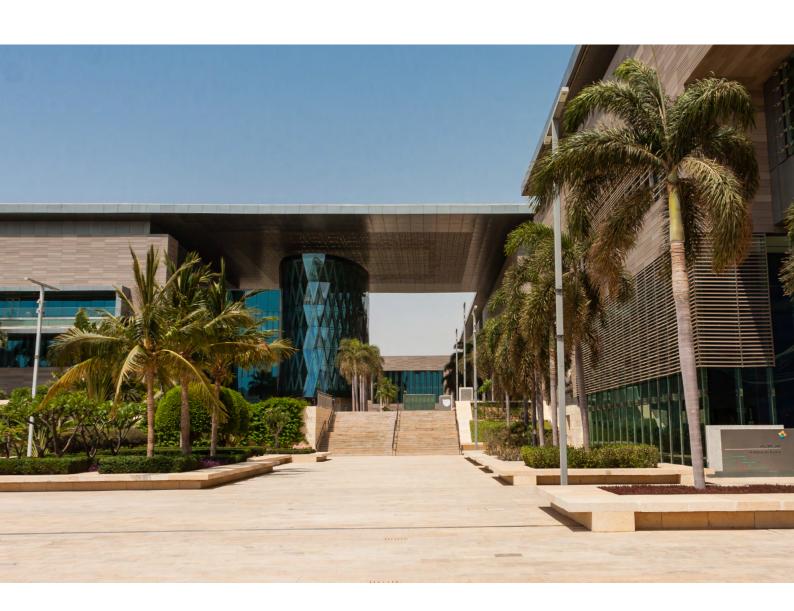# Enhancing the academic hiring process

Discover how KAUST made academic recruitment more transparent, collaborative and efficient to support its ambitious goals.

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King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in Saudi Arabia had around 50 faculty members when its doors first opened in 2009, but the institution has since grown to more than 190 faculty members representing nearly 40 nationalities. This robust global community of faculty serves a mix of Saudi and international students in graduate science and technology disciplines.

KAUST's ambitious growth goals, both for the institution and for faculty, uncovered a need for technology to support recruitment efforts. In particular, the institution wanted to recruit STEM faculty, including instructional faculty and research professors, while ensuring candidate pools were diverse and equitable. To realize these outcomes, the institution implemented Interfolio to make academic recruitment at KAUST more transparent, collaborative, and efficient. During the implementation process, KAUST partnered with Interfolio to offer training and written documentation for key stakeholders—including graduate program coordinators, faculty, deans, and support staff—for a smooth transition to the platform.

Themes discussed:

- Digitizing Recruitment to Find the Right Candidates
- A Time-Saver for Faculty and Fellowship Recruitment
- Greater Insight Into Applicant Data

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Digitizing Recruitment to Find the Right Candidates

KAUST's Faculty Affairs Manager, Suzan Abu-Shakra, learned about Interfolio and was fascinated by the digitization of a process she was used to doing on paper. "At the time, we were still doing faculty applications by paper, believe it or not," shared Abu-Shakra. "Search committee chairs would go through all the CVs submitted to a certain email, and they would print them out. We'd pass them on to all the search committee members to look at them, grade them, shortlist them, and then they'll go through that process."

Shifting to a digital approach has helped streamline recruitment and hiring at KAUST. "With the help of Interfolio, we've enhanced our search, our advertising, and the whole process of shortlisting and choosing the right candidate. So it's a great tool for me," Abu-Shakra explained. "You enter your notes and annotations, share comments, and highlight parts of a CV—in total confidence. It basically changed the whole scene."

Abu-Shakra also emphasized the benefits seen with Interfolio's integration with other campus systems. "The API enhancement also helped us, because now we post any position on Interfolio, and it talks automatically to our job board on the university website," she said. "That job board then talks to all the advertising agencies—everywhere it automatically feeds—so I don't have to worry, except for putting my position properly in Interfolio."

A Time-Saver for Faculty and Fellowship Recruitment

KAUST doesn't just use Interfolio for faculty recruitment—the team also finds it useful for postdoctoral fellow search. Given that they may see more than one thousand applications for a single postdoctoral position, this has been a tremendous time-saver when it comes to filtering through applicants. "Interfolio has helped us a lot in clearing the noise," shared Abu-Shakra. "Once you know how to advertise for a position—how to put your questions in the right way and use your filters—you save yourself a lot of time."

Along the way, Abu-Shakra has discovered actions she and her team can take on their end to make the process even easier in the long run. In particular, she highlighted the value of the forms that help filter applications exactly how they need to be categorized. "That will help the first layer of revision to be much easier," she said. "You will be able to weed out all the people who do not even meet the minimum requirements, so I highly recommend putting in extra effort when building your ad."

Abu-Shakra also noted how useful the reporting capability is when summarizing activities for the year, such as how many applications they reviewed and how many people applied. In their previous system, it could take days to track down data about applicants—such as whether or not they had any applicants from a specific country within the past year. Now, that data is readily available in Interfolio with just a few clicks. "It tells us a lot of stories," said Abu-Shakra. "That will help us direct our recruitment campaigns: Where are we lacking applicants? How are we going to direct our future recruitment? Which areas in the world we're not getting to, and how do we work on that?"

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"We try to minimize the admin work on faculty,
and this is exactly what Interfolio does."

—Suzan Abu-Shakra
Faculty Affairs Manager
King Abdullah University of Science & Technology

Greater Insight Into Applicant Data

The forward-thinking leadership team at KAUST looks for solutions that benefit faculty and staff, which includes automating processes and implementing systems that make their lives easier. "We try to minimize the admin work on faculty," said Abu-Shakra, "and this is exactly what Interfolio does. The system is structured in a way that they can look at the applications in whatever view they want." For example, KAUST finds Interfolio beneficial when summarizing PhD applicants: Where are their PhDs from? What disciplines are they in? What nationality are they? "This saves us a lot of work, and leadership is very supportive and encourages the platform to be used."

Abu-Shakra believes that the success of Interfolio at KAUST comes in part from buy-in from both senior leadership and faculty, who are the main drivers of the system. In addition to the training that they underwent when Interfolio was implemented, Abu-Shakra also set up a helpline in her office within faculty affairs to offer timely assistance should any questions arise.

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