

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience

Hiring and/or Admissions Policies for University/Organization

This is what was found by **Dartmouth Earth Science Pod** at **Dartmouth College** on Hiring and/or Admissions Policies, as well as what the pod would propose to change and improve.

Note: We acknowledge this information is not always accessible to students and even staff. If you do not have access to this information, please reflect on your own experience and outline what admissions and/or hiring should be like to foster a diverse and inclusive community.

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

The following EEO statement was used for a job search in 2018 for the Earth Sciences department at Dartmouth College:

“Dartmouth College is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer with a strong commitment to diversity. In that spirit, we are particularly interested in receiving applications from a broad spectrum of people, including women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities, veterans or any other legally protected group.”

- **Where are advertisements posted or sent? Are there other strategies for reaching applicants for hiring and/or admissions, e.g. job fairs, showcases?**
 - We submit job advertisements for post-doc and faculty positions to large academic organizations in geoscience, such as AGU, and some minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Such levels of outreach and advertisement are not involved in graduate student recruitment process.
 - During URGE pod discussions, we identified the following communities and organizations that we can reach out to build relationships with for long-term outreach efforts and advertise job postings for short-term recruitment efforts:
 - [Alaska Native Science & Engineering Program](#)
 - [American Indian Science and Engineering Society](#)
 - [Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native American in Science](#)
 - [National Association of Black Geoscientists](#)
 - [Black in Geoscience](#)
 - [GeoLatinas](#)
 - HBCUs and other MSIs ([2021 List of MSIs](#))

- In addition, having professors, postdoctoral scholars (and graduate students) give talks at HBCUs and other MSIs could be a great way to increase visibility of our department to undergraduate students from underrepresented groups (and eventually recruit some of them to our graduate program).
 - We also discussed the importance of timing of the offer of admission. In order to increase the “yield” of the admissions process, as mentioned in Posselt (2020), we should make sure to make a timely offer to students especially those from underrepresented groups.
- **What are the requirements for an applicant, e.g. letters of recommendations, fees/test scores³/grades? Is providing any of these a potential barrier that could be further lowered or removed? Are there any problematic questions asked?**
 - Prior to the application cycle for Fall 2021, letters of recommendation as well as the general GRE score was included in the requirements for an applicant
 - For Fall 2021 admissions, we removed the requirement for a GRE score due to the pandemic. There was no formal mechanism to redact GRE scores, if included in an application, and the review committee ended up seeing GRE scores from some applicants this year. The admissions committee is working on a more complete approach to redacting GREs.
 - There was no explicit decision made as to whether the removal GRE requirement is permanent or temporary. This was brought up during the conversation between faculty members and the URGE pod leader, and the faculty will revisit last year’s decision to clarify 1) whether the removal will be permanent and 2) whether optional reporting will be allowed in future admissions cycles.
 - Besides these formal requirements, individual faculty members have much control over the admissions decision. They can accept students as long as the applicants pass certain standards set by the Guarini Graduate School and they have funding for students’ salaries.
 - Other suggestions brought up during pod discussions:
 - We should start including information on the department website, making it explicitly clear that applicants need to reach out to and speak with potential advisors ahead of time. We could include a specific link on the website to help facilitate that initial contact and a more detailed description of “How to apply”
 - Reformat personal statements to be some combination of less vague statements (e.g., shorter essay responses describing specific tasks that the applicant has completed). Particular, often overrepresented, groups tend to excel at responding to the more open-ended prompt with self-aggrandizing statements. This could disproportionately disadvantage applicants from marginalized backgrounds

- **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?**
 - Currently, we do not have a rubric for evaluating applications. Most people in pod discussions expressed support for developing a rubric by the next admissions cycle. It would be important to extrapolate from knowledge of what makes a “successful” student through departmental discussions.
 - A group of faculty members (Profs. Feng, Hawley, Kelly, Osterberg and Palucis) have been attending the AGU Bridge program workshops, and they are actively discussing the development of a rubric, training of reviewers to use the rubric, as well as modification of essay prompts.
 - After watching Prof. Swann’s Inclusivity Tip, the URGE team also reached out to the Atmospheric Science Dept. at the University of Washington to learn more about the changes they have made to their admissions process. Prof. Swann has kindly shared the essay prompts and a rubric they use for their admissions process. The URGE team will share these resources with the abovementioned faculty members and recommended implementing similar changes.
 - Changes can be made at the individual research group level as well, specifically lowering the bar to contacting professors (‘cold emailing’) and to make this less daunting. We considered an [example from the LiNC Lab at McGill](#), and the Leavitt Lab will look into implementing some of the strategies from the example in our own lab website including [a formal application form](#) with clear instructions and creating [a DEI section](#)

- **Who is on selection committees and who makes the final decisions? Who interacts with the applicants?**
 - The Guarini Graduate School makes the final admissions, but with direction from the Department and specifically the PIs;
 - Previously, a few faculty members did an initial sorting of applications, largely based on GRE scores. However, the department is now moving away from this strategy to develop a more holistic evaluation process with the suggestions from the AGU Bridge program mentioned above.

- **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 evaluation by outside consultants; however, we are undergoing our 10-year self study, and we could include this in there. The study on our part was done for Fall 2019/Winter 2020 (pre-pandemic), and we still need to have the visit by outside evaluators which is delayed due to the pandemic until Fall 2021.

- All faculty and department level positions (postdoc) advertisements are reviewed by both legal council and the institutional office of Equity and Diversity.
- **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”⁶?**
 - Having experiences with prospective students through REUs is a great opportunity for both the students as applicants and the PIs as application reviewers to learn about each other. This would be great to implement at the department level
 - We should consider the costs for students to participate in these programs (e.g., cost of living in the Upper Valley area) and whether the REU stipend sufficiently covers these costs.
 - We also discussed how the geographic location of our institution/department can make the recruitment of students and faculty from marginalized groups more challenging, because it might be seen as tokenism. We think that cohort hiring (and dual career support), and maybe multiple rounds of it, eventually might be more productive.

Additional notes from reading discussions:

Reading 1: POSSELT, J. (2016). Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping.

Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjghw8s>

Discussion Questions:

- Prestige vs. Diversity: how much weight is put on prestige vs. diversity during hiring and admission processes? What about other factors (e.g., letter of recommendation)?
 - We definitely tend to gravitate towards people and institutions that we are already familiar with or identify as “prestigious”, etc.
- For Faculty: among ambiguity aversion, risk aversion and conflict aversion, which factor do you think creates the biggest barrier in changing hiring/admissions process? What kinds of additional resources and support would you like to have?
- There are multiple suggestions for a more open, holistic review process mentioned in ‘Implications for Practice’ (p. 167-175) including: developing a clear rubric for admissions (e.g., Table 10), developing relationships with sister departments and institutions, MSc-to-PhD Bridge program, REUs, properly interpreting standardized test scores, etc. Which aspects do you think are strengths or weaknesses in our current admissions process?

Reading 1 Discussion Summary: graduate admissions and implicit bias

Increase inclusivity through two major prongs:

1. Inclusivity in the application process

- Have concrete aims for graduate students that might not have a faculty mentor at their undergraduate program (i.e. public goal example rubric)
 - Have a unifying format for how potential students and postdocs can contact a faculty mentor (web form similar to McGill University system) for students that do not know about cold emails and do not have explicit connections or knowledge about this process, and to reduce implicit bias for students who do not have immediate shared connection with PI
 - Have a graduate application that has explicitly prompts that encourage student to identify their own existing skills and experience so committee can evaluate them
2. Inclusivity in the evaluation process
- Have a rubric (that may be more specific or different than the public rubric on the website) in order to fairly evaluate students on desirable skills (i.e. perseverance, inquisitiveness, etc.)
 - Have a way to incorporate flawed data like reference letters while not inheriting their biases
 - Make sure primary evaluation on rubric is done by those who value antiracist, inclusive principles

Reading 2: Griffin K.A. (2020) Institutional Barriers, Strategies, and Benefits to Increasing the Representation of Women and Men of Color in the Professoriate.

In: Perna L. (eds) Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research. Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research, vol 35. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-31365-4_4

Discussion Questions:

- *For Faculty:* do you think that “soft skills” (mentoring, teaching, committee work) are explicitly valued in the tenure evaluation process compared to their perceived importance during term? (conversely, do you feel as if these soft skills are evenly distributed through tenured vs non tenured faculty, bipoc faculty, and male vs female faculty)
- *For non-faculty:* what strengths versus weaknesses do you think lead you to being admitted to your program if you feel comfortable sharing, and do feel as if you were adequately informed of the evaluation processes explicitly versus being informed by a faculty member at your undergraduate institution ?

Reading 2 Discussion Summary: inclusivity and retention in hiring especially at the tenure track level

In addition to having a clear rubric for graduate admissions having a written expression of expectations for the tenure package would be beneficial. There are competing pressures between the university and the department on the balance between undergraduate teaching and research which are not always able to be rectified. Having the two agree, and the path be clear would be beneficial. In addition, effort put into service should be explicitly valued for tenure evaluation as it improves our community.