Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory

This is what was found by Polar Podlet at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the Pod would propose to change and improve. While this information was not always accessible, we have done our best to outline our experiences and understanding of the admissions and hiring processes. We have become aware of the prevalence of “hiring who you know / people in your network” at our institution. This kind of hiring practice can be harmful to DEI efforts and contribute to a perpetuation of workplace dynamics and policies. This process has also illuminated a need to create an admission and hiring rubric based on transparency, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- 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?\(^2\)?
  - Typical EEO statements are:
    - “The Lamont community values diversity and inclusion, and encourages applications from members of underrepresented minority groups.”
    - “Columbia University is an Equal Opportunity Employer / Disability / Veteran.”
    - “At Lamont, we are dedicated to improving diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) on our campus and within geosciences more broadly.”
    - “We are committed to attracting a large and diverse pool of applicants for this position, so please share this opportunity with your networks to help us achieve this.”
  - Required review and reporting procedure for the completion of all Professional Officer of Research searches: Officers of Research | Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory HR
  - Required review and reporting procedure for completion of all departmental Officer of Administration searches: Officers of Administration | Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory HR

- Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?
  - Existing strategies:
    - Professional mailing lists
    - Personal web pages
    - Science fairs / festivals (AMNH Science Fair, Intrepid, Open House)
    - Advertised internship programs
    - Columbia HR/Recruitment webpages:
      - Open Positions | Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory
      - At Columbia
      - At Lamont (via search)
      - Careers at Columbia | Columbia University
    - Social media. Tagging diversity-focussed organisations like @HBCUToday, @BlkinGeoscience, @DiverseGeos, @AWG_org, @PolarImpact, @PridePolar. This is done in some cases (at the prerogative of the hiring PI), but is not standardised.

---

2 https://careers.whoi.edu/opportunities/diversity-inclusion/
Thoughts on what could be improved/extended:

■ Many of the above rely to a certain extent on the assumption that interested prospective graduate students already know about Lamont and/or the academic community.
■ There do not appear to be many (if any) current programs that specifically target the recruitment of underrepresented scientists at Lamont at the graduate, postdoctoral, or research scientist levels.
■ A streamlined, maintained and widely advertised list of Columbia / LDEO internship programs would be useful. Centralize internship programs or outreach partners.
■ Better utilisation of non-academic job boards (e.g. LinkedIn, Indeed)
■ Recruiting at in-person job fairs? A physical (or virtual) presence at conferences, with graduate student(s) present to be able to talk to prospective students. Science conferences.
■ ‘Brain dates’ - short, informal discussions prompted by a particular science topic(s). One-on-one meetings between advisors and interested students, encourage them to apply.
■ Make clear in advertising that we are prioritizing the chance to increase diversity.

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?

○ For Prospective Students:
  ■ Main requirements are: personal statement, transcripts of previous post-secondary education, three letters of recommendation, application fee:
    ● [Admissions Requirements | Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences]
    ● [Earth and Environmental Sciences | Columbia | Graduate School of Arts and Sciences]
  ■ The GRE is no longer required for the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences.
  ■ The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) application fee (~$115) is a further potential barrier that could be lowered/removed. Waivers do exist.
    ● [Recommendation: Make the GSAS application fee waiver details easier to find on the Lamont and DEES websites for both students and interns.]
  ■ Could make it clearer that you get paid to go to graduate school!
  ■ A note to applicants: "If you think you don’t meet some requirements for admission but are passionate about the earth and environmental sciences and believe you could succeed here, please contact us. On numerous occasions students lacking key background courses (math or chemistry for instance) are admitted and take those classes the summer before or during their first semester of enrollment. Ambition and passion are the secret sauce we are looking for."

○ For Prospective Interns:
  ■ [Tips for Students Applying to LDEO Summer Intern Program | Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory]

○ For Prospective Faculty:
  ■ Requirements are specific to the role, and are listed in individual job descriptions.
  ■ General info found at: [Lamont Research Professor Handbook | LDEO]

○ For Prospective Staff:
  ■ [Guidelines for Minimum Qualification Requirements | Columbia University HR]
  ■ [Summary of Short-term Casual Employee Job Descriptions | Columbia University HR]

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

○ Guidelines are given to avoid problematic questions when interviewing applicants:
  ■ [Guidelines for Applicant Questions | Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory]
  ■ [Interview Guide | Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory HR]
  ■ [Guidelines for Interview Questions | Columbia University HR]

---

5 https://www.brandeis.edu/diversity/dei-recruitment-hiring/rubric-for-evaluating-diversity-statements.html
For Prospective Students:
- Our understanding is that applications are not blind (i.e. applicant names are not removed).
- Based on the above criteria: personal statement, transcripts of previous post-secondary education, letters of recommendation.
- As far as we can tell, the rubric is not public. A transparent rubric could be valuable. We are not aware of applicant names being removed, but this may happen in some cases.
- The current evaluation model leaves room for improvement as it fosters an environment where implicit bias can continue to influence decisions.

For Prospective Interns:
- We currently do not know / have access to internship application evaluation.
- Lamont is affiliated with several existing programs designed to broaden the STEM pipeline and support underrepresented geoscience students at the high school, undergraduate, and post-baccalaureate level (e.g., the Lamont-Doherty Secondary School Field Research Program, Columbia’s Bridge-to-PhD program, the Earth Intern Program, and the Lamont Summer Intern Program).
- Other interns have been brought in via direct PI relationships

For Prospective Faculty:
- Evaluation based on how an applicant fits the job description, but the specific rubric isn’t clear.
- There is a rule in place stating that one member of the search committee should be responsible for ensuring that DEI considerations (particularly diversity statements) are given high priority in the search process. Is this always adhered to?

For Prospective Staff:
- Administrative Recruitment Guide | Columbia University HR
- Affirmative Action Administrative Officer Hiring Quick Guide | Columbia University HR

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

For Prospective Students:
- A committee of LDEO and / or DEES faculty
- Potential advisers meeting with potential students (committee members send out applicant pool).
- Students encouraged to reach out to potential advisers
- Representatives from each division look at all applicants, then brings them to the division.
- Sometimes people “bubble up” who they think should be pulled aside. Word of mouth / non-linear distribution of applicants within divisions
- Researchers can request a candidate, but the committee makes the ultimate decision
- Cap on class size in order to guarantee 5 years of funding for each student – forces committee to narrow down prospective students

For Interns:
- Students make a decision on what project to work on (rank top 3 choices)
- Researcher selects which students to work with, based on their interests

For Prospective Faculty:
- Committee of at least three members of LDEO and / or DEES faculty – unclear if search committee members volunteer or are nominated / mandated (or a combination of the above)
- Search Committee Procedures | Academic Affairs & Diversity | LDEO
  - “The search committee members should each hold a title above the level of the position being recruited and hold a set minimum level of qualifications / experience.”
  - “At least one search committee member should be female and/or racial minority, to the extent possible.”
- Executive Committee vote on Recruitment & Promotions during monthly meetings. However, only those who hold a title above the level of the position being recruited are allowed to be present.
- The Directorate hire to the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory Strategic Plan
Following the selection of the final candidate, the search committee will prepare a search committee report indicating who the shortlisted candidates were, and why the selected candidate was chosen over the others.

- For Postdoctoral Scientists/Fellows:
  - Postdoc fellowship: committee & open to input from faculty.

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

- We are not aware of any examples of outside consultants actively evaluating the hiring and/or admissions process.
- Possible processes for changing the hiring/admissions process have been identified in a recent internal Lamont Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (LDEI) report (see below).
- Recommendation letters submitted for the postdoctoral fellowship competition were evaluated in a recent journal article (Dutt et al., 2016; Nature Geoscience), which found a disparity between the quality of recommendation letters for male and female candidates. While this is a reflection on letter authors from across the world, it appears that there is/was no system in place at the ‘receiving end’ to account for this disparity.

**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”?**

- Based on the recent Lamont Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (LDEI) report, a number of strategies are being considered. For example:
  - Using a cohort hiring approach as much as possible.
  - Starting an application support program that pairs current graduate students and mentors with prospective graduate students to assist them with the application process.
  - Encouraging search committee members to take implicit bias training.
  - A procedure to ensure diversity statements are given sufficient weight. Have the committee rank all the diversity statements from an applicant pool blind using a transparent rubric and assign each a number based on the quartile in which they fell in the ranking. Then the rest of the application process can proceed. The diversity statement quartile numbers can be used at the other stages of the search to help decide who is shortlisted, invited to interview and ultimately offered a position. Aggregating the scores into quartiles will help remove noise in the ranking. Doing it blind will reduce bias. Doing it first will emphasize the importance to search committee members and avoid diversity statements being an afterthought.

---