Part I: Admissions

Overview of current practice

Admission to the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Marine Science (IGPMS) at UCSB is decentralized, meaning that all admitted students must be matched to a graduate advisor before being admitted to the program. IGPMS grants near complete autonomy to faculty members in selecting which students to admit to their laboratories.

IGPMS has a Graduate Committee of six faculty members, including the IGPMS Chair, Vice Chair, and Diversity Officer. The Grad Committee oversees three sources of funding for new students: Central Campus Fellowships (awarded at the campus level), a Regents’ Fellowship, and Block Grant funding (both awarded at the program level). Applications to the doctoral program have increased steadily over the last decade, from 28 applicants in 2013 to 50 for fall 2021.

The UCSB Graduate Division (‘Grad Div’) allows IGPMS to nominate up to 5 applicants for three Central Campus Fellowship opportunities; for the 2021-2022 recruitment year IGPMS was awarded two nominations for each fellowship. To select these nominees, the Grad Committee solicits nominations from IGPMS faculty. In addition, for the 2021-2022 recruiting class, the Grad Committee piloted a new approach to selecting Central Fellowship nominations, in part motivated by the waived GRE requirement for the 2021-2022 cohort due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Every application was read by at least two members of the Grad Committee. Candidates were evaluated on a scale of 1-4 using the four-category rubric developed by Grad Div, which lists attributes in four categories: Academic Performance, Motivational Attributes, Skills and Research Potential, and Diversity Contributions. Scores were normalized across the committee members to account for variation in scale among reviewers, and the top 13 candidates (i.e. the top ~25%) were then evaluated by all members of the Grad Committee. Each committee member then ranked their top three choices for each fellowship. This process ensured that all IGPMS applications received a holistic review by multiple faculty members. As in all years, IGPMS faculty members were contacted individually about specific student applicants if it was felt there were good fits between the student’s and the faculty member’s interests.

Potential equity gaps
During our sub-Pod meeting we discussed and identified several points in our Recruitment and Admissions process where equity gaps may exist. We discussed that some prospective students may be unfamiliar with the overall graduate admissions process, the critical need to build a relationship with a prospective advisor, and how their applications will be evaluated post-application. We discussed that a prospective student’s first contact with the program is typically an email response (or lack thereof) from an IGPMS faculty member. Students may not be trained in what these initial contact emails should look like; time-limited faculty are often predisposed to ignoring poorly-crafted emails from students outside their normal recruiting avenues. Faculty expressed that “risk aversion” does contribute to an unwillingness to admit students without prior research experiences, particularly for early-career faculty. Funding was seen as a critical avenue to overcoming this risk aversion; allocation of TAships by cognate departments and IGPMS financial resources could help change this.

Proposed policy and process changes

- Improve information on the IGPMS website about the admissions process and provide additional resources on graduate school preparation, how to contact faculty, and how admissions decisions are made. (A draft guide was prepared as part of the IGPMS DEI Working Group in fall. Available here and comments welcome until April 30)
- Add specific prompts and/or more guidelines for the Statement of Purpose and Personal Contributions Statement. This could actually ease the review of applications if students know what they are being evaluated for. Make evaluation categories public.
- Hold a virtual Open House/Application Workshop in Fall to provide more concrete details about the application process. Advertise this event widely, especially in forums and channels specifically serving low-income students and communities of color (e.g. SACNAS, McNair Scholars, #BlackInMarineScience). Record public portion and consider pre-recording a separate video for those that are unable to attend.
- Construct an optional email template for faculty to use in responding to graduate student inquiries that directs them to the IGPMS website resources (above) as well as additional resources for gaining additional research experience (technician jobs, bridge programs, etc.). AES will write a draft and circulate to faculty.
- Conduct an “equity check” in Fall and ask faculty to reflect on whether their response to student inquiries is equitable. Discuss at the upcoming faculty retreat--a review of the subjective points in the application process.
- Officially adopt the holistic application review system used in 2021-2022 for future years. This might need to be reviewed if application numbers continue to rise. For example, we may need to have all faculty planning on recruiting a student participate.
- Hold a faculty vote on permanently removing the GRE requirement (Will be discussed at IGPMS faculty meeting 4/1.)
- Designate the Regent’s fellowship to a candidate that contributes to the diversity of IGPMS, potentially using students not successful at the campus level for the Central Merit/Diversity Fellowship. This fellowship can also be allocated to an existing student.
- Pursue external funding to specifically fund scholarship and research fellowships to increase pathways to our program for underrepresented students.
Part II: Hiring

Current practice


IGPMS is not a department and therefore does not hold Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions for faculty. In the past, FTE for marine science positions were awarded to IGPMS to search, and a home department for the candidate was identified during the negotiation phase of hiring. A new hiring model was proposed in IGPMS’s last FTE plan, recommending that a home department be identified for candidates prior to the initiation of a search.

All academic searches require an approved search plan, which includes considerations of advertising the position to reach the broadest possible pool of prospective applicants. These extensive plans also include detailed lists of the criteria that will be evaluated at each stage of the process. Despite these requirements, there is still considerable variation in how academic searches are run in practice that may impact equity outcomes, including committee composition, committee training, the use of rubrics in candidate evaluation, and the weighting of Diversity Statements in candidate evaluations. There is no campus-wide requirement for the inclusion of a Diversity Statement in the hiring process.

A recent search plan created for the Marine Science Institute Director search, led by IGPMS faculty, included some changes to standard practice. The search plan required a Diversity Statement as part of the application materials, Implicit Bias training was required of all search committee members, and a graduate student voting member was included on the committee. In the past, graduate students on hiring committees have typically been hand-selected by the hiring committee and are not always given voting power. For this search, students across four departments (EEMB, Earth Science, Geography, and Bren) represented in IGPMS held a vote to select four student members of the search committee that would have a single vote. IGPMS students voted only within their “home departments” and attention was paid to ensure that the elected students represented diverse backgrounds. Unfortunately, this search was put on hold to be resumed next academic year and the outcome of these procedural changes on hiring outcomes cannot be evaluated.

Potential equity gaps

Our sub-Pod discussion identified that Implicit Bias training alone was likely insufficient for addressing equity issues on hiring committees. In particular, search committees are typically not trained on how to evaluate Diversity Statements. There was discussion of further broadening job postings and the need for faculty to broaden their own professional networks. We discussed the homophily problem of faculty tending to favor candidates with backgrounds that resemble themselves and often varying opinions of what a “successful” candidate looks like. We further
discussed the need to revisit the traditional hiring committee model and consider that a program-wide review of candidates may be warranted. The program could be doing a better job of advertising ongoing diversity initiatives to communicate efforts to improve the climate within IGPMS for URM candidates. Finally, it was acknowledged that the very positions we choose to search could impact our ability to recruit a diverse applicant pool.

**Proposed policy changes**

- IGPMS will partner with Grad Div to support faculty participation in conferences targeted at URM. Remind faculty of Academic Senate awards for travel to conferences.
- Faculty will work with students to improve the list of outlets in which faculty positions are advertised, in particular social media networks.
- Commit to including language in faculty job advertisements that specifically articulates the value IGPMS/department/community places on contributions to diversity, beyond standard equal opportunity statements (e.g. Option 2 [here](#)).
- Require a Diversity Statement for all positions, provide information on what they should include, and train search committees on how to evaluate them.
- Commit to using a formal rubric which includes diversity contributions on all faculty search committees. [UC Berkeley has an example](#) we plan to adapt for IGPMS.
- Bring in UC Presidential Postdoctoral Fellowships for IGPMS seminars and seriously assess the possibility of recruiting them as faculty members (see [https://ppfp.ucop.edu/info/](https://ppfp.ucop.edu/info/)).
- Look outside IGPMS and engage faculty from other departments/units on search committees that can help better evaluate and advocate for equitable hires. Engage the AVC for DEI for help with this.