

# MERITOCRACY AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY

## BROWN BAG SERIES

Hoffman Center for Business Ethics

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**Friday, October 18th, 2024**

**1:30 p.m. to 2:45 p.m.**

In person: AAC 254. Zoom: [Register Here](#)

Any evaluation of meritocracy, or the idea of fair equality of opportunity, must make sense of what it is to select someone for a job or other position on the basis of merit. But the idea of merit is difficult to pin down. There may be a variety of reasons to pick one candidate and not another for a **job**, and not all of them need concern whether the candidate will be effective at the job. Even if we focus on the idea of effectiveness, it can be hard to say what counts as effective, and not all reasons of effectiveness will seem fair or legitimate to count. Consider one facet of the problem. Let us say that qualifications are those criteria that confirm that a candidate for a job will be effective at the job. Reaction qualifications are qualifications that are partly grounded in the reactions of any of those with whom a candidate would properly interact on the job: managers, coworkers, or customers (“recipients”). When are reaction qualifications legitimate? Surveying examples suggests that we should neither discount all reaction qualifications nor countenance them all. I argue that a selector should not take reaction qualifications into account when doing so amounts to condoning an objectionable social hierarchy. This requires anti-meritocratic selections in some instances, but only in service of cultivating meritocratic institutions.

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