Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for University of Florida (UF)

This is what was found by UF Geosciences Pod at UF on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve.

1. Key Points:

Answers to specific questions posed by URGE regarding the hiring and grad student admissions processes in the UF Departments of Geological Sciences and Geography are given below. This section provides some important highlights from these answers. For the current faculty search in the Dept. of Geological Sciences, the requested application packet included inclusion statements and encouraged applicants to weave their thoughts about diversity and inclusion into their teaching and research materials, rather than to provide a separate diversity/inclusion statement. The idea here was that DEI initiatives should not be considered separately from teaching/research, but should be considered as part of this, and the search committee was generally quite happy with this decision as it made it easy to see which applicants had given DEI substantial thought. The pod recommends that other searches implement this strategy.

For the current faculty search in the Dept. of Geography, the requested application packet included inclusion statements and required a written diversity statement focused on addressing past and/or potential contributions to diversity and inclusion through teaching, research, and service. Candidates were reviewed using rubrics, which may still be subjective, but allow for candidates to be judged on the same explicit criteria. A member of the DEI committee sits on the Faculty Search Committee to ensure that DEI initiatives are met during hiring. In Geography, a diversity representative has been present in each committee and reported to the departmental DEI representative for the college. As part of the interview process within Geography, candidates are required to present a “fit talk” describing their potential fit academically (research and teaching) and publicly state their contributions to DEI. The pod considers this a helpful strategy and recommends the inclusion of “fit talks” in other searches.

In terms of potential improvements that could be made in the Dept. of Geological Sciences, the required inclusion of a DEI committee member on faculty search and grad admissions committees, as in Geography, could help ensure DEI initiatives are at the

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5. https://www.brandeis.edu/diversity/dei-recruitment-hiring/rubric-for-evaluating-diversity-statements.html
forefront during hiring/admissions. Finally, hiring/admissions processes in the Dept. of Geological Sciences have not been evaluated by an outside entity since at least 2004; doing so could be quite helpful in terms of evaluating any inequities that are perpetuated by current processes, though also would require an investment of time and money.

The Dept of Geography has recently been developing goals for future improvement across all committees. Goals to improve biases within our admissions process for the Graduate Admissions Committee include working with available tools from Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and search committee processes on campus to integrate DEI goals with graduate applicant admissions. As of 2021, the UF Graduate School has eliminated the GRE requirement for both MS and PhD programs, and the Department of Geography has opted out of GRE requirement through this process. Ahead of application review by the departmental admissions committee, any GREs submitted by students are removed.

2. Answers to specific questions:

- What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement¹ is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement? Are there other inclusion statements and resources publicly available²?

From active searches within the Geological Sciences and Geography Departments for Artificial Intelligence positions, publicly available job postings reflect the following EEO and inclusion statements:


The Department of Geological Sciences is committed to maintaining an environment that welcomes diversity of ability, class, ethnicity/race, gender identity and expression. We particularly welcome applicants who can contribute to such an environment through their scholarship, teaching, mentoring, and professional service. Please see http://geology.ufl.edu/department/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/ for more information about diversity and inclusion in the Department of Geological Sciences.

The University and greater Gainesville community enjoy a diversity of cultural events, restaurants, year-round outdoor recreational activities, and social opportunities...The University of Florida is an equal opportunity institution dedicated to building a broadly diverse and inclusive faculty and staff. Searches are conducted in accordance with Florida's Sunshine Law. If an accommodation
due to disability is needed in order to apply for this position, please call (352) 392-2477 or the Florida Relay System at (800) 955-8771 (TDD). The University of Florida is an Equal Opportunity Institution.


The University of Florida is an equal opportunity institution dedicated to building a broadly diverse and inclusive faculty and staff. The University of Florida invites all qualified applicants, including minorities, women, veterans and individual with disabilities to apply. The University of Florida is a public institution and subject to all requirements under Florida Sunshine and Public Records laws. Searches are conducted in accordance with Florida's Sunshine Law. If an accommodation due to disability is needed to apply for this position, please call (352) 392-2477 or the Florida Relay System at (800) 955-8771 (TDD).

The Department of Geography particularly welcomes applicants who can contribute to a diverse and inclusive environment through their scholarship, teaching, mentoring, and professional service. Please see https://diversity.clas.ufl.edu/diversity-statement/ for more information about diversity and inclusion in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The university and greater Gainesville communities enjoy a diversity of cultural events, restaurants, year-round outdoor recreational activities, and social opportunities.

As is evident in the above statements, the job postings for both departments explicitly address DEI initiatives. It is assumed here that the above postings are representative of typical postings.

In the Dept. of Geological Sciences, advertisements are not sent out by the department for graduate student recruitment. Individual faculty may send advertisements, but this is rare, and the advertisements are left up to the faculty member (info from Grad Coordinator).

Graduate student recruitment is left up to individual faculty members - the Dept. Of Geography does not typically send out broad advertisements for graduate students. Many flyers created by faculty members include the following statement “The University and Department of Geography especially encourage applications by students from underrepresented or minority groups.”

- Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?
The job advertisements given above are accessible to anyone online (e.g. with a Google Search such as “UF Geological Sciences AI job search”). In the Dept. Of Geological Sciences, we made intentional efforts to advertise with groups that have diverse membership. The department was supportive of investing in this effort. In addition to the standard ad placements with professional societies and listservs, the geology dept posted on social media and placed paid ads with AWG, SACNAS, AISES and NABG (technically with American Geosciences Institute -that’s where NABG’s job listings come from). Notably, advertising fees can sometimes hinder these efforts to advertise widely.

As mentioned above, in the Dept. of Geological Sciences graduate recruitment job postings are left to individual faculty members and are rare. Conferences typically play a role in student/faculty recruitment. With conferences moving online this year due to COVID, however, this was not the case this year. Even during “normal” years, however, conference recruitment of grad students is not very effective; as per estimates by the Dept. Of Geological Sciences grad student coordinator, GSA typically results in ~50+ individuals who specify interest though only ~1-2 who actually apply. Grad student recruitment in general is left largely to individual faculty members.

The Dept. Of Geography also makes intentional efforts to disseminate job postings broadly. The recent positions were advertised on social media, the American Meteorological Society (AMS), including their diversity network, job board, the American Geophysical Union (AGU) job board, the Women in Data Science and Machine Learning job board, listservs, and to collaborators at other institutions.

Graduate student recruitment within the Dept. Of Geography occurs mostly through individual faculty members. Typically, faculty use the American Association of Geographers, a wide range of Listserv emails, emails to colleagues or through department chairs, and online platforms to reach a wide audience of potential candidates. In Spring 2021, the graduate coordinator and the current graduate admissions committee formulated a short-, mid-, and long-term recruiting strategy at the request of the department chair to formalize the role of the committee.

- 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 the postings given above, the requirements are explicitly given as follows (cut and pasted form the links given above):

Geology:
Applications must include: (1) a letter of application summarizing the applicant's qualifications, interests, future research goals, and suitability for the position, (2) a complete curriculum vitae, (3) a research statement detailing current activities and future research plans, (4) a statement summarizing teaching experience and interests, and (5) a list of names and contact information of at least three references. After initial review, applicants who are chosen to receive further consideration will be asked to request confidential letters of recommendation from the references. Applicants are encouraged to articulate their commitment to cultivating an inclusive and equitable teaching and research environment in their teaching statement and cover letter.

Geography:
For full consideration, applications must be submitted online at: http://apply.interfolio.com/82837 and must include: (1) a letter summarizing the applicant's qualifications, ongoing and future research directions, and interests (with explanation of applicant’s role in collaborative efforts), (2) a complete curriculum vitae; (3) a research and teaching statement describing qualifications to conduct research and design and teach courses utilizing AI in the fields of meteorology or climatology; (4) a diversity statement that addresses past and/or potential contributions to diversity and inclusion through teaching, research, and service; and (5) a list of at least three references. After initial review, confidential letters of recommendation from the references will be requested for applicants who are chosen for further consideration.

The Geography posting explicitly requires a diversity statement, though the Geology posting does not. From a member of the geology search committee for the current search: We opted not to require a separate diversity statement, and instead encouraged applicants to weave their thoughts about diversity and inclusion into the other documents of their packet. Diversity and inclusion should not be something so detached from teaching and research that it can be isolated into a separate document. Instead, we encouraged applicants to weave these ideas into their core application materials. We were very happy with this decision, as it was very easy to determine who had thought deeply about how diversity and inclusion should directly impact teaching and research practices, and who had not really considered it at all.

For graduate student applications, CVs, personal statements/statements of purpose, letters of recommendation and transcripts are required. GRE scores are no longer required for MA/MS or PhD applications in either department. As per the UF website, applications to UF require a $30 application fee (departments are not able to waive these required fees).
How are applicants/applications evaluated? Is that process and/or rubric public? What kind of biases are introduced in this process and what strategies are used to address these, e.g. removing applicant names?

Geology:

Faculty Positions:

It is strongly recommended (by the Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee at the college level) that the faculty search committee develop search criteria to be used when evaluating each applicant. During the most recent hiring process, the Faculty Search Committee developed minimum and preferred qualifications for the job application. These criteria were then used to create rubrics when evaluating candidate application packets. Once these criteria are used by the committee to screen applicants to create a long list, each candidate to be interviewed is typically sent the same list of questions that will be asked for preparation purposes. The committee typically conducts an exit interview as well, which again involves a standard list of questions sent to each interviewed candidate in advance.

While the development of specific, explicit criteria by which to evaluate each candidate is a good step, the scoring is still subjective and therefore vulnerable to implicit biases. For the current search, it became apparent that removing identifying information could hinder our attempts to have a diverse short list. For example, there are often significant differences in the way reference letters are written for men and women with similar qualifications. There are also significant cultural differences in how reference letters are written in different parts of the world. If you don’t account for these differences, women and international applicants may not fare as well as men with American letter writers. We kept identifying info, and were constantly reminding and checking ourselves for potential biases as best we could.

Graduate Students:

For grad student admissions (info provided by grad student coordinator): the Grad Admissions Committee examine grades from previous institutions (weighting STEM grades in particular), letters of recommendation, and prior research experience. Preferences expressed by faculty are weighted especially heavily; if a faculty member has an RA position for 1+ years for an applying student, the committee looks for red flags (poor grades or recommendations, conduct issues) and if there are none the applying student is admitted. For students applying who will need TA support, red flags are again vetted for and applicants’ records are compared to assign TA support sequentially from the strongest to least strong applicants until the known number of available TA positions is filled.

As with the faculty search process, since the admissions process is inherently subjective to some extent, it is vulnerable to implicit biases. However, the committee is composed of multiple individuals of varying career stage (see next question), and this, combined with an effort to confront and minimize biases, can help minimize issues.
Geography:

*Faculty Positions:*

During the most recent hiring process, the Faculty Search Committee developed minimum and preferred qualifications for the job application. These criteria were then used to create rubrics when evaluating candidate application packets. The rubric rated whether candidates a) met minimum requirements, b) did not meet minimum requirements, or c) the committee member was not sure/not qualified to judge. The rubric specifically addressed if the application packet adequately showed evidence of DEI related efforts of past performance. All Faculty Search Committee member rubrics were compiled, and the committee discussed which candidates were suitable to move on to following rounds, DEI was part of the review process. Candidates who moved on to the “screening” or “phone” interview round were asked the same exact set of questions and evaluated on their responses. During the “on campus” interview, applicants give both a research seminar and a “fit” talk. The latter allows the candidate to expand upon their future research and teaching interests as well as their commitment to DEI. A member of the DEI committee sits on the Faculty Search Committee to ensure that DEI initiatives are met during hiring. Prior to establishing the DEI committee, the department chair assigned a diversity representative to each committee that reviewed the applicant pool and candidates selected by the committee to ensure as wide a pool of applicants was invited to next stages. This has been more formalized in ongoing searches, but has been a process underway for the last several hires within Geography.

*Graduate Students:*

Since GREs are no longer required, the Graduate Coordinator removes any submitted GRE scores from application packets. Members of the Graduate Admissions Committee individually reviewed each packet to determine whether applicants were suitable or not suitable for 1) admission and 2) funding. Suitability criteria were based on whether applicants had met all application requirements (e.g., mentioning a faculty member with in the statement of purpose, specificity in research statement, and identified fit within the department). Students found to be suitable for funding were then evaluated on their merits by each committee member. After reviewing the application packets, committee members meet to discuss and select candidates for admission and funding.

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

Geology:
Faculty search committees are established from a pool of faculty volunteers by the Department Chair in consultation with the Associate Chair and sometimes other members of the Executive Committee.

Per the grad student coordinator, the Graduate Admissions Committee is composed of the Graduate Student Coordinator, Department Associate Chair, the former Graduate Student Coordinator, and one Junior Faculty member. The committee admits student by consensus, all must agree. Typically only the recruiting faculty member interacts with their respective applicants.

Geography:

Faculty Search Committees are appointed by the Chair to meet departmental needs. Faculty Search Committees review the applicants and suggest the pool to bring to campus for interview. All faculty members also have access to review the potential applicants and bring up for discussion and review any candidate they feel has been overlooked by the committee. The Search Committee, Department Chair and all voting Faculty members ultimately discuss and decide upon the final on-campus interview candidates. At the end of the interview process, the committee reports back to the larger faculty with summary information on each candidate and any feedback from the faculty, prior to a vote occurring. Voting is specific to “suitable/unsuitable” and shared with the Dean’s office of the college for further consideration.

The Graduate Admissions Committee is responsible for the admission of graduate students. This committee consists of at least three members appointed from the Chair and the Graduate Coordinator who chairs the committee. Members serve two-year terms that may be renewed at the discretion of the Chair. Members of the Graduate Admissions Committee read through all graduate applications, complete a rubric related to the packet components, and meet to discuss candidates. A final list of suitable students are then admitted.

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

Geology:

The hiring process has not been evaluated by outside entities. Change process is to propose a change to the Department Chair and then discuss and vote on it at a faculty meeting. The grad student recruitment/admissions process has also not been evaluated by outside entities since at least 2004.

Geography:

The hiring/admission process has not been evaluated by outside entities. Changing this process would be a departmental decision and by-laws based.
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”?

The Dept. of Geological Sciences has a well-established faculty mentoring program for new faculty that was revised over the past three years to include mentoring through promotion to full professor. Additionally, all Assistant Professors are evaluated every third year by a committee of dept. faculty in regards to tenure trajectory.

For new faculty, the Chair of the Geography Department appoints two mentors for each untenured faculty member in their first semester. The choice of the mentors does not need to be based on similarities of academic work, but is focused on finding faculty members the untenured member can talk with freely about all matters concerning the tenure process. Prior to the end of each academic year, the Chair will consult with the mentors and meet with the untenured member before writing end of year evaluation letters. Mentors provide annual update letters to the chair to capture the efforts of the mentorship. These remain at the departmental level but assist in assessing untenured faculty to draft a letter for their annual activities report. The mentor/mentee review the letter ahead of submission for transparency.

Additionally, UF has a Dual Career Services Program that is designed to assist “with dual career considerations across the campus and locally” (more info: http://aa.ufl.edu/resources/dual-career-services/). Practically, based on the experience of the Geological Sciences Department Chair, this has often served more as an intent to accommodate when possible. Typically, another or the same unit must use an open search to accommodate the partner of a candidate to which an offer has been made. This has sometimes worked out, though desired candidates have sometimes been lost because a second position was not available in the appropriate unit (info from Department Chair). The Geography department has worked actively on spouse/dual hires at every opportunity and has several spouse/dual hires in-house and across campus. Like the experience of the Geological Sciences department, several candidates that were considered were not retained after a second position to the other partner was either not extended or accepted. The Geography department has also made efforts to receive spousal hires, which were turned down when spouses in other units didn’t accept offers.

Finally, the Geography department has a long history of joint hires with centers and departments across the UF campus, including (but not limited to) Latin American Center, Center for African Studies, the Emerging Pathogens Institute, and the Informatics Institute. The department is also actively working with African American Studies on a specific hire to recruit an expert in Black Geographies to work with a cohort hiring effort underway now.