappropriate selection choices by misinterpreting the information they receive from selection interviews. Interviewers must take precautions to ensure that their preconceptions don't overly color their judgment. Here are some common factors that may create problems in interviewing.

- Stereotyping** Involves forming generalized opinions about how people of a given gender, religion, or race appear, think, act, feel, or respond. Example: Presuming that a woman would prefer a desk job over working outdoors is stereotyping.
- Inconsistency in questioning** Asking different questions of candidates. Example: Inconsistency in questioning might involve asking only Caucasian male candidates to describe their successes on previous jobs.
- First-impression error** The interviewer makes snap judgments and lets his or her first impression (either positive or negative) cloud the entire interview. Example: Giving more credence to the fact that the candidate graduated from the interviewer's alma mater than to the applicant's knowledge, skills, or abilities is an example of the first-impression error.
- Negative emphasis** Rejecting a candidate on the basis of a small amount of negative information. Research indicates that interviewers give unfavorable information roughly twice the weight of favorable information. Negative emphasis often happens when subjective factors like dress or nonverbal communication taint the interviewer's judgment.
- Halo/horn effect** The interviewer allows one strong point that he or she values highly to overshadow all other information. When this works in the candidate's favor, it is called the halo effect. When it works in the opposition direction, with the interviewer judging the potential employee unfavorably in all areas on the basis of one trait, it is called the horn effect.
- Cultural noise** The failure to recognize responses of a candidate that are socially acceptable rather than factual. Since the candidate wants the job, he or she will be reluctant to tell the interviewer unacceptable facts about himself or herself. The candidate may give responses that are "politically correct" but not very revealing. Example: An employer may comment, "I note that you are applying for a job that has a lot less authority than the job you currently hold. How do you feel about that?" The applicant might say that this is fine even though this is not the case.
- Nonverbal bias** Undue emphasis is placed on nonverbal cues that are unrelated to job performance. Example: Hair length or distracting mannerisms are good examples of nonverbal bias.
- Contrast effect** Strong candidates who interview after weak ones may appear even more qualified than they actually are because of the contrast.
- Similar-to-me error** Picking candidates based on personal characteristics that they share with the interviewer rather than job-related criteria.