Gary A. Olson, dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at Illinois State University, shares the secrets to attracting first-rate applicants in a new Heads Up column:

Design a Web site dedicated to the search with links that will showcase the institution and the community.

Advertise in multiple venues so “the greatest number of people have the potential to see the announcement.”

A little extra personal attention goes a long way. “For positions above entry-level, especially administrative ones,” send “personal letters to individuals inviting them to apply or to nominate others.” Make personal calls to a chosen few.

Think of the interview process as a kind of courtship and give candidates who visit your campus the “red-carpet treatment.”

Don’t take no for an answer. Don’t let a candidate slip through your fingers because you failed to negotiate.

Many search committees think it’s just a matter of placing a job ad and sitting back and waiting for people to apply, or that if you build “shiny new facilities,” they will come, he writes.

That may work in the movies (note the Field of Dreams reference), but in real life, passivity breeds mediocrity, he writes. “If we are to build outstanding departments and colleges, we need to take a page from the athletics playbook and aggressively pursue the best and the brightest” and sell them on the institution and the job, he writes.

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