Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for UMCES/Horn Point Laboratory

This is what was found by the Horn Point Laboratory (HPL) pod at the University of Maryland Center for Environment Science (UMCES) HPL on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve.

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

EEO statement on a current job posting: “The University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science is an equal opportunity employer. The Center’s policies, programs, and activities are in conformance with pertinent Federal and State laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, color, religion, age, national origin, sex, and disability. Inquiries regarding compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Title IX of the Educational Amendments; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; or related legal requirements should be directed to the Director of Human Relations, Center Administration, P.O. Box 775, Cambridge, MD 21613.”

Excerpt from most recent faculty job ad: “Diversity, equity, and inclusion are core values at UMCES. Successful candidates for this position will be expected to collaborate effectively with diverse colleagues and students. We strongly encourage applications from underrepresented groups, including individuals with disabilities, veterans, and women.”

**Recommendations:**
- UMCES established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Collaborative (DEIC) in June 2020. While there is a link to the DEIC webpage under “myUMCES”, it should be highlighted on the home pages of the UMCES and HPL websites.
- The DEI committee at HPL should be highlighted on the HPL website.
- Include a link to the DEIC web page on all job postings following the diversity statements.

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

All job advertisements are posted on the UMCES website for at least 2 weeks. Otherwise, strategies tend to differ by job classification:

- Faculty and postdoctoral researcher ads are placed on academic job boards and sent to professional society publications (e.g. EOS). Ads are circulated by individual faculty.

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5. https://www.brandeis.edu/diversity/dei-recruitment-hiring/rubric-for-evaluating-diversity-statements.html
members to their professional networks. Ads for a recent faculty hire were sent to the National Association of Black Geoscientists (NABG), Advancing Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), and the Earth Science Women’s Network (ESWN).

- Faculty research assistants (FRAs) tend to be recruited by individual faculty members and rely more on informal circulation among professional networks. Hourly FRA positions do not need to be advertised.

- Student ads tend to be more informal, recruited by individual faculty members and/or via contact through professional networks. Some students apply directly to the MEES program and then find an advisor with whom to work. UMCES usually has a booth at professional society meetings to advertise graduate student opportunities.

- Staff ads are placed in local newspapers: Salisbury and the Star Democrat.

Ads are often limited by department resources. Social media (e.g. Twitter) is increasingly being used to recruit students, post-docs, and faculty.

Recommendations:
- Aid UMCES HR in developing a list of places and practices for advertising to attract a diverse pool of applicants that is provided to all individuals seeking to hire.
- Encourage posting job advertisements on LinkedIn, as well as the UMCES social media feeds such as Twitter and Facebook.
- Develop a hashtag list for diverse institutions and science societies. For example: #blackinstem #BlackinMarineScience #BIPOC #WomenInSTEM #MinoritiesinSTEM #LGBTQinSTEM
- Increase budget for advertising and recruiting to reach a broader audience
- Research where people hear about jobs and consider ways to reach out better to local communities - Facebook postings, community and social services.
- Research job services and fairs at community colleges such as Wor-Wic and Chesapeake College, as well as other institutions like Salisbury University, UMES, St Mary’s College of Maryland.
- To aid in student recruiting, send faculty/students to SACNAS conference and consider hosting a booth there.
- Reach out to student clubs at local colleges eg. UMD, Salisbury, UMES to talk about careers and study in Marine science. (e.g. The Black Engineers Society’s chapter
mission is “to recruit, retain and release qualified minorities into fields of computer science, engineering, mathematics and physical sciences”

- Research diversity in MEES applicants. Consider having the DEIC review all applicants to MEES across foundations to highlight diverse applicants for review by faculty.

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

- Faculty: letter of application, curriculum vitae, statement of research, statement of graduate teaching interests, copies of three most relevant publications, and contact information of three academic references should be submitted.

- FRAs: requirements vary depending on the recruiting faculty member.

- Students: requirements are set by the MEES program and include: official transcripts of all college-level work; an essay describing reasons for applying to graduate school and examples of applicant’s determination, initiative, and creativity; a brief essay clearly defining areas of research interest and research objectives; current CV or resume; three letters of recommendation from persons familiar with the academic work of the applicant. Official Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores are optional and not considered as a criteria for admission into the program but are made available to potential faculty advisors. Most international applicants will be required to submit TOEFL or IELTS exam scores. $75 application fee.

- Staff: Cover letter, resume, and list of references. Applicants can offer a writing sample or an example relevant to the position.

Recommendations:

- Clarify student essay questions with more specific prompts.
- Develop short video vignettes to explain MEES and the application process in a friendly way and explain what we’re looking for in an essay (What is MEES - cross institutional graduate program, How to apply to the MEES program, What are the MEES foundations, How to find an advisor, How to apply effectively to showcase your strengths, What kind of work do HPL MEES graduates do?).
- Drop the GRE entirely.
• Consider dropping the three publications component for the faculty requirements and instead ask them to submit a publication they are particularly proud of and to briefly describe its novelty and impact. (Quality not quantity).

• Add a short statement describing activities/collaborations/plans for enhancing diversity equity and inclusion in the faculty member’s laboratory.

How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric\textsuperscript{4,5} public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?

• Faculty candidates are evaluated by a search committee of \textasciitilde 5 faculty members with closely related research interests, and often including at least one member from a different laboratory within the institution. The search committee for the most recent hire met prior to reviewing any applications to establish a rubric. The rubric included multiple ways of demonstrating proficiency in each category. The rubric is not public.

• FRA candidates are evaluated by individual faculty members and anyone else they choose to include in the process. The process is individual to the PI. Introducing standardization of this process across the institution could help avoid biases.

• Student applications are reviewed by the admissions committee of the MEES foundation to which the student applies. Most foundations use a rubric to evaluate applications. This rubric is not public.
  
  ○ The GRE remains a matter of discussion within the MEES Program Committee, which sets the admissions criteria. It is optional right now.
  
  ○ The essay prompts on MEES application are very vague,
  
  ○ Undergraduate grades suffer from some of the same socioeconomic biases as the GRE
  
  ■ To get exceptional students that have sub-standard undergraduate grades into the MEES program is needed, a reliable system in which these students can prove themselves while also identifying their needs or academic deficiencies so that they can thrive after matriculation.

• Staff: A committee and committee leader, composed of student, staff, and faculty, is assigned by the Lab Director or Assistant Lab Director to review all applications, determine means to rank applicants, rank applicants and set up virtual interviews. There are no standardized criteria or guidelines for the hiring process of new staff. The applications include personal information, educational history, additional training,
employment history, references, and supporting documentation: cover letter, resume, writing sample. Nothing is blinded when applications are reviewed.

General criteria for all positions are listed on relevant advertisements and available on the UMCES or MEES websites. Specific details are not public. Little to no training in implicit bias is given to selection committees, although individual members often have knowledge of typical biases (e.g. letters of recommendation) and share with the committee.

Recommendations:

- Establish standards and practices for all search committees and include HPL/UMCES HR in the process.
- A basic rubric should be developed for each category and made available to search committees for tailoring to a specific position.
- Individual hiring committees should tailor the rubric for applicant review and share it as part of the details of the job position on the website to establish transparency and to ensure that all candidates have the opportunity to highlight their expertise relevant to the rubric.
- Institute reminder/training in recognizing individual bias prior to reviewing applicants for all search committees; develop a video for search committees.

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

- Faculty search committees are generally composed of ~5 faculty members with closely related research interests. The search committee makes a recommendation to the Director for the list of candidates to bring on campus for an interview, during which the candidates meet with the entire faculty. The candidates also meet with the students, usually as a group, and students provide their input directly to the Director. The search committee meets after the interviews and makes a recommendation to the Director. This is discussed with the entire faculty, after which the Director makes a recommendation to the President of UMCES. The President makes the final decision.

- FRA candidates typically only interact with individual faculty members who make the final decision.

- Student admissions committees are composed of faculty members with related research interests. Generally, students interact with their intended advisor before or during the
process. The admissions committee recommends acceptance into the MEES program, but final acceptance is contingent upon having an advisor with funding.

- Staff: Lab Director, possibly Assistant Director for administrative staff positions, creates a committee including people that will work directly with and supervise the applicant. Includes staff, faculty, student(s), and supervisors for the position. The entire team participates in all levels of the application process from application review, virtual and in person interviews, to a final recommendation. The final decision rests with the Director, or Assistant Director.

Recommendations
- Include a staff and student representative on faculty search committees.
- Increase the number of candidates by adding a pre-interview step to the interview process, using video technology such as zoom.
- Codify the process through which students with promise may begin taking classes as advanced special students to prove themselves prior to full admission.
- Require the search committees to provide information on the diversity of the applicant pool and the short list to the faculty and/or lab director for evaluating whether diverse candidates are being fairly considered.

Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?
No; faculty and student procedures are codified in policy. FRA procedures are much more informal.

Recommendations:
- Review and audit of procedures generally should be considered to ensure UMCES and HPL are meeting the goals of the search and recruitment processes.
- Seek advice from successful programs within and outside UMCES to enhance diversity

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”? 
HPL has a strong history of partner hires with faculty. Since the 1980s, HPL has accommodated dual-career couples with research-track hires and other support. At one time, there were 13
couples working at HPL, at all ranks and positions (from maintenance staff to faculty). The only published book solely authored by dual-career couples on aquatic ecology originated at HPL. HPL also had a dedicated day care center for more than 20 years, developed by the faculty and staff of HPL, before it was destroyed by fire. It has not been rebuilt on campus but lives in the local community and continues to support the HPL community. In the recent past, we attempted a cluster hire of faculty. We have established a Career Advancement Committee to provide formal mentoring to all faculty but intentionally focused on early career faculty. The culture at HPL is generally supportive of work/life balance. The first work/life balance document was debated in the UMCES Faculty Senate in 1990. Faculty at HPL developed the first sexual harassment policy for the University of Maryland System in the 1990s.