

Case study: New York University

Improving consistency and transparency

Learn how New York University (NYU) addressed inefficiencies and a need for uniformity in existing processes to achieve hiring and academic administration goals



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Introduction

While, today, New York University manages faculty employment workflows via both the Interfolio Faculty Search and Interfolio Review, Promotion & Tenure modules, the circumstances driving their adoption of the two systems were very different.

NYU's choice of the Faculty Search module for hiring was a top-down decision based on the University needing better reporting and insights around where applicants were learning about positions, how search committees were administering searches, and ways to increase and diversify applicant pools.

The institution's adoption of the Review, Promotion & Tenure module for professional evaluations, on the other hand, was seen as an opportunity to enhance existing processes — without any pressure from the Provost's office.

“To be able to have faculty buy-in to a system which impacts important mile-stones and processes for them is huge — and I think it’s a testament to the kind of care and quality Interfolio puts into their products.”

Michael McCaw

Associate Director of Academic Appointments, Office of the Provost
New York University

Adopting Interfolio for faculty hiring campus-wide

Before moving to Interfolio for either faculty hiring or faculty reviews, New York University had struggled with a cumbersome faculty recruiting platform, resulting in hiring processes that were not as efficient or effective as desired. Faculty, staff, and administrators were not supportive of the legacy system.

Because NYU’s Office of the Provost sponsored the former platform, users regularly contacted that office for troubleshooting requests and other issues, which required significant time from staff.

“We wanted a system that required minimal effort, saved time for participants, provided easy access to reporting, and allowed the Provost’s Office to be more strategic and intentional in their support of faculty recruitment,” says Michael McCaw, Associate Director of Academic Appointments. “We sought a two-pronged approach: first, provide better support for end users of hiring processes, and, second, leverage data gathered to assist with diversity and equity initiatives. And we believed technology could be a big driver for both.”

Response

NYU’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development initially adopted Interfolio Faculty Search to enhance their recruitment practices and ensure the school was recruiting the best talent. Within about six months, the entire university expressed interest in the platform, seeing an opportunity to streamline and improve the effectiveness of the system. As a result, use of the Interfolio Faculty Search module was expanded to the entire NYU organization, including eighteen schools and colleges across the globe.

Results

Having a comprehensive, coordinated solution for faculty searches paid dividends immediately, providing better reporting on applicant pools and the outreach used to generate those pools.

NYU put effort into posting positions in venues that had not been explored before, and was able to measure the response therefrom. As a result, the University expanded beyond their traditional sources into social media outlets. They found those outlets helped increase applicant pools by over 25% and improved inclusion and diversity efforts for select positions.

In addition, the University saw further improvements over the former system. “The support built into Faculty Search was the first game changer for us,” says McCaw, “where we had less reliance on the Provost Office and more empowerment of the local or school user.”



Expanding to Interfolio Review, Promotion & Tenure

NYU realized there were additional challenges related to key faculty lifecycle workflows, like annual review, promotion, and tenure. Two key issues were the inefficiencies and lack of uniformity involved in the existing manual, paper-based systems.

“Seeing the capabilities, success, and potential of Faculty Search got us thinking about pain points related to our review, promotion, and tenure processes,” says McCaw of these concerns. “Each school and college was trying to adopt its own technology and system to support reviews — and the paper-based processes that involved printing out binders or scanning materials and sending them as PDFs was not sufficient.”

Technology fatigue was another concern. Many academic units had been hashing together multiple platforms to create workflows that assured proper security and appropriate handoffs. In this environment, things that by nature should have been simple turned out to be remarkably complicated. For example, having to train faculty and department chairs to use multiple systems just to support one type of review process presented a pain point for users across campus. And the technology fatigue created worry for faculty, especially for processes where candidates had a lot at stake, like promotion or 10-year review.

Lack of transparency created additional friction. In some cases, committees were not getting review materials in a timely fashion; in others, administrative reviewers were holding up processes. Regardless of the system, there was no efficient way to track the status of the process other than word of mouth.

Response

These challenges, combined with NYU’s positive experience with Interfolio’s hiring module, provided an opportunity to expand the relationship between the University and Interfolio. The Interfolio Review, Promotion & Tenure module provided a digital solution with transparency and accountability for stakeholders — all under one roof. As McCaw notes, “The new system gave our faculty relief to know they only had to worry about logging in.”

And from an administrator’s standpoint, the transparency provided the ability to report and communicate the status of all candidate submissions, which empowered administrators to be more thoughtfully involved, instead of having to defend the system.

Fortunately the two academic workflow modules from Interfolio (for hiring and for faculty evaluations, respectively) were alike in many ways. They have the same user interface and offer similar ways for reviewers to access and evaluate candidate materials. The opportunity to create familiarity between the two modules helped faculty to see Interfolio as a workflow hub to support key moments in their careers, which created buy-in. “Having consistency with the modules,” explains McCaw, “really helped with user acceptance and adoption, which made the transition to the Review, Promotion & Tenure module a lot smoother.”

“If you are thinking about enhancing or streamlining your processes, make sure you understand the process so you can articulate it in a way that your colleagues understand. Each school thought it was a snowflake, that they did things a bit differently, and then to be able to see that they were the same as the other units made a big difference.”

Michael McCaw

Associate Director of Academic Appointments, Office of the Provost
New York University

The impact of a survey

Evaluating faculty in any large comprehensive institution, like NYU, poses challenges due to the differences in faculty and processes. Even the activities of faculty members can be very different. For example, faculty in the sciences were focused on grant funding and journal publications, while faculty in the arts were focused on creative works and productions. These differences understandably can create anxiety for faculty adopting a single product, not to mention concerns about trust and buy-in. As a result, many academic units believed there could not be a central approach to supporting academic review, promotion, and tenure processes. Each discipline saw their instances as unique, not having a lot in common across the institution.

In response to this perception, McCaw initiated the implementation process with a survey of all of the schools/colleges, intended to identify what their processes looked like in terms of documentation required from faculty candidates and workflow used.

Surprisingly, the results indicated that about 85% of the processes were consistent across all the schools, regardless of the disciplines represented.

While initially planning to create 18 unique templates in Interfolio Review, Promotion & Tenure, one for each of the schools/colleges, they ended up with only three. In reality, it turned out, all the disciplines were having pretty much the same experience — and, from an administrative standpoint, that made template creation in Interfolio much simpler.

Unexpectedly, this discovery had an impact on morale. The results fostered a sense of confidence, understanding, and camaraderie. Faculty members were more willing to share and support one another, which opened up valuable lines of communication and understanding between schools and units. “It was easy to pick up the phone and call a colleague in another department or division, or send an email out to the entire user community within the institution,” McCaw relates. “Just that spirit — and supporting a similar process — increased empathy in a large institution like NYU.” The system spurred valuable dialogue between schools who were asking new questions on how to improve their processes using the Interfolio platform.

Additional benefits attributable to the survey results included a smoother implementation and roll-out and increased buy-in. For one example, the University offered two points in time as options for users to begin using the system. Everyone opted for the earlier start date.

And because there was more consistency in the approach of evaluations, conversations were commonly focused on how they could use the tool better.



Benefits from the new adoption

NYU saw many benefits from the Interfolio platform itself. Here is a discussion of some of the most significant outcomes from New York University's adoption of Interfolio Faculty Search and Interfolio Review, Promotion & Tenure:

1. Benefits for Provost Office

Under the old system, the Provost Office handled troubleshooting questions and technical issues, which required academic units to connect with the Provost's staff — not a good use of their time.

Interfolio's dedicated support, however, provided significant improvements, allowing users to get help faster, and get detailed responses from the Interfolio support team. This change in support structure allowed the Provost Office to focus on managing review processes and assessing the data as the basis for strategic initiatives related to faculty workload equity and enhanced professional development support for faculty up for milestone reviews.

As a result, the solution has improved the quality of life for the faculty involved and for the staff who support the senior leaders who are using this data. "It's freed up a lot of time and made things a lot more streamlined and simple," says McCaw. "The impact on people has been noticeable as end-users need significantly less time — by hours or even days — to answer important questions." Furthermore, moving to Interfolio created an immersive professional development opportunity for faculty, allowing University administration to invest in faculty and support the continuous improvement of their most valuable asset: the faculty.

2. Benefits for faculty

Faculty felt more comfortable and confident having all their key career moments within one easy-to-use, transparent platform.

3. Benefits for staff

Staff realized these lifecycle moments were difficult processes that impacted a faculty member's trajectory — there was a lot at stake. Staff members wanted to make sure they were able to thoughtfully respond to the needs of faculty candidates and address their anxieties. Having improved levels of access and transparency reduced headaches and anxiety points. Staff were able to start thinking more creatively, outside the box, which made them feel more empowered in supporting faculty.

4. Benefits for the future of NYU

With the Interfolio platform, NYU enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of its faculty workflow processes into the future. These new academic workflow solutions gave NYU the ability to identify ways to make faculty hiring and review processes a little bit easier, a little bit more streamlined. And the culture shift has helped NYU leadership and staff think about other things that could be improved. "It gets us to think more holistically about the faculty lifecycle and how we could start supporting all those things," says McCaw. "So rather than it just being a system a faculty member uses at a particular point in time, how do we make it more a part of your academic life? I've been excited by seeing people state thinking more about processes. What are the things that are involved? How do we make things a little bit smoother? It has gotten people to not get so hung up on tools, and to think more strategically and tactically about how to make things easier and better."



About Interfolio

Interfolio's innovative Faculty Information System enables academic leaders to achieve strategic success and drive institutional impact. Trusted by more than 425 institutions worldwide, the Faculty Information System streamlines processes for faculty hiring and recruitment, academic appointments and timelines, activity data reporting, and reviews and promotions.

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