Hiring and/or admissions policies of Wood Hole Oceanographic Institution
Physical Oceanography Department Pod a.k.a. the PO(d)

Current hiring and admissions Policies

Here are links to the
- latest PO tenure track faculty advertisement (also placed in this google drive folder)
- postdoc scholar application
- graduate student application

HR and APO (Academic Programs Office) are engaged in efforts to advertise all job/education opportunities widely and specifically to underrepresented groups. WHOI has a diversity statement on our hiring page: https://careers.whoi.edu/opportunities/diversity-inclusion/

Student and postdoc admissions
- Postdoc scholar and student admissions are centralized through APO, though representatives from each department handle applicants through their department and specific mentors are usually identified and involved.
- Contacting potential mentors before applying is important both for postdoc scholars and graduate students. In some cases even for undergraduate researchers.
- PI funding is important for student admissions.
- Postdoc investigator positions are usually advertised through HR, can be more informal.
- It seems likely that we will no longer require the GRE - this should be clarified and clearly communicated.

Faculty hiring
- Hiring practices vary between departments, there is no WHOI standard. This is being reviewed.
- This year marks the first year that a Diversity Statement was included in the application. The CDEI provided departments with a rubric and reading list to help incorporate these (files are in this google drive folder).
- A hiring committee comes up with a “short list”. It used to be that the entire department comes to consensus on the short list, now this is being done by a committee. The hope is that this will be more fair because the committee will spend more time on it and apply uniform metrics.
- The entire staff votes after interviewing the short list. Interviewees interact with most of the staff, as well as students and postdocs.
- There is a general rubric that is made available, but not necessarily followed by all members of the department.
Reflections and Recommendations

Student admissions

Student admissions are opaque and difficult to navigate. Suggestions to improve this:

- Ensuring there are guidelines in the application about contacting potential advisors, and potentially formalizing this process.
- Clearly post a list of potential advisors and projects and provide fellowship information.
- Lay out the selection criteria.

An issue raised specifically relating to minority students was feeling a need to change their culture to “fit” in the academic community, which is exhausting. Suggestions relating specifically to recruiting and retaining a more diverse student body:

- Include a diversity statement in the graduate school application.
- Doing a minority student cohort “cluster hire”, so that students have a built-in community.
- Including a DEI session during the student visit and supporting student participation and leadership in DEI efforts throughout their graduate school career.
- Creating a community space and/or support group for URM students, maybe for faculty and staff as well, with institutional funding.

The admissions process itself seems to be becoming more ad hoc. We suggest a complete overhaul of the admissions process, inspired by the UW Atmospheric Science overhaul in the URGE presentation. This will require building consensus around what “merit” is. We feel that APO involvement will be important, and hope that it can be at least somewhat standardized across departments. The new rubric and procedure should be shared with applicants to make the process as transparent as possible and limit personal biases to come into the admission decision.

An additional related topic raised was that we could support and engage with diverse students from other institutions, such as through guest studentships, cruise participation, and seminar invitations. Implementing a recruitment strategy over a period longer than just the interview/file review could be beneficial towards increasing diversity.

Faculty hiring

We discussed including students and postdocs in the faculty hiring process. Students are currently invited to have lunch with candidates, but it is currently unclear how their feedback will be incorporated. We suggest that this process be formalized:
At minimum we suggest that students be asked to prepare a statement on each candidate that is read at the faculty meeting.

Involvement could extend as far as including a student representative, who heads a student committee, on the search committee. Note that students would likely not be able to see recommendation letters.

Student help would be valuable in evaluating diversity statements.

One consideration that is unique to WHOI is that not all faculty members are involved in the Joint Program.

Make an internal announcement that the next seminars are interviews, so that the whole department is included in the process.

General comments

In our readings and discussions there was frequent mention of the “risk” associated with hiring diverse candidates because their backgrounds may not be as familiar. This could be the source of some of WHOI's problems as our funding structure promotes conservative admissions and hiring. However, we must work to challenge the assumption in ourselves and our colleagues that hiring unfamiliar candidates is risky, and reframe their diverse backgrounds as an asset to WHOI. Creating a culture that encourages disagreement and the ability to point out bias without diminishing collegiality would be beneficial.

Ultimately, policies should move beyond being non-discriminatory to encouraging and promoting diversity. We must also work on retention by making WHOI an attractive place to work for a diversity of folks. There is currently a search for a WHOI DEI coordinator, who will play a role in hiring and hopefully take pressure off of students/postdocs/early career people to raise issues and help provide uniform policies across departments.