Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for University of Maryland; Department of Environmental Science and Technology

This is what was found by Environmental Science and Technology at University of Maryland on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve. These questions were answered not only within our pod, but also with the assistance of our department’s graduate program director.

Note: We acknowledge this information is not always accessible to students and even staff. If you do not have access to this information, please reflect on your own experience and outline what admissions and/or hiring should be like to foster a diverse and inclusive community.

- What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement\(^1\) is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available\(^2\)?

  "While we don’t necessarily have standard GA ads, the point is still well taken. We should ask the DEIR committee to develop something appropriate for any GA announcement we put out."

- Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?

Advertise positions poorly and only in relevant societies;

  "Because this is largely up to individual faculty as they seek to fill an available GA, there is no standard answer to this question."

- What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores\(^3\)/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?

  - "Personal statement"
  - 3 letters of recommendation
  - Transcript

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\(^2\) https://careers.whoi.edu/opportunities/diversity-inclusion/
\(^5\) https://www.brandeis.edu/diversity/dei-recruitment-hiring/rubric-for-evaluating-diversity-statements.html
• How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?

“Because we do not bring in a “cohort” these kinds of approaches (standardized rubric) are less applicable. However, what we do is have 3 faculty (who work in the student’s general area of interest) provide 3 independent reviews of the applicant’s qualifications and package. We require one faculty member to be willing to serve as the student’s advisor. If an applicant gets strong reviews, but none of the reviewers wish to advise, we then inform the rest of the faculty to see if anyone else would have an interest (and maybe funding) in advising the student. If there is a faculty member willing (who wants) to advise the student, we will normally admit the student (barring any especially serious issues/problems that might be present in the application package).”

• Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?

“After following the review process described above, the Graduate Committee meets to make the final decision, based upon the faculty reviews and recommendations. Almost always the Grad committee’s decision reflects the faculty recommendations, but it provides a “check” and accountability.”

Department chair decides? Confirmed; he picks the chair of committee

• Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?

only for high profile hirings, like the dean; they monitored the hiring process throughout. Small searches are just 3-5 people.

Our admissions process (as well as out entire graduate program) was reviewed by the external departmental review committee that came through a couple of years ago.

I guess the bottom line on all of this is that in our department, it really boils down to decisions of individual faculty members. When a faculty member gets funding and they need a GA, they find someone in whom they are willing to invest and someone who also
wishes to come under their mentorship. (What that particular process looks like from person to person probably varies a great deal.) Given our funding model for GAs, there doesn’t really seem to be any other approach that is feasible. Therefore, it seems to me that the most effective way to increase diversity among our graduate students, is to 1) provide assistance/guidance to faculty regarding how they can solicit applications from diverse candidates (i.e. links/contacts/events at HBCUs etc), and 2) help faculty to understand and embrace the value of having a more diverse group of graduate students.

Note: this statement below was included in a recent ENST GA advertisement that a faculty member sent out (although I don’t know that it is a “standard” statement. It looks to me like it was “grabbed” from someplace else . . . It seems to me like something a little more robust might be able to be developed.)

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Has your university or company implemented or considered strategies like cohort hiring, mentoring, dual career support and partner hires, re-visioning your work culture, or other considerations outlined in “Leveraging Promising Practices”?

“I am glad you are having this discussion, and I’d be glad to facilitate in any way that would be helpful. As I read through this list of questions, it strikes me that they are very good questions, but because of the way that our program is organized and funded (or not) some of the questions may potentially be less germane to our grad program (by itself). I actually think much of the critical language should be generally posted on our Departmental website. So if it is not there, we should do so. I would also favor adding a statement on our grad program page that says something about the way we value diversity and are seeking to increase the diversity of our graduate student population.

The other thing to keep in mind is that when we bring on GAs we are not technically “hiring” them for a job in the same way that other job positions might be filled. Rather there is a mutual agreement that the student will be guided and mentored by this particular faculty member (remember we accept no grad student into our department unless/until a particular faculty member agrees to serve as their advisor – which is different from the way some other programs operate).

I would affirm that at any point at which we are actually advertising a position (GA), there should be some basic DEIR statement. The issue is that, while occasionally we do, often we don’t broadly advertise positions. Students simply apply or reach out to individual faculty. Unlike many departments, we don’t actually have a group of GA positions (a cohort) that we are trying to fill each year (how I wish we did!). As each individual faculty member gets a grant, they will then be looking to fill (or may already have someone in mind for) that particular (single) GA. So it seems that one way to increase the diversity of our graduate student population, is to 1) help faculty appreciate the value of increased diversity, and 2) provide tools for faculty to assist them in recruiting diverse applicants.”