Deliverable 5

Admissions and Hiring Policies

The faculty in our URGE group outlined the procedures used for hiring and admissions since the students were generally unaware of the process.

At GSO, faculty interviews are conducted by a faculty committee. This is mandated by our contract. The committee gives evaluations to the Dean of GSO who is responsible for recommending the person to hire to the Provost of URI. Historically, URI HR and the Affirmative Action Office provided some guidelines for running a fair and unbiased search but it was the impression of one member of the committee that these guidelines while helpful were somewhat focused on avoiding lawsuits rather than helping to promote diversity. Search committee members are supposed to attend a workshop run by the Affirmative Action Office. The faculty, in their evaluation, can stress that a candidate might improve diversity and evaluate the candidates’ commitment to and plans for improving diversity but it is ultimately the Dean’s decision how much to weigh this information. The faculty, as a whole, has recently discussed the need and possible ways to increase diversity but beyond an improvement in general awareness, no specific steps have been taken.

For recent searches, GSO has used a set of unofficial written guidelines, informed by best practices to avoid bias and promote diversity, to run faculty searches. It is up to each search committee to decide if they will specifically ask candidates how they will promote diversity and if there is evidence of past activity to do this. Recent searches have done this. The most recent search required a diversity statement. An open discussion on how a search can foster DEI can help the committee to reduce bias. The use of rubrics that include evaluating candidates in terms of their potential impact on diversity is encouraged as it can help reduce the implicit bias.

The short list of candidates to be interviewed must be approved by the Affirmative Action Office, although the search committee has no knowledge of whether the candidates who they select for this list are from an underrepresented group. Affirmative Action is particularly concerned with whether the agreed upon job qualification where fairly applied in the evaluation of all the candidates for the development of the short list to be interviewed.
Student admission is a multi-tiered process that is entirely determined by the faculty. Recently, we have gotten rid of the mandatory GRE. This year URI made a small number of diversity fellowships available. There has been some talk of partnering with a predominantly minority serving undergraduate institution to increase the number of under-represented graduate students but this has not happened. This is something the URGE faculty participants could help move forward.

Proposed Changes

To improve the number of low economic status and underrepresented undergraduate students across all marine science/engineering fields (marine biology, physical oceanography, geological oceanography, ocean engineering, fishegers/aquaculture), URI is initiating a tuition scholarship and mentoring program that includes a five years masters program (master of oceanography or ocean engineering). The Ocean Scholars Program (OSP) will recruit low socio-economic status students both from the incoming cohort of URI freshmen, as well as nationally. We will leverage our relationships with current marine-focused high schools to create interest in our program and broaden our application base. In addition to meeting students' financial need, the OSP is designed to address numerous psychological contingencies that the literature has shown to disproportionately affect low SES students.

We also recommend that GSO make a commitment (stated in GSO’s strategic plan) to developing a collaboration(s) with HBCU/MSI institutions. These collaborations could include:
- co-development of courses
- co-development of research projects
- joint MS-PhD programs
- joint BS-MS programs
- joint faculty appointments

A good starting point for GSO could be to have the Dan assign a faculty person the task of:

1) finding faculty who might have research areas in common with GSO that might lead to collaborations
2) sending out inquiries from the relevant faculty/dean to see if there is mutual interest that could lead to
   I. exchanges both ways of students and faculty including joint seminar series,
   II. inviting their faculty and students to present research they are engaged in our courses and vice versa and,
   III. further developing summer opportunities for their students/faculty.