Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for University of Vermont

This is what was found by the Gund Institute/University of Vermont pod at the University of Vermont on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve the present policies. Content is a mixture of content found through UVM’s publicly available website resources, job searches, and responses to a survey sent out to pod members about their experience with hiring/admissions at UVM. Faculty and graduate student insight are included from survey responses.

What EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) statement\(^1\) is included in a standard job or admissions advertisement?

Openly available job advertisements for employment at UVM include varying levels of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statements, some more thorough than others. These range from a simple statement that UVM is an EEO/Affirmative Action employer, to an extensive list of identity categories legally protected by federal or state law. Certain applications encourage applicants to outline how they may contribute to diversity with a diversity impact statement.

UVM’s admissions webpage does not immediately display an inclusion statement. A separate webpage is dedicated to this purpose, titled “Diversity and Inclusion at UVM” which links to various topics and resources. The main admissions page does express that SATs are optional for application to UVM undergraduates in an effort to provide a more holistic approach to applicant review and to promote diversity.

Where are advertisements posted or sent?

Job advertisements are available on mainstream job search websites (i.e. Indeed, Glassdoor), UVM’s website, and are advertised by hiring committees through listservs. One survey respondent mentioned that UVM hiring requires hiring committees to describe their means of publicizing jobs to find diverse recruits, but responses are not necessarily investigated for efficacy. Graduate positions are similarly advertised on listservs.

What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores/grades?
The undergraduate application requires a $55 application fee, one letter of recommendation, and is SAT optional. Graduate applications require three recommendation letters and a $65 application fee. The application fee may be waived for BIPOC applicants upon request. The Geology Department does not require GRE scores, but does recommend them. It is also promoted that applicants can submit supplemental materials to demonstrate interest/preparation, a practice that may allow for less traditional means of evaluating preparedness. Geology graduate students are also fully funded throughout their Masters, which aids in alleviating financial stress. Gund PhD applicants are prompted to discuss their contribution to a diverse and inclusive environment within their letter of interest. The GUND webpage specifies that prospective graduate students will be evaluated based on four criteria: academic qualifications, research experience, research interests, and alignment with GUNDs thematic focus areas/ diversity commitment. This links to the GUND Diversity & Inclusion webpage, where more specific actions being taken by GUND are outlined, such as diversity training and amplifying BIPOC scholar voices.

UVM does provide training to hiring and search committees to avoid bias. However, based on the experience of survey respondents, understanding of strategies for improving diversity are lacking. Respondents have witnessed search committee members question the need to focus on recruiting under-represented candidates, or suggesting that search committees act color blind. This suggests that further training is necessary to ensure that committee members understand why and how inclusive hiring practices are performed.

- These GUND criteria for PhD candidates could be more inclusive/evaluate interest outside of academics/research? Or at least be more explicit about it?

- 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?

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

- Has your hiring and/or admissions process been evaluated by outside consultants? What is the process for changing it?
Has your university or company implemented or considered strategies such as are outlined in “Leveraging Promising Practices”? 

There does not appear to be a strong presence of strategies employed for UVM hiring to improve diversity and inclusion outside of affirmative action, based upon survey response. One correspondent suggested that some faculty have fostered relationships with communities of color and have personally sought out training, but this was based in personal initiative rather than institutional promotion.

The Mosaic Center for students of color provides programs such as mentoring, retreats, and other community activities to foster peer networks. Mentoring and peer networks are important components of fostering relationships and equipping individuals for success.

The recent budgetary cuts have impacted some programs that align with the strategies outlined in “Leveraging Promising Practices” (summarized on page 5). For instance, in the summer of 2020 the University announced the closure of the popular UVM Campus Children’s School. Childcare is one part of promoting a family friendly environment -- an important component of reaching equitable employment.

Summary of findings and implications of Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for the University of Vermont

The University of Vermont does incorporate diversity and inclusion statements into most of its webpages, job advertisements, and student recruitment incentives. This appears are diversity statements in job advertisements, requests for diversity impact statements from applicants, and webpages dedicated to DEI resources. In this way, UVM does a good job of framing diversity as a strength through the application process. However, there is less consistency in DEI policies beyond the application process.

Starting before application, UVM should provide institutionally sponsored means of establishing networks for more diverse recruitment. Oftentimes this step is left to the department or individual faculty level to establish. For instance, the UVM Department of Geology has hosted a JEDI guest lecture series through Spring 2021. This is one form of establishing greater connections for diverse recruitment. Initiatives such as this should be promoted across the board by University Administration. For graduate programs, the “norm” remains that students are expected to seek out potential advisors, rather than departments actively establishing pools for BIPOC recruitment.

From our brief survey of pod members, it came up several times that committee training needs strengthening. Whether this is a search or hiring committee, understanding of why it is important to consider DEI during recruitment needs to be better established among faculty.

The Mosaic Center provides resources to individuals at UVM, such as mentoring and community building activities. Most resources are geared towards undergraduate students. The leaky pipeline must be addressed at the graduate and faculty levels as well, where diversity lags.
considerably. Family friendly policies, such as intentional dual hires, family leave, and childcare, are also important components of creating equal opportunity on campus.

Ultimately, UVM needs to work on culture change for valuing criteria that are more inclusive. Ensuring students are considered outside of pedigree, and revising tenure criteria to celebrate community engagement and teaching are two ways to earnestly value diversity.

Strategies Summarized from “Leveraging Promising Practices” (https://osf.io/dq4rw/):

1: Equipping Individuals
   ● Fostering Relationships
     ○ Building a Pool: BIPOC lecture series, pathway programs, grow-your-own programs.
     ○ On Campus Interviews: connect folks with faculty on campus, connect folks with students to provide community insight.
     ○ Mentoring: Institutionally sponsored mentoring.
     ○ Peer Networks: Institutionally sponsored groups and events for peer networking.
   ● Democratizing Knowledge about Processes, Standards, and Norms
     ○ Negotiating Job Offers: Negotiation templates to promote more equitable hiring packages.
     ○ Role Clarity: Formal description of tenure requirements/process, etc. to set candidates up for success.
     ○ Professional Development Plans: Assist candidates in balancing their responsibilities.

2: Creating equal opportunity
   ● Rethinking recruitment and hiring strategies
     ○ Ongoing Recruitment: (related to building a pool).
     ○ Diversity and Inclusion Statements
     ○ Selection and training of search committees: Diverse committees, implicit bias training, expand criteria for “successful” candidates.
     ○ Dual Career Support/Partner Hires
   ● Addressing faculty retention and Success:
     ○ Reconsidering Tenure and Advancement Processes and Criteria: Train committee members, revise promotion and tenure criteria, adopt broader definitions of scholarship inclusive of teaching and community engagement.
Family-friendly Policies: Tenure clock extensions for individuals who need to take family leave. Grants and programs to support faculty during major life transitions, family leave, and child-care. Broad communication about family-friendly policies and resources to normalize their use.

3: Valuing Difference:
Promoting and championing the value of diversity broadly on campus, while identifying and celebrating the unique contributions underrepresented group faculty make to their communities. Ally trainings, affinity group month celebrations, intergroup or community dialogue series, and speaker series. This might include enacting a welcoming and inclusive application review and interview processes that frame diversity as a strength.

4: Managing Culture:
Once an institution is operating to address its culture, it may have to move beyond expanding the criteria for inclusive excellence to begin questioning long held assumptions about what excellence means and looks like, which contributions to the institution are most meaningful and valuable, and how we assess whether someone’s work is having an impact. Normalizing and celebrating usage of these policies would represent a cultural change.

Whether an institution choses to structure this work as the responsibility of departments with administrative supports or through trainings organized by the administration, this work must be firmly held and supported by the folks at the highest levels of power in the University. In February 2021, UVM released a hiring profile for a Vice Provost of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The full “leadership profile” can be accessed at this link. An excerpt from the introductory section is copied below to provide an example of how the current University leadership frame their commitment to DEI to candidates in the field.

“Diversity and inclusion are deeply held values at the University of Vermont. In support of the preparation of our students for a global world, we are committed to providing a culture and environment that is accepting, inclusive, and supportive of diversity, where students, staff, faculty, and leaders of varied backgrounds can interact effectively in a climate of mutual respect. We aspire to build a diverse and globally aware university community sustained by an inclusive, supportive, and just campus climate. Our goal is to ensure that diversity and inclusive excellence are integral to all aspects of our University. We are proud of our accomplishments that have made the university stand out among institutions of higher education. Among these are: (i) a two course general education requirement in diversity; (ii) providing gender inclusive bathrooms and private breastfeeding rooms and lactation pods throughout campus; (iii) being among the first universities to allow students to select their own identity; (iv) a 15.3% increase in the number of BIPOC faculty and staff (including 3 administration and management) over the past five years. A summary of programs and initiatives specifically established to advance diversity, equity and inclusion can be found here.”