The hiring and graduate admissions processes in UMaine’s School of Marine Sciences are somewhat individualized and ad hoc.

The university has some guidance and training from the Office of Equal Opportunity, but it is limited and largely focuses on meeting legal requirements. We found no university- or college-wide programs designed to address inclusivity or diversity in hiring. Thus, hiring approaches are department-specific and do not inherently reflect university goals.

In the School of Marine Sciences (SMS), faculty hiring committees are assembled by the search chair, who is appointed by the School’s Director. We are not aware of rules or guidelines around the makeup of these committees or the processes that they use to advertise, recruit, and evaluate. The search committee is not empowered to make the final hiring decision at the unit level. Instead, the committee makes a recommendation to the department, who hold a vote to provide a recommendation to the Dean’s office. Within SMS, the faculty decision disempowers those who have interrogated files most deeply, and allows those who have had possibly minimal involvement in the search to influence its outcome. One change that we would like to make is for search committees to be assembled with diversity a primary focus.

Hiring of postdoctoral researchers generally requires a search with a committee, although there is a waiver process that can bypass this requirement. The hiring is not subject to review by the entire school. In the hands of some supervisors, this allows freedom to address inclusivity, diversity, and equity in hiring, but it also allows other supervisors to continue less inclusive practices.

Graduate student admissions decisions are highly individual. We have a committee that makes an initial evaluation of whether students are qualified, but this is not a strong layer of review. Files for individual applicants are forwarded to possibly matched advisors. All faculty can see files of all applicants, but the workflow is cumbersome, which in practice limits the number of applicants that each faculty member evaluates. We recently decided not to require the GRE for application, although we left the option for faculty to consider GRE scores if they are available (which we recognize as somewhat problematic). We have also discussed developing a committee to examine files in an attempt to identify strong students from underrepresented backgrounds who may be overlooked in our traditional process.

We found this week’s interviews to be enormously helpful and informative. We expect to be making faculty several hires in the next few years, and this gave us several ideas and starting points for improving our search planning and process. In addition, the discussion of graduate admissions gave us several tools to consider and implement to make meaningful progress.